



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Wilhelmina
Holladay, 2005 Aug. 17-2005 Sept. 23

Funding for this interview provided by ArtTable, Inc.

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Wilhelmina Holladay on August 17, 23 and September 16, 23, 2005. The interview took place in Washington, D.C., and was conducted by Krystyna Wasserman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview was funded by ArtTable, Inc.

Wilhelmina Holladay and Krystyna Wasserman have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Hi. This is Krystyna Wasserman from the National Museum of Women in the Arts. Today is August 17 [2005], and this is my first interview with Wilhelmina Cole Holladay, the founder and chair of the board of the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

Hi, Billie.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Hello, Krystyna.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So I thought we can talk a little bit about your life in art, and not necessarily only in art, and perhaps you might want to tell me something about your childhood. When you were born, what was the year, and then how did you grow up to become such an important person in the arts.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, I was born in 1922 in upstate New York and I lived across from my grandmother and grandfather [Gertrude and Charles Henry Strong], and they had a great influence on my life. They were wonderful people. They had given my mother and father a house as a wedding gift, so I spent a great deal of time with them.

I had breakfast with my grandfather because we were both early risers, and my grandmother was the one who really taught me aesthetics. She said, "Always be aware of beauty. Be aware and sensitive to beauty around you." She might lift up an orange and say, "Why is this beautiful? Is it the color? Is it the smell? Is it the smooth sort of oily finish when you run your hand over the skin?"

But she did that with everything. She did it with flowers, she did it with material. And I think it was the very beginning of my heightened awareness and sensitivity to my surroundings. To this day I'm very aware of material and its texture and its color and its weave and why I find it attractive, et cetera.

And that's true of so many things. I'll look at china, dishes. I have a collection of Fitzhugh china. And I think my interest is based on that early awareness of the beauty in my surroundings. Ordinary things as well as luxurious items.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Did your parents, did they buy art?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, no. I don't think so. I mean, we had some pictures in our house, but they certainly were not -- they certainly were not schooled in art. My grandmother, however, I can remember she had in her library a wonderful -- probably a reproduction of a drawing of -- no, it must have been an engraving of Rosa Bonheur way back then.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You remember because it was a woman?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, it was a woman. And I think that, frankly, Rosa Bonheur at that time was one of the few artists period -- certainly one of the few women artists that were known in America. It was a long time before America really became aware of, interested in and supportive of museums.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, they had this big horse painting [*The Horse Fair*, 1853-55, oil on canvas] at the Metropolitan. I think that was the only woman artist --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, yes, yes. And I've been told that they have more inquiries about that painting than any other one still. Because people were aware of Rosa Bonheur, as evidenced by my grandmother's engraving, I suppose.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So did you have some reproductions of artwork in your room when you were a girl, or

did you draw some pictures?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I remember having a print, certainly no great original. A print of *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun* and her daughter. *Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun* was also one of the first known [women painters]. And to me it was just a pretty picture. It was beauty, and I've always been very sensitive to my surroundings -- I want them to please me. It doesn't matter whether they please other people, but I'm not happy if I'm not pleased with my surroundings.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So you decorated your room to please yourself?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, yes. And my room was pretty, or at least people told me so.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So that was when you were in high school?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And then you went to college?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Then I went to college.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: What did you want to become when you grew up, as they say? Did you have any ideas of what you wanted to do?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, to a degree. My grandfather lost his money in the crash in '29. His family had financed Eastman Kodak, and so the Strongs were well known. But they had a lot of stock and they had probably -- I don't know much about it, but I think probably they had bought on the margin or what have you, it was always Eastman Kodak stock. And at any rate, in '29 all of a sudden where there had been affluence there was not affluence and we had to be more careful. Anyway, I grew up, I went to school, I got

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You went to -- which college did you go to?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I went to Elmira College [Elmira, NY]. I was supposed to go away. My mother's family was from Rochester, and my father's family was from a small town outside of Elmira. My Grandfather Strong came to that area, that's how my mother and father met.

He was very intelligent and decided he had to go into business. He became a builder. And my grandmother sort of ignored the situation; I remember even then she had the first automobile. It was called a Rickenbacker, with little vases inside that she always kept fresh flowers in. It had wooden spokes on the wheels. She would take me for rides and we would travel to Rochester. It took hours and hours to drive there.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Also since you grew up upstate New York, you really grew up in a beautiful landscape.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, it was beautiful. My grandfather had a farm as well as the city house; he also had a house on one of the Finger Lakes, Lake Keuka, K e-u k a. He had many, many grandchildren, and we were divided up according to age, rather than sex. And there would come a time when all of us -- the kids that were my age would go to visit at his lake house. And he would be there. You had to swim across the lake. It was two and-a-half miles wide and you had to swim it if you wanted to swim alone.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And you did?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: After many, many tries. My grandfather would put a rope around our waist and hook it to a rowboat and he would row and when we told him we wanted to give up, we stopped. But once we did the two and-a-half miles we could swim alone.

Now, that was a big deal, because no one swam alone. And so we all tried real hard, and the boys would usually make it first, but I made it finally. It's funny, when you're swimming a long, long way, you get a second breath, it's called. And I never could hold out till I got that, and I'd give up. And then one day somehow I managed to go far enough to get a second breath.

If you get that second breath, you could swim until you dropped. At any rate, I finally swam the lake, two and-a-half miles.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And you had sisters, brothers you grew up --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No. I had only one brother; he was much older than I. He was terribly bright. And he -- it was disgusting coming along afterward, because no matter how well I did, they would say, well, she does well, but she's not as bright as her brother.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Which was, of course, a lie.

[Laughter.]

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, I don't know about that, but he skipped so many grades that he went into college when he was just 16. And it's a terrible shame, because he did get into some kind of trouble and dropped out and everything. But I think that -- anyway, I have no complaints about my schooling.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Did he behave badly towards you?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, no, he was very nice to me. I was the baby and he was older, and he treated me quite well. Except my mother made him take me to the golf course. He was supposed to teach me golf, he was a great golfer. He didn't like that.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: He must have been a good teacher because you won an award.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, but that was a long time ago when I was perhaps 8 or 9. He didn't want to take me. And would say, "If you say one word you have to leave. You have to be quiet on a golf course, and don't you move when other people are." And I must say, I really learned golf manners, because he was so strict with me.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So it was a nice childhood in the country?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: It was perfectly nice. And I don't have any complaints about my childhood. One thing was very unusual. And this I think too contributed to the kind of person I am. While my grandmother was very aware of everything and proper behavior and so forth and so on, my mother was a free spirit. She was always gone.

That's why I spent so much time with my grandmother. And my mother had one of the first cars that you drive yourself, and was gone in that car all the time. She loved me, I know she loved me, but she really -- never once did she ever tell me to go to bed. And her sisters and brothers would come to play cards, because my grandmother wouldn't let them play cards at her house. And they would say, don't you think it's Billie's bed time? And she would say, if she's tired, she'll go to bed. And she never told me what to wear.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Well, do you think it was good?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I think at the time sometimes I wanted a little more supervision by her. But now I'm an independent spirit and freely make my own decisions about my behavior.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: I think it was good. I really like when people leave me the decision what to do.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I make my own decisions now and I'm not intimidated by authority.

I don't know, but I think if my mother had not allowed me such total freedom -- my cousins and I would be given enough money to go to town, to go to a movie all by ourselves, et cetera. At any rate, that's pretty much how I grew up. And I went to college and for the most part worked my way through.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes. So tell me about your college years. What did you major in?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I majored in business and history of art.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And I thought you said something once to me about drama.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Drama, drama. Yes. I took a minor in drama which has helped me in speech and I took a lot -- all the history of art I could possibly take. There was a professor from Cornell who came. I took every course he gave.

But actually, you see this lack of money at that period meant that I would -- might have to earn a living. And so I took business courses just in case. Now, I never really took much advantage of that when I was graduated.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, you did, because you sort of -- you know, when we started the museum --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I knew how a business should be structured. That came from working with my husband.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You graduated from Elmira.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: From Elmira in 1944. While in school I had had a teacher who taught me journalism. Her father was the head of a big stock securities business in Rochester, New York, where a lot of my family lived.

Now, I wanted to go to New York but the family wouldn't let me go to New York. They wanted me to go to Rochester, where the family members lived.

So I did. I went and worked for Howard Ludington, as his social secretary -- Diane Ludington was my teacher in journalism, and she recommended me and her father hired me. And they sort of took me in. They had a beautiful house with a big dog and they said, you come live with us until you get settled, which I did.

And it was a wonderful time, because I was his social secretary. I had courtesy memberships to all his clubs, and I arranged for him to entertain his clients and even arranged things for him to do at home and worked in the office to keep track of customers and not do the secretarial work, but from exposure learned a lot about the stock exchange.

It was organizing, and it was also developing a familiarity with his customers so I could know what pleased them. I mean, I really made an effort to do a dossier, so to speak, on every one of them. So that if their favorite liquor was scotch, we would have plenty of scotch for them. If their favorite meat was beef, we'd have beef when we entertained them.

And then something happened. I had moved from the Ludington's house, because I only stayed there until I could get something set up. And there were two girls from Elmira with whom I lived.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Working with you?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, no. There were two girls from college who came to Rochester. So the three of us --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: From Elmira College?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes. So the three of us took space in this big, big house off East Avenue. One of these big, big houses built by Eastman and which had been turned into a rooming house.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: In Rochester?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: In Rochester. And I remember so clearly, it was owned and run by a woman named Mrs. Hall. And she took in what would amount to roomers. So Jane and I had one huge bedroom that had before been -- this was a big formal house, and we had what had formerly been the library. And it was lovely; it had a fireplace and everything.

Jane and I had that, and then there were other rooms. Now, everyone there was a student at Eastman School of Music except two of us. One of our friends was, one of the three of us, but two of us, Jane and I, were not students. We had jobs in Rochester. I worked for Mr. Ludington.

And we had a fantastic experience, because music was all around us, all our friends were musicians, they practiced there. Whatever knowledge -- and I don't have a great knowledge at all of classical music, but whatever I have, the enjoyment I now experience started from that experience.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Did they have a museum in Rochester you would go to?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, not really. But there was so much beauty. And there was theater. I remember seeing the actress Eve de la Gallienne in Chekhov's "Cherry Orchard" there and I saw Paul Robeson in "Othello." Rochester's a wonderful city except for the weather. Oh, the weather is miserable. It's just miserable. It's cold, cold, cold.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: When you were a young woman, did you have some idea whether you want to get married, have children, or whether you wanted to work professionally, whether you wanted to move to New York? What did you want at the time when you were 18 years old or so?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I wanted to travel the world. I remember saying I want to see my whole world before I die.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And you managed to do that.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: And, well, I've certainly traveled very extensively. But no, no, I always had a dream of the big scheme of things. Always. And then this thing happened to me. My two friends that I'd gone up there with had met some boys from the University of Buffalo. And they wanted me to go over with them.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: To Buffalo?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: To Buffalo, New York. They wanted me to go over with them to -- they were going to

take a test over there, I didn't even know what it was all about. And then these two boys were going to entertain them. And so they said, come on, they'll get you a blind date; we'll all have a real good time in Buffalo, New York. And I went with them and they said, "Oh, come on, take the test." I didn't even know --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Because, it was --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, I didn't know what it was, I just said, "Sure, I'll take the test with you." What it was was a government test, and the World War II was on. And if you passed it you had to accept a position with the government. Now, I was sort of -- I thought the whole thing was a big joke. They failed it, I passed it. I was drafted to go to Washington.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Oh. And that's how you came to Washington.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: And that's how I came to Washington.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: During the war time.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: During the war.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: 1944 or '45, what was the year?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, I believe the year was '46.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, and you took this job.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I've forgotten some of the dates. But anyway, I went to work for General Hausman. And that was where -- that was the Air Force Readjustment Division at the Pentagon.

So I went to work for General Hausman. And General Hausman was head of the Air Force Readjustment division. In other words, when the soldiers would go into the north of Africa they needed certain equipment. When they left Africa and went into the boot of Italy, all those contracts had to be terminated and new contracts made. And that was what General Hausman's division did. I was his assistant.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Very difficult.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: And it was very, very hard work. I worked six days a week one week, seven days the next week. My two friends decided to come with me to Washington and join me.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: The ones who didn't pass?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, that they could get other jobs. There were lots of jobs because it was during the war and there was a dearth of men, they were all in the service. So the three of us found an apartment.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Where was the apartment?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: The apartment -- oh, it was just luck. My mother's cousin was the congressman from a New York area and through him we got an apartment owned by the Godwins. Earl Godwin was a commentator on radio, and he had a wife, Queenie. They had gone to some other place and turned the house they owned in northwest Washington into apartments.

It was off Columbia Road. It was in a section -- a densely populated section of free-standing houses, but near a whole lot of other things. It was a fun place to live, you could walk to a movie, stores, restaurants, etc.

And so my -- my room mates and I took this apartment that was on the second floor. It was just two big rooms, a bath and a terrace that was over a porch overlooking a little park. So it was really quite nice for the three of us. The housing was impossible in Washington, so we were very, very fortunate.

And then this beautiful blonde room mate of mine Marion Campbell -- took a job where they were dollar a year men who were experts throughout our country. And they would come in, and agree to work for the government for the war effort for one year for a dollar. They were like people in the service, but they were top businessmen.

And the last -- when they came to Washington, their last final clearance was in Marion's office. And they would ask her out. And she'd say, "I can't go unless my room mate goes." So she would come to me and the two of us would go out with these men who just wanted a farewell dinner in America.

They were married; they had children which we hear all about. My mother would have died if she had known we were doing it, but it was all really very innocent. We'd take them to the most expensive place for dinner -- and

we loved doing that, because --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: What were these good places?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, there was a place called the Blue Room at the big Shoreham Hotel.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Anyway, the biggest hotel had a Blue Room. And they served food and had a show. And so we would say, well, if you want to have a nice evening we must go to the Blue Room.

It was a great treat for us, because we didn't have to cook, we didn't have to buy food, and plus that we really enjoyed ourselves. And if -- and most of them were gentlemen. And there was no hanky-panky of any kind.

But if they drank too much we would excuse ourselves to go to the ladies room but instead would take a cab and go home. And that's what we did. When I look back at it that was awful. But we certainly enjoyed Washington.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Because it was such an interesting time.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, it was an interesting time. It really was. And then what happened was that Marion met the Chinese diplomats. And she said, "Billie, I want to have the Chinese to our house for drinks, but I want you here." Because we didn't entertain alone at that apartment, and we really were respectable young girls.

And I said, well, it'll have to be one of those rare nights when I'm off. I never knew whether I'd have to work late. Oh, it was awful over there at the Pentagon. One night the Chinese came for drinks.

And there were just two of them. And one was named Jen Zien Huang. H u a n g. And he was called JZ. And was very attractive, personality wise. And he said to me, "Tell me what you're doing." And I told him. He said, "Do you like it?" And I said, "I hate it." I said, "I'm working myself to death and it's not interesting, it's nothing I'm interested in. I'm doing okay, but gosh, six days a week and then seven with only one day off every other week." -- and he said, "Why don't you come to work for me?"

And I said, "I can't. Because I'm working during the war, I cannot quit." He said, "Oh yes you can since we have diplomatic immunity." And I said, "You have diplomatic immunity?" He said, "Yes, you can resign and we can hire you."

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Because that was the Embassy of China?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: China. And he was the representative of the Nationalist Party. He had taken the title of attaché at the Chinese embassy to have diplomatic privileges. He was actually the liaison between the Nationalist Party, because they were in power then, and the U.S.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: No, that was still -- that was --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Chiang Kai-shek was in power.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Chiang Kai-shek.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: He was in power and he was -- JZ was the representative of Chiang Kai-shek's party and our government. I mean, he was the one that negotiated on behalf of the Chinese.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So you decided to work for him?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, I went to General Hausman and said, "I'm leaving, I'm going to work for the Chinese." And he said, "You can't leave, Billie," and I said, "Yes, I'm leaving." And he said, "I will not sign your release, so you will get no other job in America."

And I said, "I'm going to go work for the Chinese and I don't need a release because of diplomatic immunity." And he just shook his head and off I went to the Chinese embassy.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And that was, what, one year later?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: About.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So it must have been already after the war, '46?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, no, no, no. The war was still on. Well, I'm not positive, because the negotiations -- no, the war was about to end or had ended. See --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: When you were working for this embassy? General Hausman?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: When I worked for the embassy. See, the reason I'm a little hazy is it was a long time ago. But not only that, even after the war ended all contracts connected with the war had to be finalized. And so General Hausman probably was over there doing it long after the war, but that's sort of beside the point.

I went to work for the Chinese, and the war was almost at an end but I think it was still on. And I loved working for the Chinese. I loved it. I mean, we didn't go to work until ten o'clock. And JZ, his job was to cultivate the people important in Washington.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Politically important.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Politically important in Washington. And he went about it in a fantastic way.

[Audio break]

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Okay. So now perhaps you can tell me a little bit more about your experience with the Chinese embassy.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, JZ, his job was to cultivate important people in Washington. Toward this end, before I went to work for him, he enrolled in police school, saying that it was to learn for the Chinese from the Americans how to run -- how to do police work.

Well, what it really turned out to be was that he was the pet of the class, he was a great actor. He was pet of the class and years later, when I went to work for the Chinese they needed to know how to formalize fire departments. Honestly, Americans were naive. He went to school with these firemen and became pet of the class and graduated.

And when I went to work for him, he knew all the fire chiefs. Now, the only person that can get into any building, any room in Washington, D.C. is a fireman, to do a fire inspection. They have access anywhere to do fire inspections. I mean, this was a power structure. I was so fresh out of school, having worked for a while in Rochester but not for long, and then for a while at the Pentagon. And now here I was in a totally different position.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So you really learned how to make things happen, how to get things done, how to negotiate.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I mean, I saw what power could do in Washington. And I met many, many people, and I would set up a poker game at General P.T. Mao's house and the senators would come.

[Audio break]

Senators would come and the Chinese would determine how much money was going to be lost to them. It was unbelievable. When I look back and realize how sort of gullible and naive I was, because of course I wasn't I - actually arranging everything, but I caught onto it all after a while. Negotiation was done in Chinese and I didn't speak Chinese.

You've got to remember -- and he was not a part of this, because he was far too honest, but Harry Truman was a poker player and he was in the Senate. So it was very important to know his fellow poker players. We'll never know if Americans were aware.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: It was really a game which you learned to play.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: In Washington, the Chinese played the game. I found out that it's a great asset to be underestimated. A great asset. We arranged to send over General MacArthur and his wife to report back on the Chiang regime.

MacArthur was sent to China to evaluate the situation with the Nationalists. This is before the communists. I was instructed to find out what kind of sheets do they like the best on their bed. What kind of food do they prefer? What kind of reading do they most like?

What are their general hours of retirement and rising in the morning? I had to find out everything I possibly could. And so of course I did. Fortunately I was able to get much information. They lived down in North Carolina where their regular home was, so I went down and gathered information.

I wrote it all up and then this went to China in the diplomatic pouch. When they got to China, they were cosseted. They didn't see a thing they weren't -- you know, I mean, they saw what the Chinese wanted them to

see. They were made very, very comfortable.

If you don't speak Chinese and you're in China, you've got to be taken care of. So MacArthur came back with these glowing reports and I knew that those reports had been manufactured by the Chinese. Now, it wasn't the end of the almighty scheme of things at all. And, you know, to a large degree this has -- the Nationalists lost when the U.S. thought they would win.

When Madam Chiang came, she spoke before a joint session of the Congress. The only woman ever to have done so. After that I was then made her social secretary.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That was still in Washington?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, they sent me to New York. And they put me up in the Waldorf towers. She lived at Ditmar House in Westchester. If she were going to entertain, I would go to the public library and prepare a dossier on every guest. And let's say the gentleman that was going to be at her dinner party, I would be able to give her information, and she would turn and say, "Your daughter went to Wellesley, I went to Wellesley also." "And I understand you have a summer house at such-and-such, I've been there once, and it's very beautiful." In other words, anything I could dig out for her.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So your dream to go to New York came true --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I was then up in New York. I loved it, because I could go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, etc. However, Madam was very demanding.

And quite frankly, all of this has helped me with the museum. It just --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: In a way how to play.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, this -- in Washington, the Chinese played the game. And I also found out that it's a great asset to be underestimated. A great asset. We were going to send over general -- what was the general -- who was the general, Krystyna, who went over with all the wonderful things America did after the war?

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Marshall?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: So he was going to go over and represent them. And when he came back -- he quit, he came back and he was totally disillusioned. And I said, "What happened?" And he said, "There's nothing I could do." He said there was a place where the Chinese were starving and where it was terrible, "and so I arranged to have food sent there and with the money UNRA has and all to benefit these people with clothing and food.

And the Chinese came to me and said, forget it. These are the refugees coming from the north to the south. And the more that don't die, the bigger problem we have in the south."

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Oh, what a terrible thing.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I mean, it's not that the Chinese are so terrible, really, it's just they're different from us. Totally different in their values and in their sanitation and in almost everything you can name. They would spit in the drinking fountain, so I never used it.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Well, you know, this is a different culture.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: This is a different culture.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: But then after you worked with Mme. Chiang Kai-shek for a while in New York, you decided that that was enough and you wanted to come back --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, no. I worked for her -- I'm trying to remember the sequence, because it's difficult. But I worked for her for a long time until she went back, and then I went back to the embassy. I quit the embassy when I had a child.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Really? You really worked that long for them?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, I worked for quite a while. And I got to know the Chinese. And the Chinese are very different from us. The Chinese -- you know, it's not all bad, but they have a totally different sense of time.

For instance, to prepare JZ they sent him to police school, they sent him to fireman school; they did all those things I mentioned. We would probably not do that if we were preparing someone to go to China. It also taught me patience is important if you are looking far ahead at a long term goal. And with the museum they didn't

happen right away. You cultivate, you are careful, you work hard and things happen.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So that was kind of an education in learning what you don't really want to do all your life.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, I learned Yes, yes.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And then your life really changed very dramatically

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Very much.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Because you got married.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And how did that all happen?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, I met a man named -- dear, I'm not sure anybody wants to hear all this. I met an officer named Taylor Simmons. We were just very, very good friends. His father was a general. We really liked each other, the two of us, and we did a great deal together. We dated. There was -- it was not a romance.

His mother and father lived at the 2400 Hotel, which was then a posh residential hotel. A friend of his father, an admiral who also had a big apartment there was told he had to go for health reasons to Arizona, to a dry climate, and he offered the apartment, fully furnished with everything, for Taylor to use while he was gone for a couple of years. Taylor acquired two room mates, the war was over and people were getting out of the service.

And so Taylor's roommates were Basil Crabster and Wallace Holladay. Taylor called me up and said, "Come to our housewarming and see where we are living." I had a big embassy car and I didn't want people to be aware that I used it for parties. So I said, "Is there a place I can park this car? I'm going to be coming in a diplomatic car and I shouldn't use it for parties."

Wally Holladay answered the phone and said, "Oh, I'll meet you down front and I'll take it to the garage." So I said, "I'll be there in 15 minutes." When I arrived there was Wallace Holladay. He took the car and I went up to the party.

Then I met Basil Crabster, the other roommate and found him fascinating. He had gone to Princeton and then on to Oxford and he'd been in the service with Wally. Basil and I are flirting and having the best time, everything's going great, and he asked me to have dinner with him.

And Wally came over to me and he said, "You seem like a nice girl." And I said, "Well, I hope so." And he said, "Basil's fiancée is here." I said, "Basil's fiancée is at this party? I had no idea he was engaged." And Wally said, "Yeah, she's kind of upset." I said, "He asked me to go to dinner with him."

And Wally said, "Well, perhaps you could be my date and he could bring Mary and then we can kind of fix it up."

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So that was Wally Holladay. And he was a student in Washington at that time?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, no, he was just getting out of the service.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, yes, because --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes. He was just getting out of the service. He was still an officer in the Navy. So we went to dinner. That's how I met Wallace Holladay.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: He was from Virginia?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: He was from Virginia and had gone to VPI [Virginia Polytechnic Institute]. He was going back to VPI as soon as he'd get -- could get out of the service to get his master's degree in architecture.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Already he knew that's what he wanted to do?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh yes. He was an undergrad in architecture and he was going back to get a master's degree. He was also very interested in art.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So, he really made you interested in art?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, yes, well, we just got along wonderfully.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And you went to the museums --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh yes, we did everything together. We went out constantly together and -- and he fell in love. And I said, "Don't get serious, I'm going abroad." You know, I still had this thing.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: To travel.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: To travel. That was what I wanted to do. And I'd been offered a job in Aruba and I didn't want to go there particularly but, I was really going to look around after the war so I could travel.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: But you still worked for this embassy at that period?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You had the car.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, yes. I was working for the embassy. Every single day Wally would propose to me, and after a year was up -- and I had the apartment then by myself, because my two room mates had gone on to different things: marriage and so forth.

And so Wally kept proposing and one night I said -- we were smooching on the sofa -- I said yes. He said, "Did you say yes? Did you say yes?" And he got up and he left, closed the door, walked out, came back 10 minutes later and said, "Did you say yes?" And I said, "Yes, I said yes, Wally, I'll marry you." And he said, "Can we get married tomorrow?" And I said, "No, we cannot get married tomorrow." But, you know --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You were ready to --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I was ready then. I had really fallen in love with Wally and I was ready to get married. So we got married. So now --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You were married in Washington?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, we were married in Washington. And my mother and my brother came down. Then Wally received an invitation, a fellowship with [Walter Gropius] Gropius at Harvard. And so we thought we were all set and we would go up to Harvard.

Then I became pregnant. And I thought I had ruined Wally's life, but he said, "Who needs a doctor's degree in architecture? I'd probably end up teaching and I don't even want to teach." He said, "I'm going to make money now thru FHA [Federal Housing Administration]. I'm going to make money, if I'm going to be a father." He was offered a job with - it was the government agency that would loan money to rebuild after the war. And there was a man named Ian Woodner in New York who came down here to do real estate development.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Build houses?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, he came down, but Wally was working at the FHA. Wally's job was to review people's plans, review their background and determine whether they were eligible for a loan from the government to do what they wanted to do. So the --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: To build houses?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Right, to build. To develop.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: To develop.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: And Wally was in that position. He was given the job because he'd had high marks; he had a master's degree in architecture and so forth. So he would review their plans for what they wanted to do, look over the site, look over everything about them. And so he had a position of some importance, because he would make the decisions regarding loans.

Ian Woodner came to apply, and he liked Wally and Wally liked him. One reason was their mutual interest in art. Ian had worked with Salvador Dali on the World's Fair on Long Island [1939]. And Woody had received the Prix de Beaux Arts which enabled him to paint in Europe for a couple of years. He was first an artist and then he became a businessman.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, there is still the Woodner House on 16th Street. That's the same family.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Right. Wally designed that with Woody.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Really?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Now, Woody came to Wally and said, "Come to work for me." See Wally had taken this job at this government agency just till we would go to Harvard.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: So he came home and said, "Hey, I've got a chance to make good money, but its not just architecture." He'd been offered lots of jobs with architectural firms. He said, "I like this. It is pretty exciting, and I'll be designing a hotel on 16th Street with Woody. I'll work directly with Woody." So I said, "Fine if you'll be happy."

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And you were still living in town, or --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, we then took a place in Virginia in a little apartment. Woody loved Wally. He thought of him as his son. Later Woody became ill and had to turn his business over. The doctor told him he would have to go away for a while. He came to Wally and said, "You are the only person I am willing to have run my business while I'm away. Will you do it?"

Wallace Holladay worked harder than anybody I've ever known. He would get up at the crack of dawn and go to the office. He would come home at 10, 11 at night. I mean, he worked so hard. And he was walking into Chase Manhattan Bank and saying, "I've got to borrow \$6 million," and he was so young, just in his twenties.

Woody came back after two years and the business was booming. He said, "My business has never been healthier, and you have all the credit." And he said, "Wally, you can have anything you want. You can have 50 percent of my business, you can have -- you name what you want."

And Wally said, "I want nothing." Wally had never even asked for a raise. He said, "I want nothing, except I'm giving you one year's notice, and then I'm going into business in competition with you."

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Because he learned.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: He had learned so much. And that's what he did. But Woody adored Wally all his life. Woody only died a couple of years ago. Woody had this great, great collection of art. He started out with drawings and then went on to other things. But the Metropolitan Museum of Art showed his art collection. I mean, they would have exhibitions of his holdings and he'd always invite Wally and me up and would announce, "I want to introduce Wallace Holladay," -- he treated Wally like a son.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Okay. I think maybe we end here.

[Audio break.]

Hi, this is Krystyna Wasserman interviewing Wilhelmina Cole Holladay at her residence in Georgetown, Washington, D.C. Today is August 24, 2005. And this is our second interview.

Billie, when we talked a week ago we discussed your experience of working for the Chinese embassy. And you worked closely with Madam Chiang Kai shek. Did you know that she was a painter?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I didn't know it at first. And when I found out, I wasn't terribly surprised, because knowing she was a very bright, observant person and could do so many things, it sort of followed that she would be interested in the arts and would exercise any talent she had. And she was very talented.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Well, we also never mentioned that you studied art history in France during your early years. And I wonder whether you could mention that, because that probably was a wonderful experience. And when was that, that was after Elmira College graduation?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, and later on, actually. It really was a marvelous experience. I went to the University of Paris, and there were people there from all over the world doing graduate work on history of art. I can remember once the professor when I asked about American artists, he said, "But there were no women painting in America."

And I said, "Well, what about Mary Cassatt," just because everybody knows her. And he said, "Well, she's French." And I said "No, no, no, no, she's American." He said, "No, no, she's French. We gave her one of the biggest awards." And this was true. America never recognized her, but the French did, and they did give her an award of standing.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That's interesting. I think we should go ahead. We ended last time talking that you got

married, you had your first child or you were pregnant with your first child and you stopped working for the Chinese embassy. And how your life changed.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, it changed dramatically. We were living in a small apartment in Virginia. My husband said, "Now I think we'd better build a house." He was an architect, had a master's degree in architecture. And so he said, "I'm going to go look for a proper place to build."

And he said, "Tell me what you would most like and I'll come as close as I can to it, I'll search for a site." And I said, "Well, I would really like a penthouse on Garfinckel's roof." Garfinckel's was the top department store. I am a city person and I've always loved living in the city.

And so finally he came home and he said, "Well, I've found the spot. And I'm buying it." And we got in the car and we drove and we drove and we drove. And I said, "Oh my goodness, where are we going to live?" Because it looked absolutely like the country to me. And it turned out that it was Georgetown Pike, which runs along the Potomac River.

And at that time it was exceedingly rural. And dear friends of ours who had lived in an apartment near us and we'd become very close friends said, "Would there be another piece of property next to it that we could buy and share? And you could design a house for us too."

And so that's what we did. And we lived out there until our children were born and until they went to college. So we lived there a long time.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: But you were going to the city in the meantime?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, absolutely. It was -- actually, I know exactly the timing. It was 10 minutes only, at that time, to get to Chain Bridge so that you could go into Washington. But later on it became increasingly difficult as McLean, Virginia -- and that was our address -- became more densely populated. Now it is just an extension of the city, really. But it was very country-like at that time.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So you played golf, you socialized, you went to the children's school and you were active in the parents committees, yes?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: My children went to a small school called Langley School. It was simply wonderful. It was -- started out as a nursery school, pretty soon they put on first and second grade, and now I think it takes children to the second year in high school.

But I was put on the board and I decided that they needed a new building, so I worked very hard to raise the money and to get that developed, and we did acquire a new building. I had a marvelous board. I was able to get people very prominent in government, because they lived out there with their children. And Ted Sorenson was on my board, who wrote the book about JFK [*John Kennedy and the Cuban missile crisis*, 1976], and [Joel Macy] Macy, who was the head of Civil Service, was also on my board.

So it was very interesting, it really was. And it was at that time that I decided I had to take a speech course. I had had some work in drama in college, but I remember going before the mothers and fathers, all the parents of the school children, and having to tell them that there would be a raise in tuition. And I'll never forget it.

I was so frightened that I became ill. And so then I took a speech course. All of these things that happened then were wonderful for my eventual experience in the museum.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That was the speech class at the university or the private class?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, no, it was a very special class given by a woman named Hester Beall Provensen. And it was -- I had turned it down many times because it was really very social. I remember Ladybird Johnson and all these people took it. I really felt I didn't have time for that kind of social bit in the city with children and my work at the school and all.

Boy, then I found out how tough it was to get up, I -- before a group of people -- it was very different from drama. Acting which I'd studied, is where you throw yourself into a character, and here it was a totally different thing. So I went and took the course and I studied very hard, it was 10 weeks long, and I won first prize. And ever since it has helped me, because for the museum I have to speak often.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Often, everywhere, all around the world. But Billie, that was also the time when you started to collect art for yourself.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: To a degree.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Because you developed the most important collection of art by women perhaps in the world.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, I think so. Really I do.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: It was once in your own house. And so how did that all begin?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, first of all, we needed a few pictures for our house. We certainly didn't think of ourselves as collectors. There was a huge high school in Arlington, Virginia and they had an art show of all the works of the students, and Wallace and I went to it and we looked over all of the things and found something we just loved for \$100 and we bought it.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: What year was that, roughly?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I'm so sorry, I don't know. Probably --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Fifty?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Perhaps 1950. It gave us great pleasure to own and enjoy this work of art. It was the beginning.

[Audio break]

My husband was wonderfully supportive. I can remember him working at the Langley school fair, et cetera. We made great friends and it was an interesting period of my life.

My brother had taught me a little bit about golf and I decided to take it up. And I had two -- knew two women who were taking it up quite seriously. They asked me to join them, and so I began to take golf lessons. That was fun, but it was hard work, because I like to do things well and I wasn't very good at it.

So I waited until my two children were in school and then I became very serious. And Wiffy Cox, the pro, was a great teacher at a country club here in the area. I took lessons once a week, I practiced every day a little bit, etc. determined that I would be a respectable golfer.

And by the end of that summer I had broken 100. And once you break 100 at golf, you have a handicap and can play with your handicap with almost anyone. And, of course, I proceeded to become a better golfer than that. But I think that some people -- probably in a sense it's a lack of security, but some people feel they have to do well with what they do.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And you are one of these people?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: And I'm afraid I'm one of those people.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: I'm sure you are, because I see all these awards for golf on your table. But let's go back to art.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes. So, art. I'm so fortunate that I've lived here where there are good museums and I've spent a great deal of time in them --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So you bought this work from Arlington and then you wanted more or how did this collection --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, no, something else happened that was important. My husband began to establish his business, and he started in the Midwest. He was gone a great deal of time and I was lonely. So I went down to the National Gallery of Art and took a test. You had to take a test to even work in the gift shop. And I passed it. And I took a part-time job at the National Gallery of Art.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Doing what?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I did some short tours, on the weekends when the real staff wasn't there. I worked in the gift shop, answering questions of people who came in. That was the only information desk they had at that time.

Every night before I left I had to check every painting in the museum to make sure it was hanging in its place before they turned out the lights. Things like that. But it was a fantastic learning experience and certainly enhanced my interests in art. And I began to have favorite artists or artists I wanted to know more about, and so I became better informed than I had been.

And I had enough of a background to sort of sustain this. And I can remember, because at that time we really couldn't afford major works. I would buy a poster or something, frame them and put them up. That was a great enhancement of my interest in art. And then --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And you bought more art, better art?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: -- for the Washington house?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, we were still living in McLean. And I was working at the museum part-time. And something -- this is just a silly little thing, but a print became available of an artist that I admired, an original print, and that wasn't terribly expensive. It was not a costly one, but it was a print of a Renoir.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Wow, that was very valuable.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, no, it was not. I think I paid maybe \$200 for it. But you've got to remember, this was years and years and years ago.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: But still, that was a big name.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, it was a big name. And I still have it, and I'll show it to you. But at any rate, I bought it. It was just a small, small beginning. And then I started going to galleries and I went to Harry Lunn's gallery. He saw photography as art and he actually was the one who established photography as art. Years later this paid off, because I knew Harry Lunn and he would alert me to things by women that were important. I bought Berenice Abbott photographs from him which she did when she was in Paris.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So early.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: That was early. But let's get onto the point where Wally and I really did begin to buy some art. We were traveling with a great collector, Richard Brown Baker, who was one of the big brains during the war who broke the code of the Germans.

He had been at Oxford and was an important person, and then when he returned to the states he decided that the one thing he wanted to do was to collect art. He had an apartment in New York and began collecting contemporary American art. He was astute enough to get Lichtenstein, Pollock, and Rothko. All the ones that became great.

Dick Baker had those early on. And we were traveling with him and we had bought a few things. We had purchased some Rouault prints that were very beautiful, and we had bought quite a few things that were reasonably good. But again, we didn't think of ourselves as collectors, we just were buying things for our house that appealed to us.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And you didn't have this focus on women at the time?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, no, no. Oh, no, no. But Dick said to us, you must have a focus. You're buying art now and you have to have a focus. It will be more interesting to you and to others. His focus, of course, was 20th century American art. We didn't want a focus, because we only bought what really appealed to us. We didn't want to be limited to one period or one artist or one type of art.

But then we saw a really beautiful work. We were traveling a great deal and we saw a beautiful painting by a woman in the National Museum in Austria and her work again at the Prado in Madrid. And then when we came home, since neither one of us knew her, even though both of us had been interested in history of art for many, many years. We took out all of our source books and we made a discovery that while --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That was Clara Peeters, yes?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: That was Clara Peeters. And Clara Peeters wasn't in any of the books, but neither was there any other woman. And as a matter of fact, until the year we opened there wasn't one woman in the leading texts in our country.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yeah, by Janson [H.W. Janson], *Art History*. We all studied that.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: We decided that that might be a great focus to show the contribution of women to the history of art, which obviously needed doing. We could buy a piece of sculpture, a painting, a watercolor, whatever appealed to us. We decided that that would be our focus. We would try to show the contribution of women to the history of art.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And you didn't have a great feminist ideology which supported this decision at the time, because you just said that it was unfair not to have information about women --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, mostly we felt that there was a whole gap in the history of art that needed filling, that absolutely was a legitimate part that was missing. So always from the start it wasn't really in a sense that women hadn't been treated right, we certainly found that out later on, but it was more the fact that we wanted to be -- to contribute to the history of art, as far as knowledge was concerned. And we were very fortunate. We traveled all over the world. By now I was on the board of the Corcoran. And

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: How did that happen, to be on the Board?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: They invited me to be on and I accepted and found it very interesting. I was on their Works of Art committee. And I was pretty well qualified and the meetings of the committee enhanced my knowledge.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: In collecting art?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, in collecting art by women. Wherever we traveled we'd go into the top commercial gallery and say, "What do you have by a woman?" And they'd say, "Nothing." And we'd say, "Well, that's what we're interested in." Six months later they'd be back in touch and say, "We have found a magnificent work from 18th century France or 17th century Dutch or the Renaissance by women."

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Please mention a few names so people will understand how important these artists were, like Vigée-Lebrun or Angelica Kauffman. I remember you once told me a story how you bought Angelica Kauffman and I think it's a fabulous story how you bought the painting. That would be of great interest to anybody who reads your interview.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, if you study the history of art or you love art, it's all wrapped up in history. For instance, Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun was the court painter for Marie Antoinette, which meant in her day she was very, very prominent, a leading artist. And the Royal Academy in France opened up and allowed not only Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun but three other women to become -- four in total -- to become members of the Royal Academy. That was the first time women had ever been in it. As a matter of fact, there aren't any women in it right now.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Really, that's terrible.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: So there were some other woman who had worked with the crown, with Marie Antoinette, and they were included. We are so fortunate, because in the museum now, Wallace and I have given them an example of all four of these women. There's Marguerite Gérard, Adélaïde Labille-Guillard, Lebrun, and the fourth one is Anne Vallayer-Coster who worked with the queen.

When others discovered our focus, they began to alert us to where works by women might be found.

For instance, we brought a Judith Leyster from the Chrysler Museum. They de-acquisitioned it and we bought it at a very reasonable price. A few years ago we loaned it from the museum for a show in Europe and it was appraised for insurance purposes for something like \$300,000 or \$400,000. I assure you we did not pay that for it.

We also found many, many other artists. We found an Artemisia Gentileschi; we were alerted to in Paris. We found the Lavinia Fontana we gave to the museum from the late Renaissance. She was actually the leading artist of Bologna in the 1500s. The Pope had her come and be the Vatican painter at that time. And, Sofonisba Anguissola, who was the first woman artist to be internationally known. The King of Spain had her come to be the court painter.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You just collected art and you kept it at home and you were happy looking at all these women artists.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Um-hmm [affirmative] and we bought it with quite a bit of help because I knew many people in the field.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Art historians or dealers or both?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, both. And directors at museums, and so forth.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Because they knew by now that you really collected art by women and they would tell you if something was available, yes?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes. At that time, right at the height of this I think Fortune Magazine listed the 10 major collectors and that we were one. That brought us to the attention of many, many dealers.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: I see, so you would --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: So we were approached often.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And at that time you didn't have yet any idea what you would do with all this art.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, no, we just wanted --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You just enjoyed it.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, when you really and truly get into the collecting of art, it's so meaningful to you that it has a life of its own so to speak. You don't want to stop because you just love whatever you buy and the excitement of acquiring something that you know is rare and that you're very lucky to have found is an exhilarating experience. And I wouldn't say it was always my favorite or that I was in love with each picture because our goal was to show the contribution of women to the history of art. That was always foremost. So we didn't buy anything we didn't think was significant because of that. Our collecting went on and of course it included works from the Renaissance to the present.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That's unusual because, you know, contemporary art by women was very hot in the '70s but you really had this unique approach to start early.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: We felt that while we loved contemporary art, certain things in it, we felt we had to grab those that were historically important because we knew they might not ever be available again. They were rare, it wasn't easy to find a Clara Peeters, but we did and bought it. It wasn't easy to -- it was almost like luck when someone would call us up and say I just heard there was this available, or one would come up at auction.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Tell everybody how you acquired the Angelica Kauffman, the circumstances of the purchase.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, it was incredible. We have an apartment in New York and I was there and an Angelica Kauffman was coming up at auction. I hadn't had an opportunity to see it so I called up and since they knew me I said "Look, could I come and take a look at the Kauffman." And they said "Yes, we'll give you a look at it." So I went early. A little later, a terrible storm, one of the worst ever, hit New York City and I was already at the auction house. As a result, many, many people did not arrive and when the auction started as advertised, at a given time, the eighth item was this beautiful Angelica Kauffman. It was handsome, it was a large one, of an English family, and I bought it for \$8,000 which is incredible, but no one else was there to bid on it.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That's an unusual story because nature was on your side.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes. And after the auction four or five people came up and offered me a huge profit which I didn't take. I was so thrilled to have gotten it for the collection because she was probably the most successful woman artist in the 18th century. She went to Italy and when the Empress of Russia, Catherine the Great tried to get her to come to Russia she refused because she was so very busy in Italy with commissions. The Empress collected her art in spite of her refusal to come to St. Petersburg.

Many wonderful things have happened that have helped create the collection.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And the seed of the museum was planted in your head when and who did it?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, the real person who did it -- there were several people who had mentioned the uniqueness of the collection and all, but not the idea

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You invited them home?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, people gradually became aware of it. And some of the feminists who were scholars became very interested. Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris had created an exhibition in the '70s. It was the first one ever of women artists entitled *Women Artists, 1550 to 1950*, and some of our paintings were in that exhibition. So people began to know about what we were doing and there was a heightened interest. Nancy Hanks who was sort of the godmother of the arts, she was I believe the first head of the National Endowment for the Arts, and she worked with the Rockefellers on their collection. So Nancy and I knew each other and we had dinner together one night and she said, "What you've done to me is that I go now into museums, as I always have, however, now I say to them what do you have by women?"

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Nancy said this?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, Nancy would visit a museum and ask about what was in its collection by women. And she said it would come as a big surprise when after much thought they might come up with one and after checking say "Well we have two." She thought it incredible, the dearth of material in our museums by women. And she said, "These museums are all by men -- the directors are men and the collections are by men. She said we ought to have a women's museum." This was a big joke to us at the time.

And then I started thinking about it. She also thought about it and called me up and said "Would you give your collection and your library as the seed from which such an institution might grow?" And Wally and I said "Yes, we might." So we formed a committee. Nancy had lots of clout so we had prestigious people in the museum, social and political worlds. It was a great committee.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: This was an advisory committee or founding committee?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, they came to see what we might be able to do about this. And they said "Let's start out with a museum without walls. Let's see what kind of material we can gather." We pulled together a young committee that went to embassies around the city asking about women in their country, and asking for material.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Who was on this early committee can you remember at least two or three people [From a *Washington Post* article, "The Founding Force of Wilhelmina Holladay" Sarah Booth Conroy, February 15, 1987 the following names are listed as advisory committee members: Lamia Khashoggi, Mary Lasker, Nancy Clark Reynolds, Mary Jane Wick, Claire and Gloria Getty, Diane von Furstenberg, and Louise Nevelson]?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Louise Nevelson was on the committee and she was probably the most prominent women sculptor at that time.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Okay. So, Billie, we are talking about these early days of the museum when you really got the idea of developing the museum.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: We formed this committee of people. I remember Cynthia Helms, her husband had been the ambassador to Iran, and Mike Ainslie was head of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and various others. All of them were people that were qualified to perhaps help us work this out. We met from time to time. Then something very unusual happened.

A young woman who lived next door to me said, "What are you doing? I see you come and go all the time." And I said, "Well, I'm working on the formation of the National Museum of Women in the Arts." She said, "I find that fascinating." She was a student at Georgetown and lived with a young man who'd been in the Peace Corps. She had a little boy about three years old who was adorable. One day he fell and she was frightened. He needed a pediatrician and I took them to my grandchildren's doctor. So we became acquainted.

She said, "I'm very interested." She said, "I'd like to know more about it." And I said, "Well, why don't you come to a meeting. We're having one next Tuesday." And she came, but had to leave before the meeting ended because she had a class at Georgetown. I was saying goodbye to her and she said, "You need a building." And I said, "Oh, someday."

She said, "You know, Mrs. Holladay, I really want to help." And I said, "Well, tell me what committee you want to be on and we'll do something about that." And she said, "No, I mean I really want to help." And I said, "Well, that's wonderful, my dear. And Wally and I are going off on a vacation to the Caribbean and when I get back we'll get together and talk about it."

So I went back into the meeting and someone there said "Is that Getty as in J. Paul Getty?" The young woman's name was Getty and it just never occurred to me. I never even thought about it. And it turned out that was her grandfather. Mike Ainslie and my husband then found the building we now own.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That was 1250 New York Avenue, our present headquarters.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: That's right.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And when you first went there?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, it was in a dreadful state of repair. It had been the home of the Masons. So it was certainly well built [designed by Waddy Wood] and it was built in 1908 -- seven or eight [1907] -- and the Masons had moved to the suburbs. This whole area of the city was a slum, a real slum. There were pornographic shops, one right next door, and the police told us it was just dreadful, that we had to be very careful. The building itself had been turned into a questionable cinema. The homeless people would buy a ticket to get out of the cold and come in and drink. It was really bad. When we got down there to look at it, not only were there

these poor unfortunate creatures all over the place but there were rats huge rats. I'd never seen things like that, and I just said "Let me out of here." But saner heads prevailed and they convinced me it was going to be just beautiful when it was all restored. Two and a half years later it was.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That really was a major step.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: A major step.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You found the place to house your collection because until now the collection was in your house we are now in and you would give tours, yes?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: We had already started working on the idea of the museum in temporary headquarters and --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: On Connecticut Avenue?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: On Connecticut Avenue and you, Krystyna Wasserman became our librarian, so to speak, with the library we had collected. That was very important because eventually that grew to be the tail that wagged the dog. We had some other young people working there and so forth and finally had to move to bigger quarters, still temporary quarters, on MacArthur Boulevard, then we had a first time director and other people helping.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You had a curator of education that organized tours of your collection at your house and --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: The Junior League kindly gave us our first big grant and it was enough to hire someone to handle the --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Education.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, really to develop a group of volunteers.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Volunteers, yes.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: A volunteer coordinator. And she pulled together some founding members who agreed to be docents in our house. Every Thursday we would take reservations to have people see the art in our house which was extensive, and --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And you were leading the tours too because you had some very important people at the time.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, yes.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: The president's wife, the governor's wife.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, that's right. They'd call up and want to see it. So I did. I took some of the little ones. But on Thursdays it was groups who would get a reservation and that was handled by docents. Many things happened about this time. I don't know what to go into and what not to go into, but it all led to the formation of the museum.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: With the board?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, we put together a board of about four or five people just to start with. The Junior League people that had helped me were on it and --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Roma Crocker?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, and some others that were close friends. And Helga Carter who's still very much interested in the museum and supports us financially was my husband's accountant and she agreed pro bono to be our accountant and treasurer.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: I remember her, she was so nice.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, she's a wonderful person.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: She still works?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: She still does, 20-some years and she's retiring this next year. I don't know what we're

going to do without her. She's wonderful. She adores Wally. He's sort of her pseudo father or something. And he was in her wedding, gave her away. So it's a very sad time to have Helga leave. But every year she gives some money to the museum in honor of us, she's so loyal.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You started to renovate the building?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, no, what's more important we -- Claire Getty gave a million dollars, she got her sister [Gloria Getty] to help us, Wally and I pitched in. I went to New York and called on all these corporations for money and was able to get American Standard to give the plumbing, DuPont to do the carpeting, AT&T to do our library and so forth. And when we went to the bank to borrow money to do it -- now, we had the deed of the building and we had bought it for \$5 million. Well, when people found out that this whole area was going -- it wasn't very far from the White House -- and when people found out this whole area was going to have a museum, the property values went up. The bank's appraiser appraised it for \$12 million. As a result we were able to borrow \$8 million for the renovations. We borrowed \$8 million and that plus all the in-kind gifts. We did the whole thing.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So that was a major effort.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: It was a major effort and it worked. I said at the time anybody who gives \$1,000 a year or \$5,000 will be a founding member and have their name up forever. And people said "You can't do it like this. You have to ask for bigger sums." I said "No, this is the way I'm going to do it." I didn't know how many founding members I'd get, you know, but it would be money coming in. We got almost 500. So it was quite a lot of money.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Founding members, yes?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes. And their names are still up there in the entrance to the museum. We did this over a period of the first few years. It not only helped pay for the building and get it up but also it established a constituency and many of those people are still our friends and most of them are members. They had an investment in the museum and were excited to watch it grow.

I don't know how many people give \$1,000 a year, \$2,000 a year. I always look up their histories because I acknowledge their contribution. It's amazing to see that many of these people started out with \$25 memberships and then gradually increased it to \$50. I kept them informed and gradually they gave \$100, then \$200, then \$500 and now they're giving \$1,000, \$1,500 or \$2,000. It's wonderful to see the loyalty and continued interest of these early members.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, because you really have people from all walks of life.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: It's true.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: One of the very important factors of our success is that you didn't narrow your support to one group or another; you were very open, not only to different kinds of people, but the whole nation because you had this idea of getting support from different states. So maybe first you can say a little bit about the renovation of the museum because we finally opened in 1987 and then about the beginning of the state committees. The idea developed when you were still in the temporary headquarters, because you traveled --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, with regard to the renovation of the building, Julie Harris, the great actress, did a nine minute film for me. Elizabeth Campbell had established public television in this area and was my friend and mentor. She had formerly been the Dean of Women at Mary Baldwin College. Her husband was a prominent lawyer. I admired her greatly because she worked hard for the good of the community and through public broadcasting had begun to educate many viewers. She and I were on several boards together and had become close. I sought her advice because she was so wise and had done so much in developing something truly substantial like public television.

So she said to me one day, "You need to have the tool of a video. And I know just the person to do it. Julie Harris." I said, "You know Julie Harris?" She said, "Yes, I do. We both have the same Moravian religion." Julie Harris came to Washington, saw what we were trying to do in the museum, it was in the process of being renovated. And she agreed to do this nine minute video for me. She could charm the birds out of the trees -- it was a fabulous selling tool.

So I would go in to these corporations and say I've got a nine minute video, a secretary would get it all set up for me, and if I may have 15 minutes more I'll be up and out of here, because I knew all of them were very busy. And it worked. It really worked. I was able to get all kinds of things.

I grabbed hold of any lead. A young girl, whose father was the CEO of Martin Marietta had been in my child's wedding, and I said, "Fuzzy, I don't know your father, but I'd love to have an appointment with him. I want to go

to Martin Marietta to see if they might be interested in helping." And she said, "Oh, my father will do anything for me." She was an adorable young girl. And I said "Please bring him to the house for a drink," so she did.

And I said, "I just wondered if I might meet with your foundation to see if Martin Marietta would be interested in helping with the National Museum of Women in the Art?" And he said, "Well, they don't meet with people. You present a proposal." I said, "No, I want to meet with them." And he said, "Well, I guess" -- Fuzzy said "Yes, daddy." And he said, "Okay, I'll fix it up so you can meet with the foundation. But, I'm going to tell them that it's up to them because I try not to interfere." I said, "Oh, that's fine."

So I went to meet with the foundation, I showed the Julie Harris video and then told them what I was trying to do. The next day they called me up and said, "For the first time ever after you left, we all said let's do something big." The men and women gave me a million and a half over 10 years for the Martin Marietta Great Hall. It is very beautiful.

These wonderful things happened and we've enjoyed good relations ever since. I'd never been a fatalist before, but I am convinced the museum was meant to happen because things did fall in place and have continued to do so. Fantastic. It's wonderful.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And then we had the great opening and actually the renovations of the building got an award.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, we received many awards.

I was so lucky Wallace was an architect. He would bring those drawings home and study every inch of them. No one ever had more conscientious planning. Clark Construction did the actual restoration and they won a prize and the interior design division received a prize. The success was truly exceptional.

In 1987 we had the opening. Mrs. Bush, senior cut the ribbon. Helen Hayes came and gave us a painting. The Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts attended along with the Mayor's wife, etc. It was wonderful.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: A big splash.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, a big splash.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And the exhibition was "American Women Artists: 1830 to 1930." It was curated by Eleanor Tufts.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, that's right, Eleanor Tufts. It was very well done and we were lucky to have her because she was a fine scholar.

I have the catalogue, "American Women Artists: 1830 to 1930". It was our first exhibition. United Technology was extremely generous. They underwrote a beautiful catalogue as well as the cost of the whole exhibition.

The exhibition traveled quite extensively. It went to other museums. Let's see -- it went to the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Wadsworth Athenaeum, the San Diego Museum and to the Meadows Museum. This was good because it heightened the awareness of NMWA and gave us a presence in different places.

Then we had a second opening with the permanent collection. Wally and I had been able to give to the museum approximately 500 works. We just told them to take anything they wanted and they took everything. The house looked so funny, all the white spots on our walls where the pictures had been. The whole house had to be redecorated.

The second opening was funded by AT&T and it was of the permanent collection. It created the first museum catalogue and was done by Gottlieb of Abrams. It was an exciting opening because it was our permanent collection and was done by invitation. We invited all the people who had helped and those in the city that we wanted to know about it. It was a huge success. A woman who was the vice president of AT&T got up and spoke and gave us a beautiful award which is now in our library. She talked about how important she felt the museum was.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And the balloons went up, red and blue balloons and I thought it was just absolutely splendid.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: It really was. It was exciting. It was exciting and then we all went inside and exclaimed over the beauty of the great hall and so forth.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: People were pushing through this door which was too narrow and I remember there was the Ambassador of Spain in Washington next to some lady in a wheelchair and he was pushing her in

because she was so eager to see this museum that's just opened.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, getting NMWA to that point was the result of a great deal of effort on the part of many people. And I must say that one of the big things that happened in connection with the museum was unplanned. A man came to me and he said, "I am a professional in the field of direct mail". This was before we all got tons of it. And he said, "I think your museum could benefit greatly from direct mail. Now this was before the renovation. I said, "We don't even have a museum yet, it isn't open." And he said, "No, but you are cause related and I really think you'd make out tremendously well." And I said, "Well, what will it cost?" And he said, "\$40,000." And I said, "I don't dare risk the museum's money, but I'll put up the money myself and take a chance." So we went ahead and the return was astounding. He couldn't get over it and I was thrilled. We opened the museum with 60,000 members.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That was --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Sixty thousand members. That's more members than any other museum in our country had. And Mrs. Bush was so impressed she announced it in her speech. We don't have that many members now and the reason is that after we started I was determined we would curb expenses and be in the black. During our first five years we had to open a gift shop, we had to open a restaurant, we had to get the library functioning. There were so many things to do that we cut out prospecting because it is expensive.

As a result our membership went down because there is always some diminishing. Once we had some other needs taken care of we started up again a few years ago and are up to 40,000 members. I think we added 8,000 last year. We'll build it back up. But even now our members come from every state and 25 countries and we are one of the largest 10 museums in the world when measured by membership.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, Billie because it really is so unique for our museum to have these state committees and international committees. Maybe you could tell a little bit about this idea.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, from the very beginning I didn't want it to be specifically a Washington museum. I wanted it to serve all women and knew that if we were going to accomplish our goal of educating people about women we had to go further than just Washington, D.C. So we decided to have state committees. The first committee we had was in Texas and it was wonderful. Elizabeth Hutchinson who's husband had been the Secretary of Transportation --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: In Johnson's administration?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: In Johnson's administration. Elizabeth was a VIP in Texas. She had run political campaigns in Texas. She came on our board and said, "Now, we'll start with a committee in Texas." I was traveling at the time on behalf of the museum and my secretary called and said, "Mrs. Hutchinson wants to know what you want her to do in Texas." And I said, "I don't know anything about Texas. Let her do anything she wants to do. I trust her totally."

When I returned my secretary said, "Well, you'll be in Texas for two weeks," and I was shocked, I hadn't dreamed it was going to be so extensive. But, we went. We started out in Dallas and Caroline Hunt knew Elizabeth Hutchinson. Caroline gave a bountiful tea at her hotel, The Mansion. I was in the receiving line and the women arriving were dressed magnificently. Seventy women came in beautiful clothes and jewels. I must say I was impressed. When everybody was in Caroline turned to me and said, "I like you." This openness of Texas was overwhelming. I wasn't used to it. I hadn't anticipated it, but I found it utterly charming. So I said, "Well, I like you too." She had set up a mike and I gave a little speech about the museum to the guests.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You show slides usually of the collection --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, not then -- that was before the slides even, before the slide presentation. I do now. But I told all about our plans and they got excited. And then we traveled to other cities. It was blue bonnet season and Elizabeth Hutchinson grew up driving a car. It was incredible. You just drive and drive and drive in Texas, and there were gorgeous blue bonnets, yellow wildflowers and pink wildflowers. We visited all over Texas for two weeks and I remember wherever we went someone would do something nice for us. We went to -- I remember Martha Buchanan owned a hotel in one of the Texas cities and she gave a luncheon for me. And Ellen King of the famous King Ranch people gave a luncheon in Austin. In Waco a woman named Jo Stribling gave a dinner. Her husband owned the local television station so I was on television.

We just went from place to place all over Texas for two weeks. Elizabeth had run political campaigns and I swear that's what it was like. Finally, on the very last night after ice cream socials and everything you can think of in the way of entertainment, we were in Forth Worth. Our hotel rooms were adjoining and I said, "Elizabeth, I'm going to get in that bed, I'm going to order a bowl of soup and I am going to sleep and goodnight." And she said, "Now Billie, now Billie, now Billie, just it'll be -- you just have to stay for a minute or two but there's a very

important woman in Forth Worth and she wants us to come and I really know you should meet her. It's important."

She went on and on so I said, "Okay, Elizabeth." So I got dressed up and off went to see this woman. And Elizabeth is assuring me that it won't take long. We arrive and it's a beautiful house. The woman was delighted to see us and she said, "Mrs. Holladay, I have arranged a very special dinner for you of these wonderful, wonderful little birds we cook down here from a special recipe" and so forth and so on. I look over at the Elizabeth and she's looking up at the ceiling and [laughs] and she had tricked me into it. And of course it was a wonderful dinner and a wonderful evening. Now, years later from that trip, Martha Buchanan is on the board of our museum. I met her years ago at her hotel when she gave the luncheon for me.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And many of those women who formed that early committee are now on our National Advisory Board.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And they have been supporters for so many years.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: You'll have to get out the details because after that visit, Elizabeth came and said, "You have to come back because we have not covered the state." The state is huge. And I said okay. So we went back to Corpus Christie and all these places we hadn't been able to do the first time we did the second time. We still have a fantastic committee there.

Recently I went down for their 20th anniversary. You see, they started two years before we opened. And they had all brought their daughters. Every time they have a meeting they beg me to come, and I do go as often as I can. It's always with husbands, etc. It's a big house party and it lasts three days -- they do everything on a big scale. But this last time I went down Joe and Teresa Long gave this very special dinner in their house. I went in and discovered a museum. They have an extensive collection. They have Berthe Morisot, Georgia O'Keeffe, but also Degas and great male artists.

Then the next day was their business meeting. I attended and they had a big surprise for me. For each year that they had been in existence they gave \$1,000. They handed me \$20,000 as a gift to the endowment.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Fabulous --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I know.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: It's fantastic. But your vision was to have a committee for the National Museum of Women in the Arts in almost every state.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: And it wasn't that they would raise money for us, it was that they would continue our *raison d'etre* of educating about women artists and in return it would mean more members of course, which it has. They have been well planned with the governor's wife as the honorary chairman, etc. She would open the governor's mansion and have a reception for the members of the state, etc. As the committee became better organized and had greater interest in the museum they started giving us needed gifts: the amplifying system in our auditorium, restoration of art, etc.

We went from Texas to other states and now we have perhaps 20 in the United States. We didn't do it alphabetically or geographically. When the right person, an "Elizabeth Hutchinson" showed up ready to form a committee in a state, then we worked closely with her and helped. And our state committees now are really a backbone of the museum. They offer significant outreach.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And also you didn't mention that one of the objectives of the committees is to present art from their state in our museum.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh yes, that is wonderful and important. Once the committee was fully established and had been incorporated in their own name so that they could raise their own money for an exhibition, they could apply to have an exhibition of the women artists of their state in our museum here in Washington. So far we have had 15 and they've been simply great because there's a rich diversity of talent throughout the country and every state is different. It's amazing how the art has reflected that difference.

[Audio break.]

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Okay, Billie. I think we talked last time about the importance of the state committees and international committees as an outreach of the museum. Can we finish that part of our interview -- can you say something more about these committees?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, the committees are essential if we're going to be more than a Washington museum because they are outreach and they extend the efforts of our *raison d'etre* by making people aware of women artists and the museum.

And, of course, it's a win-win because it gives these contemporary artists an opportunity to show in the nation's capital and good things come. It heightens their popularity, they sell paintings, etc. As the world has grown smaller, we have felt the need for a presence abroad and have been able to form outstanding committees in Paris, Italy, London and India. The committee that we have in Paris for instance had me to go to the Marmottan Musée and meet the Director and talk with him. That museum had much of the work of Berthe Morisot. This initiated an eventual exhibition of their great collection of Berthe Morisot. It was probably the most popular exhibition we've ever had.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: One of the most popular because Camille Claudel and Kahlo, Carr and O'Keeffe they were also very popular. We've had many good exhibitions. But we may talk about this exhibition a little later. At the last meeting of the Works of Art Committee you talked in a very interesting way about your collecting and I thought some of your thoughts about collecting art are really valuable for anybody who would listen to this tape so could you repeat some of the things you said?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, I think I've mentioned my friend, Dick Baker, before. Richard Brown Baker was a great collector. He was the first person to collect American contemporary artists. Early on he went to every show in New York. He was a Rhodes Scholar, was wealthy and after he came back from London after World War II -- it was he who broke the code of the Germans during the war -- he decided that he would devote his whole time and energy in collecting top notch contemporary artists, American artists. He was the first one to buy in depth Jackson Pollock, Lichtenstein, all of the great artists that have since become very, very famous. They were all in his collection and he gave them all to Yale. He's also given art to RISD because he was the Brown family from Rhode Island.

Early on my husband and I traveled with him extensively. When he saw that we were buying a few works of art he said "You must have a focus. It will be more important to you and to others." We did not think of ourselves as collectors and bought only that which we loved. Then, in an attempt to discover material about Clara Peeters who hung in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and in the Prado, we discovered there was almost no material on women artists.

They absolutely hadn't appeared in exhibitions et cetera. And it was something that would sustain the momentum because it was almost a monumental task, an endless task. And that line of acquisition was something that not only kept our enthusiasm up but became increasingly important as we delved into it and realized the extent of neglect women artists had had.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: He also defined what a collector needs to do to be successful, didn't he?

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Mayor Barry, Effie Barry, everybody --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: But you made yourself known to the gallery owners that you really had a focus and that you collect women artists of all periods and that was -- that opened the door to all these markets which were then after you trying to present art by women to you hoping that you may buy some.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: That's right. And also because I had worked at the National Gallery of Art when I was young and had been on the board of the Corcoran I had a lot of friends in the art world. And once they discovered that this door which was too would point out possibilities. At any rate, Dick and I met and talked about this and he took me to some of the galleries in New York. He was a wonderful, wonderful companion and as a result of that -- this was long before we had made any decision to collect art by women, but all of the things he said to us about collecting came back to us when we decided on this as a focus. And it seemed to embody everything he had said. I'm so glad we listened to him. He had written me a wonderful essay on collecting. I've always kept it.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Is he alive?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, no, he's dead because he was older than we and he was very active in World War II, he was very important.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So he had never seen the museum?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, he had one time.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Oh, good.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: One time he came to the museum and just marveled and I gave him so much credit, of course, because he had led us to a focus and described how collecting should be. We learned so much from him that enhanced and added to the whole effort of the museum.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So we can consider him one of your mentors actually?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh my yes, he was a mentor. My husband at the time was certainly very understanding and always supportive, but he was establishing his business and was very busy. Knowing my interest, he was glad that I had Dick with whom I could go to the shows in New York and the advice of someone truly knowledgeable.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, of course. And then you started to acquire art for yourself first and then for the museum. Do you have favorite pieces?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: You know, it's amazing. We love best what we know. My taste in art changes all the time. When I'm collecting a particular artist I try to become very familiar with her history and with her work and for a while she gets to be my favorite artist. And then I move on. If I become interested in another artist that I feel the museum is going to eventually need and that I would enjoy having in my house in the meantime, then I study that artist.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So who is now your favorite artist?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: My favorite artist right now is Gwen John. Gwen John was the sister of Augustus John and she is a wonderful artist. She sort of draws you into a picture. Her work is very subtle. One time Augustus John said, "One day I'll be known as Gwen John's brother." And, recently the Tate Museum had an exhibition of the two ["Gwen John and Augustus John," 29 September 2004 - 9 January 2005] of their work. My husband I had loaned a painting and went over for the opening. There was celebratory dinner and all. When it was reviewed by the critics it was exciting to me to find out that the emphasis of the reviewers was on the work of Gwen John. Wally and I have purchased three more examples of her work, but there are few available.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Wow, that's fantastic. And when you acquire art, how does all that happen? I remember one time you told me about your Christmas presents from Wally and the family gatherings and everybody sees the new painting first and then we're of course getting that for the museum. But could you just say how some of your acquisitions came to your possession?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: We have a family tradition. I have four grandchildren. The family comes here on Christmas Eve and we get all dressed up. One time Wally said to me, "What do you want for a Christmas present?" I said, "I want a butler and a cook on that night so that I can dress up and be comfortable with the family." And he said, "All right, you find them and that's your Christmas present." So we were able to get a wonderful professional butler and cook that worked at Blair House and arranged dinners when they had foreign dignitaries visit. They were very special. And that has been my Christmas present every year since.

And so Wally would -- he knew what I wanted in the way of art of course, we've talked a great deal about art, and he would buy something as a surprise and hide it in an open place where everybody could see it

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: But you.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, I would be busy and I wouldn't notice. It was never very -- it wasn't in the middle of the floor. For instance, when it was a Harriet Frishmuth's sculpture for our fountain out in the garden, he put the lights on out back and put a big red ribbon around her. Had her installed on the Q.T. in the middle of our fountain. Put a big red ribbon around her waist and tied a bow. It was the nude figure of a very young woman.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And she did these beautiful young sort of blossoming into womanhood figures. This one is up on her toes like she is dancing and there's a frog at the back spitting water. But I was very, very busy and didn't look out the window and didn't see it. Of course, the little children were tee-heeing and talking and trying to make me aware of it in a funny way and I wasn't paying any attention whatsoever, I was just busy making sure everybody was being properly taken care of.

And finally the littlest one said, "I want you to look out the window." And I said, "Well, fine, why? What's out there because it's evening, it's nighttime." And he said, "I want you to look out the window" and he took my hand and dragged me over to the window and there was this beautiful statue. It was a present to me. And, of course, the children just loved this and the next year -- when I sit at the table with the fireplace behind me (we always have a picture over that fireplace). And unbeknownst to me the picture had been removed and the one Wally had bought as a Christmas present was hanging. But again --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Which work was that?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Eva Gonzales, yes, I think it was Eva Gonzales.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: It is a beautiful painting.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, it is a gorgeous painting. I had admired it greatly. It had been recommended by someone in Europe. It was too expensive and I didn't think we could acquire it. And so that night I was busy again and I sat down in my place. Everybody was seated at the table and then eventually the littlest one again said, "Please look over -- turn around and look, look." And I said, "Well, why, dear?" And he said, "Please turn around and look, look up." And there was the beautiful Christmas present. But the children loved this excitement and Wally did too.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So you keep that every year? It's a tradition --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, not quite. Now they're grown up, but they still come back every year.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: But, do you still get art for your present at Christmas?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes. It's always art and jewelry and we open it on Christmas Eve with the children and we of course always have a present for them on Christmas Eve. Their big Christmas is the next day, but on Christmas Eve we invite their other grandmother and grandfather, my daughter-in-law's parents, and it's truly a family night. The children still sing the blessing they sang when they were little. I'm delighted that they treasure that evening, look forward to it.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: It's wonderful and I know because you mentioned to me that some of your grandchildren are getting gifts of art from you now.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: My daughter-in-law has a Master's in history of art and that's wonderful because we have so much in common. And, my son [Wallace "Hap" Holladay, Jr.] just automatically became interested. I'll never forget, it was hard to make him try to be interested in art. I mean he kind of resented the fact that we were so absorbed when he was young. Then he went off to college and he took a course in history of art just because it fit into the schedule and -- at least that's what he told me. And then he called me up all excited and he said, "Mother, do you know that last painting by Cezanne, the last one he did of that gardener?" And he said, "It's a wonderful painting. We just learned about it today and I wondered if you were familiar with it." I said, "Yes, I'm familiar with it." But to see this excitement in art awakening in him meant a lot to me. Now he collects posters and photographs -- original posters by Toulouse Lautrec and so forth.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: He has a focus too.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, so he has a focus. Posters, photographs and the books and memorabilia concerning those fields. But we also give art for their house. We had collected some nice works by men, prior to our focus so each Christmas we give them a piece of art by a man. Art is a big deal on our Christmas Eve.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That's a wonderful tradition.

[Audio break.]

Okay, Billie, tell me how did you begin on your career path? What were your earliest experiences and how did this help to establish you in the field?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, early on I really hadn't worked in the field of art. Then I worked part time at the National Gallery of Art. My husband was very busy establishing a business and he was away a great deal. I was reasonably well qualified and worked on weekends at the National Gallery of Art giving tours and working in the gift shop answering questions about the collection and so forth. Later I was on the board of the Corcoran for 10 years and these two things gave me an opportunity to delve into the history of art. What has actually helped me with regard to the formation of the museum is that I was a part of establishing my husband's business; I was director of the interior design division, I was president of my child's private school and then I was on a bank board and became chairman of that bank board.

Now, all of these things ended up being enormously helpful in the establishment of the museum because a museum is far more than exhibiting art. It's a business. We have a gift shop, we have a restaurant, we had to get --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: We have to balance the budget.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: We have to balance a very large budget. Thank God I had that degree of experience.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: It helped I'm sure.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: It really did help me a great deal, still does.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And what were the biggest challenges you faced early on and throughout your career?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, I was terribly lucky because once I married Wallace I didn't have to work for money and I could do that which I really wanted to do. I've always been pretty purposeful. I did volunteer work, but I never wanted to just determine the color of the tea napkins or something. My volunteer work was always very purposeful and I helped actually form the Langley private school out in Virginia. Under my leadership a wing was created and grades were added to it, etc. It was very challenging and I worked hard and it gave me a lot of satisfaction. I think the most challenging thing was to learn to speak publicly.

From the very beginning of the museum there were challenges. For instance, in our first five years we had to open a gift shop. We had to open a restaurant. We had to get the library in operation, refine the staff. It was --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So in another word, the biggest challenge was to keep the museum going and developing.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Developing. It was a big challenge and fortunately in our first five years we were able to accomplish everything and be on budget.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So that was really a tremendous challenge and you succeeded in doing all of that.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, we really did. In the next five years we had to buy the property next door. We had to tear it down and build a new wing and get it paid for. And on our 10th anniversary Mrs. Clinton cut the ribbon and the building was paid for. And these were challenges that were met, not just by me but with the help of many, many people.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So we always face challenges in the museum because we always want to do better, to do more interesting things so it's a constant challenge.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: It really is.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Billie, could you describe your professional interest and areas of inquiries. How did you decide what projects to take on?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I've always had the feeling that what I was doing had to be meaningful and I wanted to be able to measure the success or failure of what I was doing. With Langley School it was -- the public schools were in a mess. Fairfax County was growing at an alarming rate. A family moved in, once read a statistic, every 15 minutes. The schools were -- the public schools were absolutely impossibly crowded and had been put on part-time so that they could accommodate all the children. To work so that my children and others could have small classes and be taught by well qualified people, I felt was very, very important and I was willing to work for Langley School and help create that.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So that was your professional interest before you got involved with the museum, of course.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: The greatest challenge was to acquire the ability to speak in public. It has helped me so much. See, this helps you and in order to face any challenge, to be successful, you have to be able to sell. The only way you sell is to truly be comfortable in speaking. And that was something -- we've talked about it before in this interview, but it was amazing. I'll never forget that I finally took this course and I did succeed and won an award. But I'll tell you that has helped me ever since. First you've got to sell the idea of the museum; you've got to sell the idea of support, of committees, of everything you do that's new. If you're going to have help you've got to present your ideas in such a fashion to people that they will be enthusiastic and join in.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: How do you decide what projects to take on?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: It's always got to be something that I feel is meaningful and helpful to people.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Actually there is a connection between your involvement in education through school and education through the museum; it's a thread which runs through your life.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: We have had an excellent director of education and she has done a marvelous job at the museum. At one time we were having between 80 and 90 programs a year for children. And the children of the inner city in Washington can be reached best through the arts. They blossom. They love music, they love the visual arts, they love drawing, etc.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: and artists' books --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, to have them create an artist book brings out their creative best. It is amazing.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So when you would describe your professional accomplishments, how would you describe them and what work and art projects have given you the greatest satisfaction and why?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, it's not only children that the museum helps. There is a spiritual quality to art that comes from creativity. I remember attending an El Greco exhibition in Texas and there was a long line of people waiting to get in. Some of them were young or in blue jeans and there were some in mink coats, you know, poor people and rich people and a great variety of people waiting to get into the El Greco show.

I don't think most of them could have explained their need to see the El Greco show, but I am convinced it was because, whether they knew it or not, they were going to derive a spiritual experience from the great creativity of his work. Otherwise they wouldn't have been there. There was a reason why all these different kinds of people wanted to see an art exhibition. I happen to believe very strongly that art is essential for a well balanced life. I think a life without poetry, without the visual arts, without music, would be extremely barren. And so we serve in many ways. And I know that we enrich the lives of many, many people through our work.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: I guess some people come to the museum to celebrate their birthdays and they write in the guest book, "I came with my daughter to celebrate my birthday. That was the best celebration to see your museum," that's what they write.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: That's wonderful.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: We talked about your collecting, but you do have this philosophy that art doesn't belong to one person, that art belongs to everybody. And maybe just say that again because it is your philosophy and you never felt badly about giving away art. I remember from the very beginning when I came one day to your house after you had given your art to the museum and the walls were bare because everything had gone to our museum. But that's how you felt and you still feel that way, that people shouldn't amass enormous collections and keep them locked away.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I truly feel that the arts are meant to be shared. And my whole attitude about the visual arts is the same attitude I have about music or poetry or the dance -- you cannot own anything that someone has created. You can only be privileged to enjoy it. You can't own a child that you've created. You can care for that child for a while and all, but that child has a life of its own. I feel the same way about art.

You can buy art, you can hang it on your wall, you can enjoy it, you can take care of it, but it has a life of its own. With the exception of something burning up, if someone who cares naught for and is unable to care for -- inherits a Mary Cassatt it will go up at auction and it will be bought by a museum and it will continue to do its thing. There is a longevity of great art that has very little to do with the individuals who for a time during their life possessed it.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That's a very good statement. And when you think about the history of the museum exhibitions you mentioned the first exhibition, the inaugural show, "American Women Artists: 1830 - 1930," but, you know, all these shows in many ways were possible thanks to you. So which are really the shows you loved the most?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, it's so hard for me to say because when I love a show, it's for many, many reasons. It's for enjoyment, of course, but another reason I love it is if it brings in lots of people because then more people have enjoyed art. And if it makes more money in our gift shop and ticket sales and what have you that enhances the museum and again enhances our ability to serve. So when I think back over the exhibitions, the ones I guess that have given me the most pleasure are the ones like Grandma Moses ["Grandma Moses in the 21st Century," March 15 to June 10, 2001] and Berthe Morisot ["Berthe Morisot: An Impressionist and her Circle," January 14, 2005 - May 8, 2005], and this wonderful one we had that had Georgia O'Keeffe, Frida Kahlo and Emily Carr ["Places of Their Own: Emily Carr, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Frida Kahlo," February 8 to May 12, 2002]. Emily Carr is the great Canadian woman artist. She isn't terribly well known and she was certainly the highlight of that exhibition. And how wonderful to introduce a new great talent to the public. All three women are dead but all three women shared some certain things. And I loved that exhibition.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: But also sometimes we just introduce the new artist to the American public like when we did exhibition of Camille Claudel early on or when we did something unusual -- I just thought that the exhibition of Julie Taymor ["Julie Taymor: Playing with Fire," November 16, 2000, to February 4, 2001] was also --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, Julie Taymor.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So you liked both of these exhibitions?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, heavenly day, yes. Julie Taymor was the most exciting thing. She had done many, many -- she's probably the most creative woman in America today. And she had done *The Lion King*, that's proof of the pudding, still running New York, and she had done many other things. Operas and films and so forth and all of them were powerful and we were so fortunate to have Julie cooperate with us so that we could have her great puppets and the wonderful stage settings -- and I remember that she had done miniature stage settings and figures and all of what she hoped would be involved in the whole of each one of her productions in New York, and they were just exquisite small works of art. They weren't for sale, of course, but I'll never forget seeing all of those in one room.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Because it was also very creative for the museum to have an exhibition of stage design.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, the puppets seemed alive, they moved, many of them, and we had the music that went with them.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And videos of her films.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh yes. People still talk about it.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, because it was so creative and it was such a fabulous installation.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: It's just amazing how many people still say -- they'll come up to me and say, "I'm a member and I loved the Julie Taymor show." So that was -- as a matter of fact, that was selected as one of the 10 best exhibitions in 2000.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, it was -- it made you proud, of course.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, it was great and what was so touching was that her mother -- and I did not know that her mother had been a member since we opened, Julie Taymor's mother. And while at the museum she told me all these wonderful tales about Julie Taymor. Julie Taymor and I have since become friends.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That's just wonderful. And, you also like Camille Claudel for different reasons.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: -- nobody knew about Camille Claudel.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh yes. It was a great exhibition, and that put us on the map in a way. John Russell of the *New York Times* wrote a review. He came and saw it and wrote a review in the *New York Times*. Now, he didn't come down and review many things in Washington - - -

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That's right.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: - - - and he started the review out, "We are all indebted to the National Museum of Women in the Arts for bringing Camille Claudel to America." I'll just never forget that. Because of his recognition our worth seemed to go up in the minds of other museum people.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes. So these were, I guess, some of your greatest satisfactions. Now, I know that you have an office full of awards, and I remember that you have doctorates, honorary doctorates, from many universities, including Findlay [Findlay University, Findlay, Ohio], Mount Vernon College and Elmira College where you went to school, and you -- can you just tell me about some of these awards because I see another one on the table. That was - - -

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, the reason that's on the table, it just happened the day before yesterday. It was given by Moore College of Art and Design. That's the first college in America -- the first school in America for women artists and is located in Philadelphia. I was impressed by the school. It has grown and blossomed under a wonderful director. They once gave me an honorary doctorate. Each year they give two visionary awards, visionary women, and in 2005 they gave it to Faith Ringgold, the African-American artist, and myself. And it was an exciting experience. Some of the awards have been more meaningful than others, and I'm so fortunate I have been given 30-some. But the greatest satisfaction which comes from the awards is that it gives credibility to the museum and heightens the awareness of the museum. That's a real satisfaction because I want people to know that I am not the museum. The museum is the result of the efforts of many, many talented people.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And also you were Washingtonian of the Year [1987] and you received a Norwegian Government award --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: The Norwegian Government award was exciting because I had worked with the

Norwegian Embassy here and had met the King and Queen. Her majesty is a beautiful woman. She dresses magnificently and loves art. She has a great collection of her own. She kindly and generously underwrote an exhibition at our museum.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That was the exhibition of "Norwegian Women Artists?"

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: "Norwegian Women Artists". It was funded by the Norwegian Government and was a big success. The King and Queen came to open the exhibition, but not only that, they brought their chamber orchestra, headed by a woman, to play in our performance hall. Because all this happened I was fortunate to know them a bit, their majesties gave me -- they knighted me and presented me with a beautiful medal worn when you dress formally and a boutonniere. There was a ceremony at the Embassy and then the King and Queen invited me to come to Norway.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And you went?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: And I went. We had a group of about 10 people that went from the museum and that's part of the tradition, you go and you call on the King. And I've got to admit that I was tongue-tied. I couldn't think of a thing to say. It didn't bother me at all as long as their majesties were in our museum, we chatted away, but I was truly awed at the palace. When I got over there, the splendor of the castle and his office and everybody bowing and scraping me in and out, I was struck absolutely dumb. I said yes, sir, no, sir -- [laughs] -- it was dreadful. You can't win them all. A humbling experience.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Well, that was an interesting experience.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: That also happened, incidentally, with the Queen of Denmark. Her Majesty came and underwrote a wonderful exhibition of Danish women artists. A woman has designed the Georg Jensen Silver and the Queen herself had done ceremonial robes. But furniture was in it, and fabrics, and all sorts of things. But she brought her ballet dancers who danced in our auditorium to invited guests. Ever since the Danish Embassy has helped us.

The present ambassador's wife [Birgitte Wilhelmsen] came and took our history of art course and offered the embassy for numerous occasions which was most helpful to the museum. They are returning, the Federspiels, Ambassador and Dr. Fiederspiel. She's a doctor, medical doctor. But I gave a small dinner -- we were 10 people - - as a farewell gesture to them and they seemed touched by that. It was their guest list and they've been wonderful, wonderful friends of the museum, brought the royal princess to come and see our museum when she visited the Ambassador.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Did you ever visit the court in Denmark?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I went to Denmark and I didn't visit the court, but her prime minister -- as a matter of fact she and the King were out of the country but the prime minister gave a dinner for me. And a woman that had come with the queen, I didn't realize she was a part of her majesty's entourage but was also her friend. That woman's husband is the head of Carlsberg Beer, of Georg Jensen, of Royal Danish China, all these things are a conglomerate that he heads. We were shown everything.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: A royal welcome.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Okay. I want to know what the projects you are currently engaged in are. I know that you give a lot of time to the endowment because it's very, very important that we have an endowment, but just talk about it.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, I went to the Ford Foundation and asked them for some help with an endowment and they said they could not give me money for an endowment, but would give me \$70,000 to do a study to see if were ready for an endowment drive.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So that was some time ago?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, about three years ago [2002]. And so the experts -- this expert firm interviewed everybody -- our major donors, the whole board, the staff, on and on, and they came to the conclusion that we were ready for an endowment drive and they told us that our goal should be \$25 million in pledges and cash, and \$10 million in planned giving. Climis and Carol Lascaris, she had been president of our museum for two terms, and they were with the museum from the very beginning. She and her husband Climis agreed to be the chairmen of the endowment drive. I'm so happy to say that we now, after about four years, have over \$20 million in pledges and cash and we are over with planned giving. We still have another \$4 million plus to go for

our \$25 million and the hope is that we can raise that last \$4 million to celebrate the completion of the endowment and announce at our 20th anniversary in 2007.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And are you also involved in all these exhibition projects? You have been the chair of the board for many, many years since we opened the museum, but you really are active in everything we do. What are the most recent projects you are engaged in?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, many wonderful things have happened. I'm so proud of the board and the executive committee. It includes a nationally known scientist; a woman who was the mayor of a New Jersey city, has run an international business and who was selected by the president to open the embassies after the Soviet Socialist Republic was dissolved, these countries all had to have embassies. Mary is truly a worldly individual.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That's Mary Mochary?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: M.A. Brickfield's the scientist who discovered all of what we know about pain. She is recognized everywhere in medical circles for that. We have a woman on our board who was a former anchorwoman on television and then with the money she made created her own business of owning hotels and she still manages her own business even though she has retired from television. And we have a woman that had worked for the World Bank and then went into business as a money manager about 10 years ago or so. She now manages billions of dollars including some of the World Bank money. I could go on and on.

Well, the project -- what we strive for is that our excellent staff, the director and so forth, the head of our curatorial and all, will share with the executive -- we have a meeting every month and the director comes. And we have asked her to share all of the things that the museum is trying to do or should do. Then we help in any way we can. Because our board members have contacts we try to be helpful when it comes to raising money.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So now specifically we work on these two exhibits, the renaissance women artists, yes?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, for example, our wonderful Italian committee under Vittorio Mosca, a great gentleman in Italy, has suggested and is working on an exhibition of Italian women artists from the renaissance to the baroque. The paintings will come from all the great museums in Italy and the show will open at our museum and will then go to a European venue. It will help celebrate our 20th Anniversary in 2007. The money is to be raised for this.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: You are involved in this?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, I am going to Milan for a week at the end of this month --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: To help raise money?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I will be meeting with various people that Vittorio has thought might be helpful.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes. So that will be one project. And are you also involved in this Mexican and Peruvian exhibition?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, not really. That was brought to us by Laura Bush and involves the first ladies of Peru and Mexico. Mrs. Bush suggested that we have it at our museum. It is women and children from the pre-Columbian age from a humanistic point of view. My daughter-in-law Winton has worked with the staff.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: No, I just was curious whether --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: At the instigation of Laura Bush, the Department of Education established a new specific office, which presented to many institutions throughout the United States a request for an art program that would reach the inner city children throughout our country in public schools. We were so fortunate that we were invited to participate and we were very fortunate that we were selected. We'll be given a million dollars over a period of three years to test and evaluate our proposal. We've just finished our second year with great success.

However, that started because I was fortunate enough to call on the Department of Education and be given a full-time appointment with the assistant secretary of Education. We talked at length. I invited her to the museum. She saw the museum, liked what we were doing and became acquainted with us. She invited her assistant and several of the people who would head this department over to the museum. That was the reason we were one of the ones selected to submit a proposal. Our excellent staff put it together. We were fortunate enough to win. We used as part of the project a guide for children we earlier published which had won a prize. But that is how the executive committee or the board and the staff can work together toward an end achievement.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So this was a very important project you followed and helped where you could.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: This project is truly important. We have taken two schools for the trial run. They were selected because they had the highest requests for free lunches. We were going to the students who were in need. And we have now finished our first year. The test results of the children before and after are encouraging in what were revealed.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: All the children are learning about women artists --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Much more. They are learning the terminology of art, they have visited a museum. They've been asked to look for a portrait and what to see in a portrait, they look for a still life, look for this or that, they have discussed it, they've tried it on their own. When they get through (some of them had never even been to a museum before) they've had fun because they participated, they looked for things and they learned the terminology of art, what to look for in art and they've attempted a picture on their own.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, so this thread of education through art really brings fantastic results.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, it's very exciting. If we succeed it will be introduced into the public schools throughout the country.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Wow.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Was that the legacy?

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes. Billie, I am just thinking that you did so much for art and what do you see as your legacy? The museum is established, it works beautifully.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, I like the idea -- I think it's helpful for a family to have roots. And because my children and grandchildren have felt a part of this and been a part of it really, I think they feel they have roots in Washington.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: They were born in Washington?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: They were born in Washington and they are very aware of the museum and its accomplishments. I'm happy that they seem to love the museum. They're so proud of it because they feel that as part of the family they're a part of it. And so if I've left them with a feeling of knowing who they are and the roots from which they come, etc. perhaps that is a legacy.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: But that's your personal legacy. That's your family legacy.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And in a broader sense in terms of society?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: In a broader sense, I do hope that the museum will continue to serve and continue to enhance. And if I can feel that I had a part in leaving something to this city that is beneficial over a long period of time, it will give me great pleasure.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: I'm sure that will happen. And it's happening already. That's a wonderful legacy to leave something so wonderful as a museum which everyone can enjoy, come and visit. And the final question today is what would you tell a young woman beginning her career in the visual arts?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I hope I'll have a wonderful answer to that in the future and this is why: I was approached by the Small Business Administration. They have money from the government to help women entrepreneurs. Not to give them money but to devise ways to guide them towards success. They asked me about women artists and I said I think women artists have a great problem in knowing how to sell their work and how to get a good dealer, the practical aspects. They're very creative but I think they really need help in the commercial aspects of their art.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That's the advice you would give to artists mostly, yes? Well, your advice is good too, but when people finish school and they study art history or museum studies, they always look for jobs and I really don't know what to tell people when they ask me how to get into museums or how to proceed with my career in the visual arts because there's not enough jobs for everybody.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, it's -- no, it's very, very difficult. The first thing they have to face up to is there isn't money except for a very few. If they want to make money they are in the wrong fields. And the second thing is that they may have to start out as a receptionist or the phone operator or something just to get into a

museum. But I do think -- I would hope that real talent is recognized. I've watched several who came to our museum in very minor positions and worked their way up to being the head of a department. I'm thinking of membership specifically because the girl who ended up there started out fresh out of school in a minor position and she ended up top notch head of membership.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Robin Brunstrum?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes. She was excellent. And she started out like a minor office assistant and they weren't even very complimentary of her. Somehow a few challenges approached, she went into the membership department, she took hold and when the head of that membership department left she became the head of it. She was proud of being important and she did a wonderful job. The best advice I guess I can give is just somehow get your foot in the door and work very hard.

[Audio break.]

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Hi. This is Krystyna Wasserman and I'm interviewing Mrs. Holladay. This is our last interview. Today is September 23rd, 2005.

Billie, we never talked about how your being a woman affected your life and your career and whether it really had any impact on your career, the fact of being a woman.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, I think probably it did in a positive way because my children went to a little private school. Now, the fathers -- the parents were very influential in this, but the fathers were very busy. Since, they were working. I was fortunate, I didn't have to work, was interested in my child's school and was on the board and then was elected president. That volunteer position did give me a presence. I had to speak before many, many important people and as a result I took a speech course because I didn't feel adequate. And so in a way being a woman and being given the jobs men didn't want or men couldn't do because of their occupation was an enhancement.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Well, yes, but you never really experienced any kind of personal or social gender bias when you were working. You worked for several organizations but I don't think anybody just looked at you as a woman -- or maybe they did, I really don't know.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, I honestly can't say that in the specific things I did I was discriminated against. Once I was involved in the museum and realized that women artists had been given short shift it made me somewhat a feminist, but I was not a feminist to start. I was older and I was very well taken care of in every way. I cannot fairly say that I felt great discrimination. As a matter of fact, I like men and I think men like me.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: [Laughs.] Now I am sure this is true but -- so how did you arrive at this sort of really feminist route because your point of view changed over the years when you went to so many places and discovered that women are not on the walls of major art museums, that you can't find information about them. So it really means that you sort of underwent some kind of a process of --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, yes, certainly by heightening my awareness of that discrimination and it wasn't -- it certainly wasn't that I didn't believe in many of the things that the feminists stood for. I certainly think people should get equal pay for equal effort, etc. I certainly think that there should be considerations of qualifications when you give people responsibility and a job regardless of gender, etc. I believed in all sorts of things that the feminists believed in, it's just that I wasn't actively involved.

I don't want to claim credit because I think if it weren't for the feminists, Sandra Day O'Connor wouldn't be on the Supreme Court. Probably the museum wouldn't be as timely as it is. And so I really feel we're terribly indebted to the feminists. I think some of their activities in promoting were rather unpleasant and harsh, but maybe that's what you have to do when you're breaking ground.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, because in a sense things changed for women. You know, we didn't have women museum directors, just recently Lisa Dennison was appointed Guggenheim Museum director. I think that's in great measure thanks to the feminist movement. So do you think things have changed for women?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, I definitely do. There is no doubt. As a matter of fact, the law changed and it's now against the law to discriminate. I think because suddenly corporations realized customers were women, not just men, there has been a scramble to get some women on their boards. Unfortunately we still aren't there. The percentage of women on boards of major corporations is very limited, but there are some. And you mentioned women directors; I'm amazed at how many women directors have been appointed. When we started this I don't believe there was one.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: So lots of things have happened, obviously.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Anne D'Harnoncourt, wasn't she the director at -- in Philadelphia?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: In Philadelphia. She was one of the first.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, she sort of grew up with the museum and inherited the job from her father. She was also well qualified.

And do you think Art Table has anything to do with this?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I think so. I think that just by heightening the awareness through its activities. Art Table's worth can be measured by its growth. The fact that it grew so rapidly and had so many supporters and members are certainly evidence that people thought it was worthwhile. I think that when that many people who are interested in art express an interest, especially where women are involved, it certainly enhances the whole. There is no doubt Art Table had a degree of influence in the changeover.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: I feel that it's like the "old girls network," you know, because they have occasions to talk to each other at some high level positions and that sometimes facilitates finding jobs or --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Networking probably.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: It's a very female type of networking.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Right. I'm so sorry that I haven't had time to be an active member. I certainly would find it interesting, but the museum has taken all of my time. I simply can't be active in other things.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, I absolutely know that because you spend so much of your personal time at the museum. Billie, we need to talk a little bit about your personal life which is intertwined with your professional life to some degree. And do you have any support system? I know that your husband Wallace is really very supportive and has always been, but just --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, he's been terribly supportive. He said "I will do everything I can -- if you want to do this I'll do everything I possibly can to help you except I will not talk to newspapers and I will not get up and make speeches. Those things I refuse to do." And he never has done those things. That's perfectly all right because it doesn't bother me to handle that end of it. I can't tell you what it means to me to have a loving, faithful, supportive mate; it makes all the difference in the world. I can't imagine not having my husband.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And I think you really have a lot of good friends who supported you all through the museum development and that are a good support system --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Absolutely.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: -- because you can rely on some of these people.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I'm totally indebted to them. It's just amazing. I do have good friends and most of them are involved in the museum and give of themselves mightily. They give their talent, their time and their money. I'm exceedingly grateful because if it hadn't been for the many loyal supporters and members, the museum wouldn't exist.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So it's family and friends, that's your support system.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, my extended family too. My daughter-in-law has a Master's in history of art and she was brought on the board -- not by me but by others. She's a very attractive, very likable, darling individual and one of my best friends. And my son is very interested in art because he grew up with it and has a collection. He has not gotten into it like my daughter-in-law, but he's always there too -- steady, steady.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, he supports you.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: He loves his mother.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, he comes to all of our events. And did having children affect your career in some way?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, to a degree because I was very fortunate. I did have help with the children, but the first thing I did very actively outside of the house was to be involved in their school and become president of that school. And under my leadership -- I really am very proud of this -- we added grades because it was very

necessary. As I have said in Fairfax County the classes were on part-time, there was such immense growth and the public schools hadn't kept up, so a private school was desperately needed. Because of the demand we enlarged it and the added buildings, I spearheaded that. That experience was invaluable.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: For the future.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: For the future.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: But did they ever -- did you really want to get a job when they were little and you didn't because you had to stay with them? Did you have this internal conflict like many mothers have, like they -- like our former publications director, Lauren Schipsi? She gave up the job to be with her baby. And have you been torn in that way or --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: No, because of help I had the freedom to go out and do what I wanted to do. Now, I went to work at the National Gallery of Art.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: When they were still little?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: They were very little. I was accepted and it was -- you had to be qualified and I took some tours at the National Gallery of Art and I worked in the gift shop answering questions because that was where visitors came for information. And it was fun. I really enjoyed working at the National Gallery of Art and was there on weekends when the staff had time off. Because it was weekends I was given lots of opportunities that I wouldn't have had otherwise.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And you had live-in help to take care of --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I had live-in help which made it possible to do many things and I am humble because I know not every woman was so fortunate. It was a blessing.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So I think we said something that your professional life and your personal life are closely interwoven.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Because many friends are result of the museum development and there are new friends always and there are old friends so --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, I've met so many wonderful people.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So did I.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: You know, I think -- I suppose this sounds prejudiced but I think art attracts nice people. I think the people that are sensitive to art and love art and feel the spirituality and creativeness of art are nice people, good people, sensitive people. And, gives one the best of all worlds. The museum has given me far more than I've given. It has enabled me to meet wonderful people and have wonderful friends.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: It's made your life very rich.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, very, rich.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And exciting.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes. I'm very grateful. I don't want to sound like I'm bragging about it or something because I'm not; I am indebted, terribly indebted to all of those who have helped.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Well, you love the museum so much so tell me one of your fondest memories connected with the museum?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I've got so many funny memories. Do you know, way in the beginning I was out in Kansas City and I was given the key to the city. And I'm standing up in front of all these people and the mayor gives me the key and I say, "I'm so indebted to the state of Kansas for doing this" and it was in Missouri. [Laughs.] I mean, my geography was so bad, I --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That's strange, you traveled so much.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: But not in my own country which is dreadful.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: But you made up for that. [Laughs.]

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Since the museum I've learned my own country and it's another gift it's given me. I used to hop over the country like a flea to get to Hawaii or go the other way to Europe usually. I even knew the geography of South America better than I knew my own country.

The first time I ever went to Colorado it was with Wally. He was going there on business and we went into the Brown Hotel. Wally had lost a button on his jacket and I asked if I could get a valet or someone to sew a button on this jacket. And they said, "Oh, yes, Mrs. Holladay." They sewed the button on and when I asked the charges they said, "No charge." I was overwhelmed being a New Yorker that they wouldn't charge for sewing on a button.

We were treated so beautifully. We went out and these people that I didn't even know said, "Well, since your husband is going to be busy, would you like to go with us? We'll show you around a little bit." And they took me up into the mountains. I came back raving about Colorado and how friendly the people were and how beautiful it was. And my husband said, "Everybody else knows about Colorado, but you."

[Laughter.]

Because of the museum's state committees and because I'm asked to speak in various places, I'm really getting to know my own country and know it well.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That really is very lovely. But is there anything specific, any event which you remember so fondly? Like I remember first time I went ever to the gala in the Department of Commerce. I will never forget it because it was so beautiful. But you must have a lot of experiences like that when it was something really memorable.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: That was special. That really was special. A very strange thing happened. Givenchy, the great designer, wanted to do something in Washington. The president of Garfinckel's was a friend of mine and she said, "I know the people who work with Givenchy and they want to do something in Washington. Why don't we have a Gala ball and a display of his clothes?" One thing led to another and through contacts I was able to get the departmental auditorium. We went down to look at it and it was set up like an auditorium with seats. I said we couldn't have a ball here. And they said "Oh, yes, for I think it was \$1,500 you can have every one of these chairs removed and replaced. They're not fastened to the floor."

I was amazed. We went ahead. Behind this wonderful gala room were a series of rooms that were very lovely. I don't know what they'd been intended for, but we decided we could have an exhibition of Givenchy's clothes back there.

Now, he had always dressed Mrs. Mellon [Bunny Mellon]. And so I said, "Oh, if Mrs. Mellon would help us some way it would be tremendous and add to our prestige." I sat down and on some stationary I had bought at Tiffany's, gray stationary with engraved initials, I wrote to Mrs. Mellon and asked her if she would participate. She called me up and said, "We have the same stationary." [laughs.] You know, that's just one of the funny little things that make me a fatalist, make me believe it was all meant to be. She said, "Now, Mrs. Holladay, I must help dear Hubert [Hubert Givenchy]." They were on a first name basis.

She said, "He's made all of my clothes and so what can I do?" And I said, "Well, you could perhaps be the honorary chairman and come." She said, "Well, I'll be involved on one condition -- we have white tablecloths." And I said "We'll have white tablecloths." And she said, "Very well, very well."

We borrowed clothes from Princess Kelly, her daughter's first communion dress was done by Givenchy and we had that, and we had all these beautiful clothes.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: I think we also had some Audrey Hepburn's?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, all these beautiful clothes. We were allowed to keep the exhibition open for a week and we publicized it. Givenchy actually escorted Mrs. Mellon, who never appeared at anything in Washington -- occasionally, rarely she would be beside Paul Mellon at the gallery for something but that was it. And she was escorted by Givenchy to our very first gala.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Which was before we even opened?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: It was before we were in the building. The *New York Times* put the picture of Mrs. Mellon and Givenchy on the front page. It was a coup.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Wow.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: The French Embassy [French Ambassador Bernard Vernier-Palliez] was so excited about the whole thing that they had a beautiful event at the embassy to celebrate it. All in all it was very special

and more than we could have anticipated.

Another thing that we did -- and this was so much fun -- there was a young drum and bugle group that was made up of the public school children in Washington, D.C., mostly underprivileged children. And they had won a prize and been sent to Europe so I asked if they could come play for us. Now, the room had a central core where all the tables were and then there was like an area, an open area down each side that was like a passage, a wide hall.

Without any pre-announcement and they came, playing their hearts out loud all the way down one side, went across the front, out down the hall the other side and that was it. And Givenchy said, "Oh, this is so American" -- [laughter.] But everybody, I think, had a wonderful time. Givenchy provided the flowers. Now this was in the winter time and here were these magnificent quince blossoms bouquets in the middle of every table.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: It was the most outstanding evening I have ever seen in my life.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: It really was. I remember that one of the columnists in Washington, Sarah Conroy [Sarah Booth Conroy, "In the glow of Givenchy" *The Washington Post*, February 23, 1983], headed her column "It's the most elegant party we've ever had in Washington." It was exciting.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So that was a good memory for you.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: It was a prestigious start. It gave us a remarkable kick-off.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And presence.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Lots of wonderful things have happened just by chance. The museum was meant to be.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So you don't have just one thing you remember more than anything else, it was a lot of different things during our 20 or so years -- must be actually more now -- it's 23.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: There were lots of highlights. There was the highlight when we opened the building and Helen Hayes came and Mrs. Bush, Sr. cut the ribbon. That was very special. Then on our 10th anniversary Mrs. Clinton cut the ribbon and was so pleased about everything. She cut the ribbon on our new wing. It was up and paid for. That was meaningful to me.

Many other things have happened. Laura Bush has been supportive. She was the honorary chair of our Texas committee so she knew about the museum before she became the First Lady. Also, she was aware of Barbara Bush's involvement. Tonight she's having a dinner at the Library of Congress and we've been invited. I know that the invitation to us is because of the museum.

The museum has given me so many wonderful opportunities.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Okay, Billie. And I thought it would be nice if you -- because you met so many artists in your life -- during the time when you started to collect art and before you became the museum person and founder and chair of the board, you visited many studios. Perhaps you have a favorite leading artist or visited somebody's studio and would like to share the memories.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, I think probably the artist that's impressed me most is Julie Taymor. I think she's the most creative woman in America today, not only with her theater and opera and movies, but I was fortunate to get to know her because we had an exhibition of her wonderful, wonderful puppets that she uses in her work and her settings. And she came and her mother had been a founding member of our museum, which I didn't even know, that was exciting. And she did the movie on Frida Kahlo [*Frida*, 2002] and premiered it in our auditorium and came to the event. Julie Taymor stands out in my mind as a fantastically creative contemporary artist. But I did know many of the contemporary artists in New York.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Have you seen her studio? Have you ever visited her in her working environment?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: In our exhibition she had small studies for everything she has done. They were just jewels.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Models?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Models, actually whole stages in miniature with every little thing worked out down to the last detail. They are precious. I would give anything to have one for the museum or for myself but they're not for sale. She's very, very special.

And another sculptor where I sense great strength in creativeness is Magdalena Abakanowicz. We're so

fortunate to have something of hers. We've gotten to know one another and she's going to be given an award [2005 Lifetime Achievement Award by the International Sculpture Center, October 20, 2005] and I've promised to go up for it in New York. She called me from Poland and said "Do come."

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So these are the artists you really admire?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Well, there's many and I hate to pick one out because there are many very fine --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: So these are some of your favorite artists.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: But these are certainly ones which I admire and respect.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And, Billie, if you would have unlimited resources, millions, billions, what would you like to buy for yourself and for the museum?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: For the museum I would like to buy something that Wildenstein has. Its price is one million six hundred thousand. It is the painting of Marie Antoinette that was owned by the Rothschilds, Lillian De Rothschild. She collected memorabilia of Marie Antoinette. She had wonderful things. She had one great painting Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun did of the queen when she was seventeen.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And that's portrait by Vigée-Lebrun? The one at Wildenstein?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes. And it's the best. It's the best in the world and Wildenstein has it for sale. We've looked at it but it's just more money than we can afford to spend.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: And we have several Vigée-Lebruns.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: And that's another reason, we do have some fine Vigée-Lebruns at the museum and so it seems a bit much, but if money were unlimited --

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: That's what you would buy.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: I would buy for the museum, not for me. For me right now -- and my taste changes so there might be something else later one -- I have bought two Gwen John oils and also two watercolors by her. I adore her work and there's one particular painting which I can't get because it's owned by someone else, but if it ever comes up for sale I'm ready to buy it.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Who owns it?

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: It's some private ownership. But I've been asking the last relative of the Johns to keep an eye open for me. I really think her work is very special.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: It is special; it's very contemporary in its own way.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Yes, it invites you in, it's so subtle.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Yes, very much so.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Very subtle. It draws you to it. I think the museum should have her art in depth. Since we're going to give everything to the museum, I would like to continue to acquire Gwen John, but there are many other wonderful things of course.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Okay, Billie, my last question is if there is one thing you want to be remembered for, what would that be? And I think I know the answer because, of course, it would be the museum but I want to hear that from you.

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: [Laughs.] Well, didn't we go over this last time?

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: We did, we did, but I want to end this interview with something --

WILHELMINA HOLLADAY: Oh, with that. Well, the museum, as you know, has been a large part of my life. It's been meaningful to me in many, many ways and some we've touched on. As I said before I like to think that it has perhaps given my family as a whole, my grandchildren and all, roots in the city. They can be real Washingtonians and know that their family had a part in the artistic life of the city, the nation's capital. And so it is the museum, of course. I don't expect to be really remembered. And I'm very happy about this -- the museum will have a life of its own and it will have many, many other people who support it and become identified with it. I think it's wonderful that I've had all the advantages I have had because of the museum, but I don't expect it to

be a forever legacy.

KRYSTYNA WASSERMAN: Well, if not you, we wouldn't have the museum. Well, thank you, Billie, that was wonderful.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Last updated...August 24, 2007