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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Janet W. Solinger, 2005 October 7

Funding for this interview provided by ArtTable, Inc. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Janet Solinger on October 7, 2005. The interview took place in Washington, D.C., and was conducted by Marc Pachter for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview was funded by ArtTable, Inc.

Janet Solinger has reviewed the transcript and has 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

MARC PACHTER: I'm going to start pretty much by summarizing –

JANET SOLINGER: Okay.

MR. PACHTER: – your initial phase and then we'll proceed because you take off in your interest in the arts just after you marry and I just want to be sure about my understanding that it wasn't your initial family interest.

MS. SOLINGER: I don't – I don't really think so, although, as I say, when I saw later what my father had collected, I was surprised – after I became sophisticated about art, I was surprised at how much he'd evidently bought in New York. He went to New York a lot on business, he was a lawyer – a successful lawyer. He did go to galleries and he did buy things, and he had – well, we divided up some of the art he had in his office later, and my stepmother has some at home. They were very nice works.

MR. PACHTER: So that there would have been a visceral effect but not necessarily the tradition that certain families have with saying, "Now, you are to be interested in the arts. This is –"

MS. SOLINGER: Right. No. It didn't happen that way.

MR. PACHTER: It wasn't that way. And again –

MS. SOLINGER: I wished I could say that it did but it didn't.

MR. PACHTER: Well, it's all the more impressive that the commitment became as strong as it did in you later on. And then in university, again, my understanding is that while you gravitated towards certain art courses, it wasn't really yet the point of your education.

MS. SOLINGER: It wasn't central.

MR. PACHTER: It wasn't central.

MS. SOLINGER: But I was – but I was finding art more important, so that when I came to New York I was ready to start going to all the museums and the galleries. I mean, the interest was there.

MR. PACHTER: Is it fair to give the focusing of the interest the credit for that in part to your marriage after university?

MS. SOLINGER: I would say in part, yes. My husband also was a lawyer and he had many interests. I can't say that he pushed me to the arts. It's really interesting because, you know, we're talking about long ago but I can't really pinpoint that he said, "Janet, let's get more interested in the arts." I don't think he did, but he did to the extent that he was active in the formation of the Cincinnati Museum of Contemporary Art in that we did own a few things that he had selected [He received a Ralston Crawford lithograph for being an original donor]. And, oh, the other thing I should say when I got married I got many gifts of lovely silver items from a store that carried art as well as silver. And I had two cousins who were interested in the arts – first cousins. And I didn't want all this silver. In those days, silver was not a thing with me. We went down to this store and I bought two [Diego Rivera] Rivera watercolors and two Anita Fenton wood blocks and in exchange for all the silver –

MR. PACHTER: Oh.

MS. SOLINGER: And I don't even want to talk about the Diego watercolors – Rivera watercolors because they were lovely. They were in my living room for years and they were very important to me and I carried them with me to New York, and when I got involved in contemporary art in New York, somehow they were given away.

MR. PACHTER: Ah.

MS. SOLINGER: And they're worth, you know, apiece probably a couple of $100,000 today, besides which I like them. I don't know how that happened.

MR. PACHTER: It's early to talk about this because we need to get you to New York – that central moment – but I think it's fair to say that in the pattern of buying of art, you don't necessarily consider yourself a collector per se in a formal way that you have continued to buy as you did that first time what it is that interested you. Is that fair?

MS. SOLINGER: The first time?

MR. PACHTER: The first time, but then thereafter, I mean, do you – we are surrounded in your apartment with an extraordinary collection. I don't know whether you at that early point said, "Collecting art is one of the things I want to do in my life," or whether you just let it happen, if you will, naturally.

MS. SOLINGER: Well, it's in between because though you don't want me to go to New York yet. [Laughter.] When I moved to New York I had those Diego Rivera watercolors and Ralston Crawford that I mentioned and woodblocks and some other things which – I don't remember that was of any importance, but it filled walls, but when I moved to New York and began to work in a museum all the people I was with were either artists or collectors –

MR. PACHTER: Or collectors.

MS. SOLINGER: – or curators.

MR. PACHTER: Or curators, or course.

MS. SOLINGER: It was very funny when using things I haven't thought of in a long time is that when they'd say, "What opening are you going to tonight?" In my terms, I thought of theater because my husband and I were big theater buffs. An opening seemed to me like a theatre. Then I realized very quickly without making a fool of myself they were talking about the art gallery openings.

And Tuesday night in New York in the '60s was like magic, you know, it was what gallery you had to be at what time [6:30 PM was the magical time]. So you'd be where everybody was seeing the artist and I quickly learned – art became central to me in the '60s.

MR. PACHTER: I'm now going to let you move formally to New York –

MS. SOLINGER: All right.

MR. PACHTER: – because it is clearly so central. What brought you to New York?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, originally what brought me to New York outside of the fact that my husband and I went to New York all the time, several times a year and saw theater, I don't remember I was going to too many museums in those days. Mostly we'd see eight plays in every week that we were there, and we loved the city, but after three years of being a widow – I remarried and I happened to marry a man whose headquarters were in Great Neck.

MR. PACHTER: Oh. So as a good wife of that period you went with your husband to his job.

MS. SOLINGER: Well, I was not a good wife. [Laughter.]

MR. PACHTER: Well, as –

MS. SOLINGER: But I did go –

MR. PACHTER: Well, as a traditional – in any case –

MS. SOLINGER: Well –

MR. PACHTER: – it was because of your husband's work initially that you went to –

MS. SOLINGER: Well, he was – he was based in New York. I mean, family in Cincinnati but he was based in New York.

MR. PACHTER: Ah, I see.

MS. SOLINGER: It wasn't that I went with him. It was that he was there.

MR. PACHTER: I see. I see.

MS. SOLINGER: And a good deal older than I. He had a very, very established position and so if I were going to marry him I would be in New York.

MR. PACHTER: Right.

MS. SOLINGER: And we moved to New York.

MR. PACHTER: And you lived in Great Neck?

MS. SOLINGER: We lived in Great Neck for a little – about 14 months.

MR. PACHTER: And how was that period? Were you principally still not working in an art context but just taking an interest?

MS. SOLINGER: When I moved to New York to Great Neck, I wanted to continue University and get my Masters or I had worked for three years – two years and nine months actually – I wanted to get a job. I mean, I had now tasted the great exhilaration of working and also I now realized I should have got my Masters when I graduated from college, but he wouldn't hear of my – he was, as I said, much older and very traditional. He wouldn't hear of either one, and it really hastened the end of our marriage because Great Neck and the kind of life I lived there was not what I was used to nor wanted.

So – that was not the only thing but it was very important. So my sister lived there – [Telephone ringing.]. Oh, excuse me.

[Audio break.]

MR. PACHTER: Okay. So this is the point where your marriage is not consistent with other things that you wanted to do.

MS. SOLINGER: Well, I was taking life more seriously, having worked for those years and I began to go to New York during the day a good deal. Living in Great Neck as I did it was an adventure to go to New York. And my sister, who lived in Rye, would meet me in the city and we did go to museums a great deal.

I remember a turning point in my thinking about art: we went to the Rothko show at the Museum of Modern Art. It was, I guess, his first major show and my thinking: "Is that art?" You know, it was two bands of color. And I certainly had not been taught that in my university days, so it opened my eyes to things that later would be opened much more. I had not – I don't think that contemporary art had reached Cincinnati.

I mean, there was that Museum of Contemporary Art and I did go to it and I was brought along to it, but I had never heard of Rothko. This was 1960, '61.

MR. PACHTER: And you were – you were not so much resistant as perplexed?

MS. SOLINGER: I was not resistant at all. I was – yes, I was perplexed. I was willing to learn, but hadn't really seen it before – had not been exposed to it before.

MR. PACHTER: Now the Woman and the Moment were perfect because this was an extraordinary time in New York –

MS. SOLINGER: Oh, it was a perfect time.

MR. PACHTER: – in the art world. So as you began to look around and take an interest in art and so forth, did you determine on a job that would work within the arts?

MS. SOLINGER: No. Initially, during that year, the nine months I was married, I simply wanted to either go along with my graduate work in English literature or get a job. I had plenty of opportunities to have a job because I did well in my job in Cincinnati, and people were saying, "Call me up if you ever come to New York."

I knew I could get a job but since it would not work with the marriage I didn't, but when I got a divorce nine months later, I began to look seriously for a job – really seriously. I would go into New York every day; drive in from Great Neck and have either lunch or interviews or whatever. I read the *Times* – the New York *Times* assiduously looking for what there was, and I was offered a number of jobs. But I think one of my criteria was it had to be really interesting to me and – I hate to say this, it sounds superficial, but it had to be fun.

And so I did turn down some offers until I heard about a job at the Jewish Museum where the administrator was

leaving and the Jewish Museum was about to build a new building and the person who was behind the move was interested in contemporary art. So I tried to use the few people I knew in New York to meet the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary who – under whose auspices the Jewish Museum was sited, and it was very hard to meet him. I had a glowing letter from Nelson Glueck, who was the head of Hebrew Union College Reform branch of Judaism, where I worked.

MR. PACHTER: In Cincinnati?

MS. SOLINGER: In Cincinnati –

MR. PACHTER: Right.

MS. SOLINGER: And the guy I wanted to meet at the Jewish Theological Seminary – Louis Finkelstein, was the head of the Conservative movement. So I had this wonderful letter from Nelson and connections and finally – it took me awhile – seems like awhile; probably wasn't because I got the divorce on March 16th and I started my new job on June 1st, so it couldn't have been so long. But I met him and I said he was like the *Wizard of Oz* that I finally – you know, the curtains parted and there he was. And I don't even if I'd shown him the letter from Nelson, but I did say to myself, "Well, if Nelson liked me, Louis will like me." So he did and I became administrator of the Jewish Museum, which would not really happen I think today because my background was not good enough.

MR. PACHTER: But they – they just sensed the quality that you might bring to it and –

MS. SOLINGER: Whatever. It was very scary. I had to meet with the board. And then driving in from Great Neck to an evening meeting and, you know, it was pretty nerve wracking and I remember a light that I didn't know about was out at the back of my car – police stopping me and I, who never cried, cried because I was so worried about this meeting with the board. And it was important: I had three children. And it cost me a lot of money because I'd put money into the house and moved the kids from Cincinnati and I wanted them to have a good life in New York, and it was very important for me to get this job even though I'd cavalierly refused others so that was an important evening.

MR. PACHTER: But the entire board had to basically express confidence in your selection.

MS. SOLINGER: Yes. I mean, I don't know how much it was show and how much it was real, but – because once Louis had, sort of, signed off.

MR. PACHTER: Right.

MS. SOLINGER: But it was, you know, to me it was real.

MR. PACHTER: Right. It was a real test. What is it that they expected you to do in this job?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, that's interesting. I don't think they knew at that moment because they had a curator, Stephen Kayser, whom I can just see in front of me. He looked something like Peter Lorre. He was a very nice man. He and his wife lived in a little apartment, which I never saw, in the museum. You know, this had been the Warburg Mansion, so it was probably servants' quarters on the roof and they lived there. And he was the curator; he was not the director. And he sort of ran the museum, but he – I came June 1st and he left within a week or 10 days for Europe for the summer.

So they were – the board was trying to decide what they really wanted of the museum, and I – everything sort of fell on me, in fact, Stephen called me – I forget, toward the end of August or in September, he said, "Do you think I should come back?" And I said, "If you want a museum – if you want a fall schedule, I think you ought to come back." Because he didn't leave me with an inkling of what he wanted and he was in charge of the art schedule for the museum. So all that summer – they had commissioned before I came a bunch of New Year's cards from mediocre but well-known artists – not bad, not good – and they want me to sell those. In fact, they sent me to the Concorde in, you know, what's the mountains up there? Not the Berkshires.

MR. PACHTER: The Catskills.

MS. SOLINGER: The Catskills to set up a booth and sell the art. I did play golf instead but – [laughter] – and talked to men. But they were trying to plot what the museum should be and they knew it shouldn't be with this guy who wasn't really interested. And so I spent that fall and winter meeting with the board three nights a week as we discussed what kind – where the museum should go or what it should be.

I mean, I was expected to be there and I was there and it was interesting. And there were important people at that meeting like Ben Heller, who was a very big collector and David Finn, who were involved, and the rest of the board were mostly Upper East Side Jewish people who knew nothing much about art. They knew about Judaica.

MR. PACHTER: Right.

MS. SOLINGER: And there was a Judaica workshop in the museum, and it was mainly a city museum that school kids came to, but I say that knowing at the same time in those years Helen Frankenthaler had a show there before I came, and Adolph Gottlieb and other mainstream Jewish artists had exhibitions there, but it seemed to be when I came, mostly that they were just showing the Judaica and preparing for this new building that the chair – woman who became chairman of the board – that was Vera List, whom you know. Her brother-in-law, her brother was the architect of the new building. We called him either Black Sam or Boston Blackie. The architect was designing the Warburg museum addition.

And incidentally, he took out the oldest residential elevator in New York. [Laughter.] And we never forgave him for it. It was so horrible – to do this.

MR. PACHTER: And the – the planning for it was really to have a space for art where art would be well placed?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, these conversations that we had two and three nights a week and I say three pretty advisedly, were what was the museum going to be? What should it be? There we were with this great location on the Upper East Side and really on the – as today, the art walk, but the goal up to that point had been Judaica and Jewish artists of some sort. Whoever had arranged Frankenthaler and Gottlieb exhibitions had made good choices, but they really didn't know where they were going. So I was really doing everything, which happened a lot during the period I was there. I was, sort of, acting director because they'd fired Stephen, who was – I liked him. He was a nice man, but he really – I don't think the museum was his main interest. He had that nice apartment though. And we began to look around and eventually a man by the name of Alan Solomon, who at that time was the director of the White Art Gallery in Cornell was a candidate.

And I remember so well the day that he was interviewed. He came in and he asked me for, frantically, the names of Jewish artists that he could talk to the board about because it wasn't in his mind. He was – he was one of the great art – knowledgeable people of that day – talking now '62, I guess. And – yes, early in '62, and I guess he did a good job of presenting himself and he was hired. Although Karl Katz was always in the picture, but Karl asked at that time for more than they want to give. So Alan came and really revolutionized the museum.

MR. PACHTER: And what was the heart of that revolution?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, the heart of revolution was that he began to show – he wanted to show contemporary art, and he wanted to show it without regard to religion, but he also he knew he had to show some Judaica. And during his stay there, there was a wonderful Jewish synagogue show Barnett Newman insisted on making a Jewish synagogue work although he was – had never done anything in synagogues but he wanted to make one because he wanted to play with us and the synagogue show was great. And Richard Meier had been a student of Alan's at Cornell –

MR. PACHTER: Really?

MS. SOLINGER: – and he came down and made the cases for us and he installed them for the show "Synagogue Art." Richard was one of our playmates. I was at a party not so long ago and I said, "I bet I was the first person you know in New York that you still see," and he said, "That's really true." And so we all played together with Barnett Newman, Richard Meier, Leo Castelli and many others that I could name and that's when I learned what I said before was that Tuesday night when they said openings meant art openings and not –

MR. PACHTER: Right.

MS. SOLINGER: – theatre.

MR. PACHTER: You know, periods that in retrospect look like Golden Ages, at the time just look like what you have to do to get done. Did it feel at that time –

MS. SOLINGER: No. It felt like – it felt wonderful.

MR. PACHTER: It felt wonderful. You knew something very magical was happening.

MS. SOLINGER: It was very magical. I mean, being close to [Robert Rauschenberg] Rauschenberg and Johns. I don't know whether you noticed that Jasper Johns over there –

MR. PACHTER: Yeah.

MS. SOLINGER: – but at the time of his show, he sent me two dozen roses with a card saying: "The show would have been impossible without you, Janet." So I saw him about a year later – I saw him in between, but a year later I saw him in Paris and I said, "Jasper, you remember," – we used to call him Jap then, I said, "You

remember those roses you sent me at the time of your show?" He said, "Certainly." I said, "Why didn't you give me a lithograph or a drawing?" He said, "Never thought of it." So I wrote to him a couple of years ago and mentioned that and this came by return mail.

MR. PACHTER: Oh.

MS. SOLINGER: I said, "I'd love a work from the '60s." Well, this was 1960 which is earlier than I wanted but, hey.

MR. PACHTER: At this point, if somebody said to you, "Now that you're in the museum and now it's got a vision and so forth, what is it you do?" What would you have said?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, that was a problem because Alan, who really established all of this and took – became the winner of the Venice Biennale with Rauschenberg's work, was not appreciated by the board because they thought he was never there. What he was doing was going to artists' studios, finding new artists. He was doing a fantastic job, but the board didn't appreciate him. So it came to – the Biennale was in summer of '64, and it came to that fall and winter and they let it be known to him that he was not going to get a raise and he was under observation. And he and I talked about this a great deal and decided he couldn't stay under those circumstances. So that there was a long period when they were looking for somebody, and I was acting director.

And this was not the only time. About three or four times in addition to the time when Hans van Weeren-Griek was leaving, I was acting director with all the responsibilities, but never with the authority because I was a woman and you asked – mentioned the whole about that.

MR. PACHTER: Yes. Yes.

MS. SOLINGER: Among other reasons, I guess, but that was – but that was the reason that seemed paramount to most people. I was a woman. I could not possibly be a director of a Jewish museum on the Upper East Side.

MR. PACHTER: This was a given.

MS. SOLINGER: It was a given.

MR. PACHTER: It was a given.

MS. SOLINGER: Although the woman who's there now has been a director for a long, long time, Joan Rosebaum, but –

MR. PACHTER: But that's because of your having –

MS. SOLINGER: No, I don't know. It's because it's just changing times. I don't think I had any influence on that.

MR. PACHTER: But there was no question. And what about in your mind? Were you ever saying to yourself, "Damn it. I can do this job."

MS. SOLINGER: Well, I'm sure I thought it or said it, but well, there was a long time I didn't think I could do the job because I didn't know the art like Alan did.

MR. PACHTER: Right.

MS. SOLINGER: His successor however, was a Christian man who I was extremely fond of, Hans van Weeren-Griek [Acting director at the Jewish Museum, 1964] and his wife – used to visit them a lot in Vermont and all, but he didn't know contemporary art at all. That may have been time when I thought: "Well, you know, I surely know as much as he knew." Also, that was a wonderful period. Alan and I each had a key to the liquor closet because we have a lot of openings and they were really great openings. I would call up our designer and say, "What are you wearing tonight to the party?" And she'd say, "My black one." I said, "That's settles it. I'm wearing my Jean Harlow spaghetti-strap white dress." And we really have a jazzy time.

When Hans came, I still had the keys to the liquor closet and it turned out he was a drunkard and he would be marvelous in the morning. We'd go out to lunch and I would have a Bloody Mary and he would have five. And he came back and all the good he did in the morning of getting the museum separate from the seminary and building up good will, you know, he turned beet red and lost his cool all afternoon, so that at that time, I thought surely I could, you know, do better than that.

And then again we had a long period –

MR. PACHTER: Did you present yourself?

MS. SOLINGER: Never.

MR. PACHTER: No?

MS. SOLINGER: Never.

MR. PACHTER: Never.

MS. SOLINGER: In fact, when Alan was away at one point there was a show coming up and Ben Heller, whom you probably don't know so well but he was a major, major collector and probably still is, and he and I hung the show; mostly I, but, you know, deferring to Ben. I mean, we had workmen, but I mean we decided where everything went and what was going up.

The best story that I didn't tell you and I'm sure you've heard about this period – is when Alan opened with the Rauschenberg show and we had a major fancy opening. It was like probably wearing my Jean Harlow dresses or whatever on Saturday night and Sunday, we had seminary and museum members and Rauschenberg was there and a widow of one of the seminary professors came over to him and said, "Mr. Rauschenberg, are you Jewish?" And he said, "No. ma'am. I wish I were. Sometimes I wish I were. It's such a wonderful religion." And she said, "Thank God." And that was a well known story. It was quoted in the *New Yorker* at one point, but what they didn't know was that a few months later we had a show called "Major Works in Black and White" with all the artists of the time, Newman, Rothko and everybody – Motherwell and Rauschenberg. And I saw her walking around and I said, "Mrs. Ginsberg, what do you like about the show?" She said, "I love the Rauschenberg," so it shows what exposure can do. But that was a very famous story. The first part was quoted in the *New Yorker*.

MR. PACHTER: Did – did you ever feel – I know you didn't present yourself as the prospective next director, maybe because you thought it was not even thinkable, but –

MS. SOLINGER: It wasn't even thinkable to me, probably.

MR. PACHTER: Right. Did you at this point – and since, of course, ArtTable will come into our conversation later, it's an early point just to ask you: did you think consciously that there were other women who were working in museums in New York with whom you might establish either relationships or support groups? Was that even an idea?

MS. SOLINGER: It was too early and I'll tell you why it was too early.

MR. PACHTER: Okay.

MS. SOLINGER: When I was getting ready to leave the museum with all these different directors and when Sam Hunter finally did come, I worked with Sam that fall and I was at the point, as I said, of carrying the museum for all these now four and a half years with very big periods when I was – had all these responsibilities but none of the authority. I began to look around and there was a group of museum administrators from the Met, Modern, Guggenheim, Whitney. We all met once a month, and I got very friendly with all the administrators. So when I decided to change jobs, who'd I go to see but the administrators that I knew? And I remember going to Met and Joe Noble was the administrator and he said – he offered me a job and I said, "What's the salary?" And he told me some ridiculous salary and I told him what my aspiration was and he said, "Janet, no women make that kind of salary in the Met."

MR. PACHTER: Really.

MS. SOLINGER: There's no possibility. And the same thing happened at the Modern. So there were no women –

MR. PACHTER: They weren't embarrassed because for them that was a given.

MS. SOLINGER: That was a given. So who could I organize if women were – so downtrodden – is what I was going to say. I was going to the Hamptons one day and a woman from the Modern was among the group n the automobile I was going down in and she was at the Modern working for Waldo Rasmussen, and she was making like $8,000 a year and I said, "I know you can do better than that." She said, "Well, Waldo says it's a good salary." So that was the feeling of the women working at that time, that they were lucky to be in the museum. They all probably had some private money and they were not in any way co-optable to –

MR. PACHTER: Right.

MS. SOLINGER: – to a museum organization for women.

MR. PACHTER: In your case, you needed the money. You were –

MS. SOLINGER: I needed the money. I had some private money but not –certainly not to live on.

MR. PACHTER: Not to live on.

MS. SOLINGER: And not only that, but I had a sense of myself and I wouldn't have worked for less, and I – when I left the Jewish Museum – I mean, the salary sounds pitiable today but since I just read in the *Washingtonian* that in 1965, the dollar then is worth 16 cents today, and since we're talking earlier than that the salary I was making was adequate.

MR. PACHTER: Was adequate.

MS. SOLINGER: It wasn't great, but it was adequate.

MR. PACHTER: But you certainly were not going to accept anything less?

MS. SOLINGER: No, not –

MR. PACHTER: Even for the glamour of a Met position or a MoMA position?

MS. SOLINGER: No, and when I finally got settled [after two jobs that were not – they were not what I wanted. They were both fun in a way]. It was at NYU [New York University]. I was now talking to the dean of the college where I later worked and I told him what my salary needs were and he said, "We don't have an associate dean that makes that much." And I was at a place that I was working at that time that I hated and I said, "Well, I'm sorry." I said, "I get free lunch where I work and I walk to work, and it's very pleasant and I can't leave to make less money." And I walked toward the door and he said, "Wait a minute. If you don't tell anybody what you get, I'll give you the money." So I learned a lot about being very sure of what you want and –

MR. PACHTER: Right. Gutsy.

MS. SOLINGER: – sticking with your guts.

MR. PACHTER: Gutsy. I'd like to just pause for a moment and say one of the reasons why you knew you needed a job in addition to needing one personally, is you had three daughters. You know, you needed money for that. How were you balancing – the inevitable question of somebody, particularly as a single parent – how were you balancing your home life and your – your exciting work life?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, it changed. When I had three girls at home, we had this very big apartment on West End Avenue. I seemed to be home – I don't know what they remember, but I seemed to be home enough that we had good times together and my youngest was going to the Lycée Français and so I said, "Okay, tonight we'll speak French at the table." It'd start out that way; wouldn't end up that way necessarily, but I remember spending a good amount of time with all of them. But they probably don't remember that so much because as time wore on and my life became more glamorous and more exciting, I was probably not home as much as I had been but I think – I mean, I think I was a good enough mother. They're all doing extremely well. They have some genes from their father, terminal degrees that got them there.

MR. PACHTER: It wasn't preying on you. I mean you felt that you were managing –

MS. SOLINGER: Yes.

MR. PACHTER: – this complicated life.

MS. SOLINGER: I think I did, you know, under the circumstances as well as I could.

MR. PACHTER: Right. Well, now we can take you to NYU. You've negotiated an acceptable salary. What was the position?

MS. SOLINGER: I started out being director of publications which included public information because we started a television station. We had a radio station, and I was in charge of all the publications of millions a year because within the college there were so many schools. And then I was there two years when the woman who managed the special events program retired and she said, "I want only Janet Solinger to take my place."

So she had a lovely program of poetry readings and concerts, and little did she know what she was handing me because it became the wildest, most fascinating program in the city at that time, and it really put NYU on that kind of a map. It was already, of course, on the map – a much bigger map, and it was marvelous fun. [Audio break, tape change.]

MR. PACHTER: Oh, yes, yes. I mean, define wild and exciting by some of the things that happened.

MS. SOLINGER: Well, the first program that I had, I guess, was in October of ‘68 and I’m trying – I guess this was first. And at the program it was Less Levine and Andy Warhol and Jill Johnson and other arts luminaries. I think Jill put the program together and there were other people of that ilk. And it was to be a seminar, and I forget the name of the – subject of the seminar, but it was about art. It seemed innocuous, and – except that one of the panelists was a Merce Cunningham dancer, whose name was Laura, and I can’t think of her last name. But she called me up a couple of weeks in advance and said, “Janet, can I have an animal on the program?” [Laughter.] And I said, “What kind of animal Laura?” And she said, “I don’t know yet.” And I said, “How big?” And she said, “No bigger than a dog.” And I said, “Sure.” So people kept coming to that program and I finally said to the guards, “We can’t let any more people in.” I mean, there is a limit of 800 to the auditorium. But they did; it was just jammed.

And the first thing that happened was a member of the audience yelled, “Fire.” And I didn’t know all the rules of New York, but I went over to him and said, “That’s against the law, you’ll have to leave.” It was against the law. I didn’t know it. I made up the law. But then we sat down and a man from the audience gets up, goes onstage, and undresses completely – nude. Now this was before Meredith Monk. It was before any of the play – *Oh, Calcutta!* or *Marat/Sade* – whatever, never happened before on a New York stage. So I thought about it awhile and this was ‘68, and you know, and anything went and I wasn’t going to stop it.

So he sat down and there was a black cover in front of the table, and he sat down after a while and we all went to Jill’s afterwards for a party. And, I thought – and I was at that time going with the head of the sociology department at NYU. And I said – we were going to his house for dinner, I guess, and the pig was on his terrace.

MR. PACHTER: Oh, it was a pig that –

MS. SOLINGER: It was a pig. I didn’t say. Oh, the pig went wee, wee, weeing up both aisles of the auditorium, and the whole thing. [Laughter.] He was a little pig though; he wasn’t a big pig. He wasn’t as big as some dogs. And so, the pig was there oinking and weeing and we went to Jill’s for a while and then everyone kept saying, “Well, what are you going to tell the dean?” It was a pretty big deal to have nudity and a pig for my first event.

So the next morning I went to the office and I called my dean’s office and I said, “Merle, can I talk to Russell?” And she said, “He’s home sick with a cold.” And I said, “Well, if anybody funny calls you, turn the call over to me.” And by afternoon, I thought well I’d better call the head of publicity for all of NYU. And I told Bob Terkle the story and he said, “Well, I’ve got to tell President Hester [James McNaughton Hester] this story and he won’t be back till Wednesday.” And I said, “Do what you have to do Bob. I know what you have to do.”

So, Wednesday morning came, my New York *Times* was delivered, and the headline on the right column on the first page, which as you know is the important column, said – [NYU had a new Martin Luther King Center. That was ’68] “J. F. Hatchett,” who was head of the center, “calls Nixon, Humphrey, and Shanker” – Shanker was in education, you know – “Racist Bastards.” That was the headline [New York *Times*, October 9, 1968]. So I looked at the headline, read the article, and went to work. And I called Bob, and I said, “Nudity is shit next to racist bastards, Bob.” [Laughter.] He said, “I don’t think Jim Hester is ever going to hear about what happened Sunday.”

MR. PACHTER: And you – so in the end, you got away with it?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, I got away with it. And the next event I had was Meredith Monk and people were standing around the corner in the rain this time. And Meredith was doing a piece that had simulated intercourse in it, and I remember standing there with the great critic Irving Sandler. Well, he was the art critic for *New York Post*. He’s written lots of articles and books and so forth. I just read a book of his. And I said “Irving, what should I do?” He said, “I’m going to get my daughter.” His daughter was 18 months. He went home and got her to see this. And again, it created – the crowd was phenomenal and this went on all year. It was always something like that.

And at the end of the year I went to the provost, and I said – Alan Carter was his name, and I said, “Alan, I need the $5,000 your office gives me for programs.” It was called Sundays at Three; I did many more things. I continued the poetry, and I had many women poets and many black poets. It was a very successful poetry program, high level concerts, and a film series, but this was special, the Sundays at Three. And Alan said, “But, Janet, there is so much porno.” And I said, “Alan, it brings them to the Square doesn’t it?” And he gave me the $5,000 that I needed.

MR. PACHTER: How aware were you, I mean this is also the era of happenings and so forth –

[Cross talk.]

MR. PACHTER: They were happenings.

MS. SOLINGER: There were even more happening-ish as the year went on.

MR. PACHTER: Were you accepting of this, or were you a provocateur? Were you interested in this going to that next level?

MS. SOLINGER: I don't think I was a provocateur. I think people came to me. I remember one guy, a dancer, Steve Pachter, he wanted to have eight redheaded nude men on the stage. He was one of the major dancers of the time. I said, "That's illegal in New York." And I didn't know it was illegal; it turned out it was illegal. I had to make up laws as I went along. [Laughter.] So we didn't have it. I was not a provocateur, but I was interested.

And I had been going to the major happenings where Claus Oldenburg was sailing around in a boat and there was Henry Gelzhalder – and the cigar in his mouth, you know. It was – actually, it was Claus' happening. And it was a Y on the Upper West Side. And I went to all of them. I went to all of Andy Warhol's films. I did everything that one did in those days, but I don't think that I planned these things. People came to me because that was the life in New York, and I loved it. I mean, it was fun.

MR. PACHTER: You were open to the possibilities.

MS. SOLINGER: I was open. I was probably the most open person.

MR. PACHTER: But you know, you've just said something that I think is, if not unique to you, a prominent element in your success. And that is that there was almost no distinction between the life you led on your own – where you would go, whom you would meet – and the programs you were creating. A lot of people really do see it as a nine to five, and they – you know, they find the interesting people or they read the New York *Times* and find out who is writing what, but you're actually out in that world.

MS. SOLINGER: I was. I always said, "Any job is not a job; it's a way of life." And I feel that way still today; that you have to be part of the scene to understand it, to develop what you're going to do that is consonant with it. And that was certainly true in the '60s and early '70s in New York. And the people, it became a period, where I knew all the major artists so well and my saddest moment was that I didn't tell them all, as I did to Jasper, some years later –

MR. PACHTER: Give me something. [Laughter.]

MS. SOLINGER: – do you mind giving me of a work of art? [Laughter.] Which people did do, and a lot of people were buying art, $50 dollars a month or whatever, until they paid for it. And as Rosenquist said to me once, "Janet you could have owned anything we made for $300 dollars." But I didn't do that. I didn't think I had the money.

MR. PACHTER: Tell me about the – again, the professional circumstances of your job. Clearly in the end they trusted you. They let you do what you wanted to do. They gave you increasing responsibilities. I'm going to continue to ask this question until it seems actually either relevant or irrelevant. Did you feel any barriers or constraints to your circumstance, whether as a woman or whether because of the nature of the job they had assigned you, or were you pretty much able to do what you wanted to do? And be recognized and rewarded at that level?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, my job had several facets. When I said, director of publications, I worked with all the various deans and directors of the various departments of our college and some of them could were not as cooperative as they should have been. And that was – I would take home work many a night to finish the editing and get it in shape for the next day because they were late getting it to me or they didn't do a good job. Every time they'd write Jasper John, I'd correct it and make in Johns. [Laughter.] And that's a minor thing but it amused me.

MR. PACHTER: Exactly

MS. SOLINGER: But, I mean, that part – I had my dean's complete confidence. That was the good part. He was a wonderful man. And I would say most of the deans, yes, so that was not a problem.

When I was going to go to the Smithsonian, NYU offered me a associate deanship to stay, plus a salary raise in a wage freeze time, so that's an indication –

MR. PACHTER: That you had won their confidence.

MS. SOLINGER: And Russell had to go the provost in order to get that exception and they all agreed. So, yes I think I had a very satisfying position at NYU.

MR. PACHTER: You would – so no particular barriers or challenges that you were not able to meet. I mean, basically, it was a good period?

MS. SOLINGER: I think it was – I think that the Jewish Museum had a challenge that we haven't really gone into. It had a lot of challenges –

MR. PACHTER: Please.

MS. SOLINGER: But, well, I mean, the board and Vera was a terrible person to work with. She's now dead, so – I mean, a lot of people worshipped Vera and she was very good for the arts in many ways; but she was very tough to me. And this problem of whether it was Jewish or not was a problem, and the changing of directors and all that. You know, it was not easy there.

But I was having the time of my life in other ways. You know, Alan said to me, "God, how do you keep all those men on a string?" You know, and all that. I was having a great time, but at NYU it was really a lovely life. And we lived, ultimately, in a penthouse in the Village; a stones throw from the main center of NYU – the student center. And my daughter, who was then in grade school I guess, felt that she ran NYU. [Laughter.] She'd come home from the center and tell me all kinds of gossip that I didn't know even. And when we talked about moving to Washington, she didn't want to go because she loved NYU and the Village so much. And I said to her, "Martha, you can run the Supreme Court. You can run the House of Representatives. Name it, I'll fix it up for you." [Laughter.] Because she loved the ambiance so much down there.

MR. PACHTER: Well, you know it makes no sense, now, that there you are at NYU. There your daughter – probably all your daughters are happy

MS. SOLINGER: Well, my other two were already in college.

MR. PACHTER: But you're having the exciting and professionally satisfying time. Why would you leave?

MS. SOLINGER: That is such a good question. I also – what I left out was that I was going with a man that was probably the most significant relationship I had in my entire life, and maybe he was the reason that I left. I don't know. I was still enjoying my life at NYU a good deal and, as I say, Martha was completely happy. The other two girls were in college and not living at home.

MR. PACHTER: College, right.

MS. SOLINGER: We had this marvelous penthouse and I had lots of friends –

[Interruption for phone conversation.]

MR. PACHTER: So your situation in New York sounds pretty ideal.

MS. SOLINGER: It was very good. Except that Erwin whom, with an E always think of an E because it would be different with an I – who was a wonderful scholar and a playboy – scholar and a playboy, but a very fun person – great person. But he had married once and he was burned. And he didn't really want to get married again and in those years with a fairly small child at home, I felt that I had to get married if I were going to have a continuing relationship, so I thought, well, if I move to Washington that would show him.

MR. PACHTER: Well, that's often –

MS. SOLINGER: I mean, that was maybe not central.

[Cross talk.]

MS. SOLINGER: But it was an afterthought about it. It's not necessarily what I thought at the time [I think I did].

MR. PACHTER: How did the opportunity to go to Washington present itself?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, I was just there working and having a good time when – well, first of all, Lisa – did you ever know Lisa Taylor?

MR. PACHTER: I did, yes.

MS. SOLINGER: Lisa had called me up and said, "They're interested in you at the Smithsonian and I know they would pay you at least $5,000 dollars more than you're making," and $5,000 seemed like money then. It doesn't today, but it did then. And she said, "At least see them." So this man came to see me and I said, "No." I said, "I am very happy in New York" for all the reasons that I have told you and I said, "I am sure there are plenty of people who would like that job in Washington, so thank you very much." And he came back a couple of times. And I thought it was ridiculous because I am sure there were by that time – this is now '72 – that there were people that were now qualified for the job. It didn't have to be a woman, and people were qualified. But he

came back again and each time he came back he had bigger offers.

MR. PACHTER: Well, what was the job?

MS. SOLINGER: It was being director of the Smithsonian Resident Associate Program.

MR. PACHTER: Which didn't exist yet?

MS. SOLINGER: Yes, it did.

MR. PACHTER: Oh, yes it did.

MS. SOLINGER: Lisa was the first director. Dillon Ripley had started the program and Lisa was the first director. And then Lisa left, as you know, to go to the Cooper Hewitt.

And then they had an interim person who – it wasn't that big in Lisa's time; it was a modest program. The next person ran the modest person to the ground. They didn't tell me that. And the New York *Times* article – but they wrote up about it more. What it was actually was, was very different. So they said, "At least come down and see the Smithsonian to see if you like it."

MR. PACHTER: Did they know how dangerous you had been in New York?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, that was the funny part. I don't know if they did. They set up a meeting for me with – I call it Janet's Magical Mystery Tour – because they set up a meeting with me with and I don't know how many people. I say 12, but it's probably more than there were – from starting early in the morning, somebody for lunch, and before and after. There were like three meetings in the morning, one at lunch, some after, and then the final meeting with the assistant secretary. And I know one of them said to me, "Do you know Meredith Monk?" That's the way he talked. He turned out to be a very nice man. But she had evidently done a scandalous program at the Smithsonian. I didn't tell them what kind of program she did with me. [Laughter.] And I said, "Yes, she's performed for me." But I really didn't know what I wanted. At the end of the day, the assistant secretary said, "If you want the job, Janet, you know you can have it." But I didn't say yes, and I didn't – I agonized about what I was going to do.

So I went back to New York and they – I said I would let them know by the following Wednesday. That was a Friday. It was April, and Washington was beautiful. Everything was in bloom. It was late April and everything was in bloom. It was beautiful. And I said, if I had only gone in August, or November, or February, I would never have taken the job. But it looked lovely. And, of course, the Smithsonian is impressive. And so finally by Wednesday I provisionally said, "All right." And they said, "Well, now you have to see Mr. Ripley."

And this was at a point where I had to tell my dean something, and I said, "Now I have to see Mr. Ripley? Does that mean you've offered me the job and now I have to –" It was very confusing. So I came back to Washington. That was when my dean tried to get me an assistant deanship and a raise in pay to meet the Smithsonian and all that. But I thought, "I'm not going to play that game." I'm not going to go from back and forth and say, "No, more money, more money." So I came back to meet with Mr. Ripley.

And I was going to a museum meeting in South Carolina, Columbia, and I stopped in Washington. Another beautiful day. By this time I guess it was May or the end of April. And I had a nice talk with Dillon Ripley, but he didn't say, "Welcome Aboard." He didn't say anything to indicate to me whether I had a job or didn't have a job. And I went down to South Carolina, and everybody that I knew in the museum – in the university world was there, and they all said, "Oh, Russell is crying he's going to lose you." And I said, "Tell them not to, because I don't know if I have the job. Ripley didn't say yes or anything." But of course, when I got back from the meeting there was a letter.

And I didn't know it was written, but you said how did they square that. That whole – I took a two and a half week vacation – well, I stayed at NYU – I gave NYU a goodly amount of notice and then at the end of June, I moved my things here on June 28th. And Erwin and I went on a two-and-a-half-week vacation in the Hamptons. And they called me up. I don't know how they got my number. I wanted to have a series of films that had been at the Whitney Museum of American Art. They called up to say there was sex in them; shouldn't have them. I mean, there were calls like that all the time.

MR. PACHTER: From the first?

MS. SOLINGER: From the first; before I even started. And Erwin and I were getting very nervous about it; whether I should take the job because it sounds so restrictive. And, in fact – so I planned all summer – I guess I didn't start until – I forget when I started, but I had planning time. Maybe, I guess what I did was come down while I was still working at NYU and I planned this program, "If Elected," because they were having an exhibition.

Marvin [Marvin S. Sadik, Director of the National Portrait Gallery from 1969-1981] was having an exhibition called “If Elected,” [1972-3] so I thought I would have a number of candidates – major, known candidates who were not elected, but who ran.

And I had liked Allard Lowenstein – a blessed memory – and people like that. And all of them were okay – Hubert Humphrey – except for Allard because he was evidently running against a ex-Regent or a Regent. And I got a call from Marvin saying, “You really can’t have that because we can’t do that to a Regent.” And so I blacked the program out. I was going to try to replace him, but it just seemed more complicated. And there were many things like that.

MR. PACHTER: Is it particularly relevant or just accidental that the program – the first program you talked about as you were starting to formulate things was a politically oriented program? Did you think, now, well one thing that Washington was going to offer was a series of political programs, or had you done those in New York as well? Was that not your –

MS. SOLINGER: Well, I don’t know. That’s a good question, as I hadn’t thought about it that way. Because at the same time I was planning art programs and, in fact, the most amazing thing was that – I had told you I was no longer interested in going to temple and stuff like that. And I called a woman, who is now one of my closest friends – and I didn’t realize it was Yom Kippur Eve – to ask if we could visit her house on a program about contemporary art – that involved Carter talking – Carter Brown – and she couldn’t believe that I would call her on Yom Kippur Eve and her family was gathering for dinner. She always calls me on that day to say, “Happy Anniversary.” This is now 33 years ago.

So I was planning art. I was planning all kinds of programs. I had a program with the Kennedy Center on ballet, symphony, music and opera. And I would have the person that represented the field speak and then see a performance on a different night, and that was very popular for a number of years.

MR. PACHTER: Were you finding it difficult to recreate a social network? I mean, because of the – as you said, the relationship between life and work or did that just come naturally?

MS. SOLINGER: It didn’t come that easily that summer. I did know some people in Washington – and I won’t go into the horror of one relationship; of a woman that had stayed at my house all the time in New York, who I thought was very close, and she excluded me from everything when I came here. I even stayed with her the night the movers were coming the next morning.

And so I moved here and my sister was on vacation the whole summer; and I didn’t know who to turn to even put a nail in the wall or – I didn’t know anything. I had nobody to turn to. I had a couple of guys I was going out with, but they weren’t related to my work or my field – fields, so it was a pretty scary kind of a summer. But I was mostly just planning then anyway. You’re right, it was not related. The two were not related.

MR. PACHTER: Did planning – I mean in the days of New York, you could pick up a phone to an artist you had just seen at an opening the night before and they needed to just travel across town for your program. Now there was going to be a lot of importing of people presumably?

MS. SOLINGER: Yes, I certainly didn’t know the Washington art scene as well as I might have. I knew Ken Noland. We gave him a show in New York. I knew him well, but he wasn’t living in Washington anymore. No, I really didn’t know the scene here at all and I had no one to tell me about it. I mean, I can’t say I don’t know it now; I know it very well now.

MR. PACHTER: You do indeed.

MS. SOLINGER: But, no, I would say that my program was an instant success and the membership went from 7,500 to 15,000 the first year [eventually 67,000]. And it went from a program that lost $250,000 dollars a year to eventually that made $7 million. And every year, from the first year, I made money for the institution. So it was a success right away, but you’re right to say there was a disconnect somewhat between my life and what I was planning.

But as I mentioned to you, I think that any kind of a job is a full-time job – you know, lifetime thing – life job. So that I’m – I guess I’ve found a way. And I did go to all of my events. I introduced every speaker for many years. I remember saying, “I guess April means that I can’t go out with anybody because I just introduce speakers all the time, every night.”

MR. PACHTER: And then you also, I remember too, would socialize after the event.

MS. SOLINGER: Right, I always took the speaker out for dinner. I remember once picking up three important – I don’t even know who they are anymore – but major, major people. Picking them all up at different sites and

taking them all out for dinner at once, so it was – they were all imported though, as you say.

MR. PACHTER: On the question of a network, there's of course the professional network of subject matter, but there's also the network of friends and colleagues. And this is, again, a good time to at least ask you, as you were thinking about that, establishing a network whether of women in the ArtTable context or in other ways, were you beginning to think about establishing professional associations with people?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, certainly within the Smithsonian. I was at a gathering one night several years after I had been with the Smithsonian, and a woman said to me, "You have the best job in Washington." I said, "Well, it's a good job, but I haven't had a raise since I'm here and my grade level is –" I mean, I had the raises that we all know about where you get a percentage – yes, it's an automatic raise. And I said, "My grade level that they hired me at" – I didn't know anything about grades when I came – "is not the one I would like." She said, "Well you go speak to your – the head of your department, the assistant secretary, and tell him that either he gives you a raise or you're leaving." And she called me the next morning to see if I had done it. And I said no. But she gave me bravery to do it. And I tried it out on the treasurer, Ames Wheeler . Do you remember him?

MR. PACHTER: Oh, indeed.

MS. SOLINGER: He said, "Oh yeah, my daughter didn't get a raise and so she wasn't happy." I said, "Your daughter is a little girl. I am a professional woman." I was by this time in my 50s – 51. And I said, "I really have to have a raise." But Ames didn't have the authority to do it. So Julian Euell was my immediate boss and I went over to Julian's office and he wasn't in yet. He never came before noon. And I said, "I want to see Julian the minute he comes in." And I just sat there. So he came in, and I said, "Julian, I want a grade level raise and if I don't have it," I said, "I'm going to sue the institution because you promised me one a couple of times. And this is not only for myself, but for all the women in the institution, and for breach of promise." I said, "There isn't a woman in this institution" – I was the highest paid woman in the institution – I wasn't making that much money – and I said, "I am going to sue for all the women in the institution because I know that there is nobody that makes what they deserve here."

And he looked at me and said, "When do you have to have an answer by?" And this was probably like November. I said, "I have to see it in my salary – my paycheck the first of January or I'm leaving, and I'm also going to sue." I got it right away. So that was really the first time –

MR. PACHTER: That was momentous. Do you think it had an effect on their thinking about women and their salaries in general or in the end –

MS. SOLINGER: I doubt it. But it did have an effect on the other women because we did talk –

MR. PACHTER: That you had done this.

MS. SOLINGER: That I'd done that. After I left, a lot of people would say, "Well, this would never happen if Janet were here." I did – I was very outspoken on what I thought we should have and do and there's still a lot of women there that would say, "Well, Janet wouldn't have let this happen." So I wouldn't say that myself, but since they have said it to me, I think there was a question that I began to realize at that time, that women were not treated – I mean I probably realized it subliminally all the time, but when this woman talked to me the night before and said, "Tell them you're going to quit if you don't get it." Then I began to think of the broader aspects of it. [Audio break, tape change.]

MR. PACHTER: Janet, you were at the – shaping the Resident Associates at the Smithsonian for essentially 20 years. As you look now at how it took form as a program, do you remember thinking of certain elements within it to create that combined effect? I mean, you were a master programmer already when you got there, but there were things you added, systems you created. Are there things that you're particularly proud of how the organization took shape?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, as you say, some programming I had done, but some of it was influenced directly by NYU. For example, I brought the course program to the Smithsonian – there was no such thing as a course program and I started a whole program of that. And I am sure it was influenced by the fact that I'd worked in a college of continuing education and saw the eagerness with which older adults wanted to learn more about the world – that there is no such thing as ending your education, so I think starting the course program was one of the strongest things that I did, and it was definitely influenced by watching how that went at NYU.

As far as the – there was a tour program already in existence. Moya King was there and continued to stay there, but, you know, we increased it a whole, whole lot and I added a lot of trips to New York and other – Chicago, Houston, where there was good architecture or good art. But I built on something that was there. So what hadn't been there was – the children's program had been there, too, and that was just added on to. But I guess making it more relevant overall with getting the big speakers from New York and elsewhere.

MR. PACHTER: Right, making Washington a place they needed to come for this.

MS. SOLINGER: Yes and I think now today working at the Corcoran that the Smithsonian itself – the name "the Smithsonian" has a lot to do with people accepting. We get very good speakers at the Corcoran, but I think when my staff gets upset with the –the Smithsonian, I say, "Well, you know, it's the Smithsonian. We're a private museum." But, I think the – I have these connections in New York, probably worldwide, and I am trying to think, and you know him very well, Richard Howland, he was so helpful to me in getting people. He knew everybody. He's still alive. You see him at the Cosmos Club from time to time.

MR. PACHTER: The guy who did the symposia?

MS. SOLINGER: No, not Wilton [Wilton Dillon], although Wilton is still friendly with him.

MR. PACHTER: Well, in any case.

MS. SOLINGER: In any case, he – in the very beginning would say so and so was coming from Bali or coming from somewhere, and he would bring them to me and I accepted them always because I trusted him, because I loved strange things, exotic people. And then also I was bringing people down from New York and I was able to get artists that I knew, and speakers and architects certainly. You know, I think that my New York contacts were valuable. I guess also it was a program that was there in a good place in the Smithsonian and in a good location and was attractive to people to come. That had never happened before. I mean, that was certainly nothing that Lisa or her successor, Susan, had ever done [I had 67,000 members when I left].

MR. PACHTER: Right.

MS. SOLINGER: And the other thing is, it was a time – the Kennedy Center had just opened the year before [1971] and it was a time when Washington was beginning to look beyond being a sleepy village town, with all the charms of the North and the efficiency of the South, as Kennedy said.

MR. PACHTER: Right.

MS. SOLINGER: And, so it –

MR. PACHTER: Very parochial, which is –

MS. SOLINGER: It had been very parochial, but I think the Kennedy Center changed a lot of that. And I did, as I say, start a program with the Kennedy Center right away and so people began to – and it was always a highly educated population, so having a place to come to to further their knowledge and education was great for Washingtonians. And now many, many cultural institutions in Washington have cultured memberships and programs.

MR. PACHTER: Oh yes, but, you know –

MS. SOLINGER: But then they didn't.

MR. PACHTER: You created the standard.

MS. SOLINGER: Well, I created a something – monster – because now everybody has one, and it's harder to compete.

MR. PACHTER: Compete. And in a way, you have to compete with yourself right now.

MS. SOLINGER: Indeed, indeed yes. Absolutely.

MR. PACHTER: Before I get to the Corcoran, I want to talk about your infusing the Resident Associates Program with an art sensibility because I don't think there is any question but that somebody else that might put together some of the things you did would not have been able to given that serious art side to it.

MS. SOLINGER: Well, having spent, as I mentioned, so many years at the Jewish Museum and my two jobs following that, which we didn't talk about, were both art jobs, so that I became closer and closer intrinsically to the art world, certainly made me an arts person – art person. And then at NYU, even though a lot of them were happenings, they were happenings with artists so I began to be more interested in art than probably in any other field. And –

MR. PACHTER: Was it possible to do it in a non-art making world? I mean, the incredible thing about your program at NYU must have been that the art was being made all around, and then one could have a window into it through the kinds of things you were doing, really both at the Jewish Museum and NYU.

MS. SOLINGER: NYU was much more permissive. I mean, here I came to a situation at the Smithsonian. I was very scared at what I was doing. I am sure you remember the Erica Jong situation where the secretary wrote me a list of things I couldn't do. I will never forget – you probably know that story, but it bears repeating that one of the things I couldn't do was anything to do with – was poetry. So Lloyd Herman called me about a month afterwards and he said, "Janet, we're having a show on poets and artists working together, and I'd love for you to do some programs about it." And I said, "Lloyd, you read Ripley's column" – he took over three or four of my columns in my monthly bulletin. He said, "Well, Dr. Taylor wants you to do it."

I said – and I adored Josh Taylor – and I said, "Tell Dr. Taylor to write me a letter," which he did. And so I lined up Kenneth Koch and Larry Rivers to talk together. I lined up a major woman artist [Grace Hartigan] – who lived in this area – to speak. I had a course on it. I had every center in the city do poetry with visual arts: the Library of Congress, the Martin Luther King Library, every gallery, everybody did poetry and arts. The Library of Congress did – I think it was, was it Rauschenberg's "Dante," but every single place – and the Martin Luther King Library had schoolchildren working on the program. The whole city did it. The secretary could say nothing. It was all done. So I did almost everything he said not to, such as "don't do anything political."

So I went to see Jim Billington, who was then head of the Woodrow Wilson Center. I said, "What can we do together, Jim?" And we did everything imaginable together. Now, that wasn't art, that was politics and it was fine too. There wasn't anything – I guess it was my contrary nature – that he had said not to do that I didn't do because I thought he was wrong.

MR. PACHTER: Contrary or subversive?

MS. SOLINGER: Maybe, or just thinking I knew more than he knew. I don't know. I just did it. [Laughter.]

MR. PACHTER: How important was it that there were not that many art makers in Washington compared to New York? Was that a factor? Or New York was close enough so that was the –

MS. SOLINGER: New York was close enough, although I always – it's still not close enough because, you know, somebody will say in New York, for example, that program at the Y about lyrics and lyricists, you know? People could come for an hour or so to the Y or to NYU, but they couldn't come for an hour or so to Washington. So you really don't get the casual kind of relationship that you would have in New York. So, yes, I think it was important that – in the grand scheme, I had wonderful people coming all the time, but in the casual scheme you wouldn't get the kind of people that would be marvelous for the program and open yet another door but who just couldn't come down for an hour.

MR. PACHTER: There's another aspect of your art vision at the Resident Associates that I'd like to talk about and that is the idea of commissioning art. How did that come to be, and do you feel that it was a successful program?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, actually, I started at the Jewish Museum. We had an annual Purim Ball. And I remember one year, I asked Jim Dine and Paul Brach to do multiples, and Jim Dine said, "All I do is bathrobes, Janet." And I said, "Do a Purim bathrobe, do a spring bathrobe." Which he did a marvelous floating hamantaschen – and he gave me one and he lived across the street from me and I never picked it up. I can't believe it. Paul, who is married to Miriam [Miriam Schapiro]. He gave me a work and I have one on the wall. So I did commission those two.

MR. PACHTER: So it goes back to –

MS. SOLINGER: It goes back to the Jewish Museum.

MR. PACHTER: – Jewish Museum.

MS. SOLINGER: I don't think – I can't remember doing it at all at NYU, but when I came to the Smithsonian – I know what happened. I came and inherited a show of Vera's work. Remember Vera, who made sheets and all? Well, my predecessor had engaged her to do an early fall program. And I was sort of humiliated. I certainly didn't want to do a show of a woman who made sheets and all. So, in fact, Dan Boorstin [Daniel J. Boorstin, Director of American History, 1969-1973] said, "You're having Vera in my building?" when I finally met him – he'd been away all summer. And when I walked back across the Mall on this beautiful October day after meeting him, I went back with my tail between my legs because he was really tough. And I ran into a couple of colleagues who said, "Don't worry. He treats everybody that way."

But I did ask Vera to make a – I'm thinking way back to my Jewish Museum days – to make a work of art that I could sell, and she did, and it did sell out. And so that was my beginning with the Vera line. I hate to mention that Vera was the beginning. But then I just began to ask artists to do it. I loved doing – I made actually probably several million dollars in profit for the Smithsonian over the years.

MR. PACHTER: Really? So was your audience very interested from the first?

MS. SOLINGER: The first ones I really did were from the Hirshhorn collection. The Hirshhorn opened and it was the Rivers [Larry Rivers] and Robert Indiana and four posters, and a Calder [Alexander Calder] and a poster of works by Georgia O'Keeffe. Anyway, there were four. I was very scared, because I had never done it in Washington except for that stupid Vera. I took an advertisement in the *Smithsonian* magazine. And there were editions of 100 I believe, and they sold out in no time. So that gave me the confidence to go on. So then every year I commissioned someone else, and they always did – I think I had two that didn't do well, both of which were against my better judgment, but I always had the feeling if the artist decides on something you can't interfere too much once you've asked him or her. So there was one that I really didn't like, and I called the artist and I called his dealer, and they said, "Oh, it's going to be wonderful." And it really didn't sell. But –

MR. PACHTER: So you were being kind of an impresario around these.

MS. SOLINGER: A patron.

MR. PACHTER: A patron, and you were also trying to imagine your audience and what they would like. Were there artists you would say to yourself, "This individual would produce something stunning, but nobody here would like it or buy it?"

MS. SOLINGER: I didn't think that too much. I had to trust my gut. I didn't really feel too much that – whether they are going to like it. I thought if I liked it – in fact, I was described somewhere once as a typical resident associate, so maybe I thought if I liked it, they would like it. There's a couple of examples in my dining room of works that I commissioned.

MR. PACHTER: Was there in fact a favorite among the commissioned works during that period?

MS. SOLINGER: I don't know – a lot of them I liked. I liked that Sam Gilliam's around the corner, and I commissioned a fair number of Washington artists – and there are a fair number of them about. And, there's a Jacob Kainen in the hall that I liked an awful lot. And Willem de Looper. And they just about all sold out. In fact, they were all – several years ago an art train – you know that art train that went through the country?

MR. PACHTER: Yes, yes. I remember.

MS. SOLINGER: And I read about it, but there was no mention of how – it just said the date program had started. So I didn't get any credit for doing it, but it was done. And it did make a lot of money. And I make money out – I do it continuing down there at the Corcoran and it's made not anywhere near the same amount, but last year it netted $75,000, which is not little.

MR. PACHTER: You make me think of a question I might not have otherwise asked, and that is that as much as you were a programmer. There is a way to work in a universe of the nonprofit where its just a matter of coming out with great programs and your being supported, but you had to be businesswomen.

MS. SOLINGER: I did, always.

MR. PACHTER: At the same time.

MS. SOLINGER: I always had a budget I had to make. I will never forget, one year I did well – really well. I did well a lot of years, but that year I did particularly well. I not only made my budget, but I made a good deal of money for the Institution. We never got to keep it. It always had to go straight to the Smithsonian. And I saw Ames that day at lunch and I said, "Ames, did you look at the final budget of the year?" And he said, "Yes." I said, "Ames I wore my fingers to the bone. Look at my hand." He said, "You've got another hand." So I got him – I happened to see a box with a skeleton hand that came out, you put a nickel or quarter and it would grab it and go back in the box, and I gave it to him for a present. [Laughter.]

MR. PACHTER: Did you consider this a disadvantage of your job or something that interested you as much as the other?

MS. SOLINGER: It didn't interest me, but it was a condition of my job. I didn't know about it in advance because it was losing money when I took it over, but I sort of liked the idea that I making money – I always liked to make a budget. I mean, I'm very interested in my budget right now. I guess I know when we had – one of the treasurer's we had following Ames said, "Janet knows more about the budget than any other department here." I do follow budgets and try to make realistic budgets.

MR. PACHTER: Was there anything you weren't able to do because of lack of money or support, because your imagination is so vast programmatically, or were you mostly able to get it done?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, you know sometimes you just don't have people you want to have because you just can't afford them, but that's a given. If you can't – if somebody says they won't come. I remember once I wanted William Safire to speak, and he wanted $18,000. And I said, "Sorry." Then we got a series by the New York *Times*, that underwrote it, and he had to speak for nothing. So that was a great pleasure. [Laughter.]

And there are other people of that ilk who wanted – I wanted the *Time* magazine critic to speak [Robert Hughes], and he wanted a lot of money. And then I wanted him to speak on Lucien Freud. At that time, he was speaking only about Australia. He'd written a book about Australia.

MR. PACHTER: Robert Hughes.

MS. SOLINGER: Robert Hughes. And so when I called I said, "I don't want you to speak about Australia." I said, "I want you to speak about Lucien Freud." He said, "Well, what will you pay?" And I actually got Steve Weil on the phone, and we planned a figure – and then I finally said, I think I said $4,000, and he wanted $25,000. And, his secretary asked him, and then she said, "I don't know what you said or what you did but he's going to do it." So today I couldn't even offer four because we just have such a small auditorium and we need to cover the cost. So that's very frustrating when you want somebody and you can't afford them. That was true at the Smithsonian and more true at the Corcoran; that you just have to say – you set a price in your mind, with your staff and so forth, and can't go above it. So obviously, you could have a more glittering program if money were not an object.

MR. PACHTER: It's hard to imagine, though, more glittering than you finally achieved.

MS. SOLINGER: Well, that's nice of you to say that, but – you know, I think of – someone said to me not so long ago, "How do you get all these people? It's so wonderful. We have these great people." I said, "You should see the ones that got away." And that we wait for, sometimes for weeks and weeks or months, and they won't do it. Or people, honestly people that we want and they go to the Smithsonian. There's lots of frustrations in it, but you've got to be positive about it.

MR. PACHTER: I think another attribute of your time with the Associates I'd like to talk about is your turning the Associates into an international forum. I mean, it – again, that feels like something your interests drove the associates to – to focus on a lot more the connection with the international community.

MS. SOLINGER: Well, to some extent, and it's awfully hard sometimes to remember what's what. But I do feel that a lot of it had to do with the fact that the National Endowment for the Humanities was starting a program of – Today programs –beginning with Canada Today, then Mexico and so forth. So, they – Canada Today had no involvement and they called me up and said would I write about it in my – calendar – my bulletin. So I did it as a favor. And "Canada Today" did better. So they asked me whether I would be a co-chairman of the next one, which was "Mexico Today." And of course it meant trips to Mexico; it meant planning – they were all composed of exhibitions, lectures and films and other components as they fit the country. So I said, "Sure." So after "Mexico Today" we did – I'm not sure if I got the order right but we did Japan and Belgium. I think Belgium was the next one.

Then I became known as a person who was good at that, so I did Germany. I did Netherlands. And I was decorated by three countries for the stuff that I had done for them. I had lunch with the current Egyptian ambassador last week, I said, "I always thought I was bad because you didn't give me a decoration." [Laughter.] I went to Egypt three times to put that together. And I had to put it together single-handed. I said it lightly, and I was only kidding. I had a marvelous time in Egypt because I ended up doing just about everything: the art exhibition, films –

MR. PACHTER: You became a kind of cultural ambassador in lots of ways, and that feels like where Washington was a good fit because that certainly was strength of this city.

MS. SOLINGER: Right.

MR. PACHTER: With embassy's here with their desire to have showcases and to have some culture contact with America, not just political.

MS. SOLINGER: Which continues on. We now have dinners about once a month at some ambassador residence or other. And I'm surprised that they like it so well, but they do it gladly. And we have concerts, we are having a concert with a very ancient – the most ancient stringed instrument in the world, that was discovered in Greece. The Greek Embassy is putting it on next week or the week after at the Corcoran [October 16, 2005].

MR. PACHTER: So it's a different we now. So maybe its time to – to after 20 years at the Smithsonian to find out why you then left what you had made into a perfect birth, if you will, to do what you wanted to do. Why did you – did you go onto another –

MS. SOLINGER: Well, at the – before the end of 20 years, I think it was 18 and a half, I said to the then secretary, Robert McCormick Adams, that I think that I had done everything that I wanted to do with the Residents program. Was there another job at the Smithsonian that he thinks that I could do. And he said, "I don't know." He said, "I see you so much as a perfect person for the Resident Associate program." He said, "What other job would you like?" I said, "Well I wouldn't know. I don't know what is in your mind or who's leaving or whatever." He said, "Well, think about it," but I didn't really give it to much thought and continued on until – you remember I think it was Carmen that started the decision to have somebody look at the Smithsonian and see where to make changes.

MR. PACHTER: Yes – Carmen Turner

MS. SOLINGER: And so one of the changes that I had really discussed maybe seven years earlier was combining the resident and the national program. And at that time, Joe Bonsignore [Joseph J. Bonsignore] thought it was such a terrible idea, he was – wrote a treatise on why it shouldn't happen. So by now I didn't really think it should happen and I could see lots of reasons why it shouldn't. And I thought about it and I thought if I were to take over the reins, I could see a couple of years of horrible administration ahead of trying to – I was friendly enough with Joe Carper, the director of the National program, but the staffs weren't friendly and it would have been a difficult task to get them together. So I thought I don't really want to do this. It's not what I like doing. So I called Tom Lovejoy, who was at that point – assistant secretary [held the post from 1987-1994]–

MR. PACHTER: For External Affairs.

MS. SOLINGER: – for External Affairs. And I told him that I did not want to be considered for that job and if there was something else that he could think of fine, but I wanted to be out of that. So I guess I kept it for a year and then I think it was 20 years. And then they gave me space – a wonderful office in the Castle. I don't know if you ever saw it on the third floor, overlooking the garden. It was wonderful.

MR. PACHTER: Yes

MS. SOLINGER: But, I really didn't have a lot – I had enough to do. I continued doing some seminars and some other stuff that was pending and so forth, but – and they let me take my antique furniture with me, that was lovely. And John Jamison took over the interim job in my old office until they got somebody to come in. And I also, I don't think it was a great treat to have Constance Berry Newman as the overall honcho at that time. I wasn't the only person that thought that. And in fact it used to be very easy to walk in and see Bob McCormick Adams. She was like a gatekeeper – if you made a date she had to be there as well. And I found that it getting increasingly bureaucratic, and it wasn't fun anymore.

MR. PACHTER: So you looked around, or somebody found you?

MS. SOLINGER: I let it be known that I was going to retire. And there were three possibilities. I knew that I wouldn't want to work full-time. I knew I wanted to work three days a week. At the same time I joined a country club to play golf. Jim Billington was now head of the Library of Congress and he and I were talking a lot, and David Levy was at the Corcoran. He and I were talking a lot. And I was talking to a couple of people at the Brookings Institution and all three of them would have produced jobs, but David was the most insistent. Jim had a really bad back at the time and was out of work a lot. So I made my stipulations while I was still at the Smithsonian, which were, three days a week, parking, some staff, and whatever else. I don't remember. Those were the three important ones, plus salary. And he met them, so I decided I would take three months off. I stopped at the Smithsonian at the end of '93, December, and came to the Corcoran the first of April, of '94.

MR. PACHTER: How important was it that the Corcoran offered you again a focus on the arts? Mind you, the arts can be many things, but rather than science and politics and so forth? Was that an advantage or just not an issue?

MS. SOLINGER: Yes, well, that's a good question because if I had gone to the Library of Congress or – you know I was doing a lot of seminars at the Smithsonian that had nothing to do with art, that had to do with topical subjects, international subjects or whatever.

MR. PACHTER: Right.

MS. SOLINGER: So I would have brought that to the Brookings. I could have – I talked to people about coming to Brookings. And the Library of Congress would have been much more humanities than art.

MR. PACHTER: Right.

MS. SOLINGER: So perhaps that had something to do with it, but they had never – the other thing it had to do with it, there was no such program at the Corcoran, so I could invent what I wanted. And the Corcoran was very

thrilled with the possibility because they knew my work at the Smithsonian. And the then chairman of the board – well no, the then chairman of the board probably didn't so much, but Ronald Abramson, who was on the board, knew my work and they thought it was terrific that I would think of coming. So, you know, having a warm welcome is a nice thing.

MR. PACHTER: Yes. And did you have – you've already said there are some limitations in not having the Smithsonian brand to work with?

MS. SOLINGER: Yes, that was one thing. Also, there is one auditorium. I had built up a wonderful relationship with the various museums at the Smithsonian and I met with the directors and their staff – at least some of them once a month, some every three months, depending on what we were doing, but regularly. And I got to use their auditoriums and their staffs and so forth. So with Corcoran I had this one auditorium, which seats 193 people, which I book for 240. My experience is that 15% of audiences don't show up. It isn't always mine to use because the education – the college uses it and the education department; sometimes corporations book the whole place. When Clinton [William Jefferson Clinton] used to use the Corcoran a lot, he didn't want anybody in there. I'd be swept.

So it isn't ideal from the point of view of the program I want to do. We do a lot of programs out, like trips or visits to embassies and stuff, because we just haven't got enough space to have them there all the time. But it's – the Corcoran has a wonderful staff, a marvelous spirit, and always, no matter who's there – I mean, the guards are so kind and nice and they – the run of the staff is uniformly wonderful to work with. So it has a lot of advantages to it. It's completely different. It's a nice job for what you might call an after-retirement job.

MR. PACHTER: Do you find yourself more driven in terms of programming by the exhibitions that are on there, or –

MS. SOLINGER: Well, I feel like we should do more, but I don't really have luck so much – program on exhibitions. I explained to our current acting director, who is also chairman of the board, that we don't program for every exhibition. And when we do program for exhibitions, they don't always work out so well. So that – I consider art a very broad subject at the Corcoran, which includes fashion, interior design, cuisine, architecture, style, whatever. So that I'm not just concentrating narrowly on the visual arts, but the visual arts plays an important role. But I try – because at the Smithsonian, because we had so many different disciplines with all the other museums, it was very broad.

MR. PACHTER: Right.

MS. SOLINGER: And I could have brought a different kind of approach to the Corcoran; nobody said it has to be the arts, but I felt that it should be. So I brought in the concept –

MR. PACHTER: But you had a catholic – small-C – view of the arts?

MS. SOLINGER: Right

MR. PACHTER: Another important subject in anybody's life, but one that I would like to bring up right now is the whole question of mentor and mentee? Either in your life, who may be seen as mentor, but as I know your role in the Washington community, particularly your role as a mentor, have you found people coming to you? We certainly know that you emboldened women at the Smithsonian in various ways, but have there been direct relationships where you felt responsible for somebody or they to you?

MS. SOLINGER: At the Corcoran, definitely yes. My staffs and subsequent to them being my staffs, in their other lives, yes, but it's interesting when we talked – we mentioned ArtTable before. I've asked every eligible person at the Corcoran to become a member, and they all have, and I've worked with them to become members; the latest one being the chief of communications. I asked her the day before yesterday if she'd like to join ArtTable and she said she'd like to very much, so were going to start working on that. It's due November 1. But, Jackie Serwer was already a member as was Susan Badder, the head of education. But I brought in four or five, and so when Margeaux becomes a member, that will be nice.

MR. PACHTER: Lets talk about ArtTable and its role, if you will as an organization of mentoring. Were you there at the beginning?

MS. SOLINGER: Yes, I was a charter member in New York.

MR. PACHTER: In New York.

MS. SOLINGER: I actually lived in Washington, I believe, when it started, but they asked me to be a charter member. And I was on the board of the New York chapter. You know, it wasn't the New York chapter, it was the

board. There was no Washington chapter. And I love the board meetings, and it was not because the board meetings were so great, they really weren't in those days. I don't know what they are like now. But it brought me to New York, so I'd – meetings used to be on a Monday, and I said, "No, because I can't go to theater the night before. There is no theater." So they changed –[End Tape 2, Side A] – it to a Wednesday, so I could come in on Tuesday night.

MR. PACHTER: Why was the organization formed?

MS. SOLINGER: Actually, it was formed as a networking – like an old girl's network because I think the women felt – I wasn't part of the very initial thinking, but I think women felt that men had ways of forming an old boy's network, and this was a good way for women to interact and to help one another. And I think secondarily, and I say this very advisedly secondarily, was a mentoring and also taking an active role in promoting the arts in the world. I wish those two were bigger items in the organization.

MR. PACHTER: And do you think there are ways that that could happen? Is it just the way priorities are established or is the temperament or personalities of –

MS. SOLINGER: I don't know why. They've given me reasons why there's not more political activity. I mean, they do come down, you know, once a year for the day of political activity for the arts in the Congress and so forth and have sessions. I'm not sure. I think it's because it's the 501[c]3 thing, that they can't be political and do that.

MR. PACHTER: Right. Okay.

MS. SOLINGER: Mentoring is relatively important. I have someone who asked me to be her official mentor. She was so smart and she knew so many things, I said, "You better mentor me." [Laughter.] She was a young African-American woman. She was just marvelous and she was very good in her work. And I said, "There's nothing I can teach you."

MR. PACHTER: Well, I'm sure she knew better, but in any case, have you found that people have contacted you through the organization for advice about things whether it's organized or not? Has it worked at that level?

MS. SOLINGER: I suppose. I mean, people do call me. There was a time when I thought a good job for me would be to find jobs for people and find people for jobs. I was spending – I was mostly in New York, but I was spending so much time with people calling me – do I know somebody? And people calling me, do I know a place? And so I've always felt a close relationship with other women particularly – I guess they were mostly women – to try to fit the person with the position. And I still find that happening a lot.

MR. PACHTER: Do you find that the situation for women is noticeably different now so that it is, there are a number of opportunities out there, fits to be made, or whether there are still restrictions, you think, on ambition?

MS. SOLINGER: Oh I think there – I think it's much – I think it's in a different league than it was. I certainly think that women have much more – are much more easily able to find jobs regardless of sex, but I still think there are some – some barriers; not too many. I think women still get paid less for the job. Not everywhere, but I do hear that in law firms and stuff like that, it's hard for women to break through that glass ceiling. But, I mean, we both know – I don't have to go into it – that women have made great strides.

MR. PACHTER: Does that mean that ArtTable still has a role?

MS. SOLINGER: Oh yes, because – well, when I was first active in the museum world, I guess the only person [woman] that had ever become a director was Adelyn Breeskin –

MR. PACHTER: Adelyn Breeskin –

MS. SOLINGER: And that was because it was during the war and they didn't have any men and she became director. She was a wonderful woman anyway. Talk about mentoring. I – to me –

MR. PACHTER: A great director.

MS. SOLINGER: To me – to me, she was my mentor.

MR. PACHTER: Oh, okay.

MS. SOLINGER: I thought she was wonderful. And –

MR. PACHTER: How did she play that balancing act in a way that others could learn from? Was it just –

MS. SOLINGER: I don't think she did, but I just – to me – I looked up to her. She's tall anyway. [Laughter.] But I have a great picture of her and Josh with Raphael Soyer between them. And, you know, the height is a big factor. But, I mean, Adelyn accomplished enough that she would have deserved it at any time, but I think that it was influenced by the war. But then after that, women were not directors for a long, long time. And of course now women are directors, and increasingly so. I'm sure ArtTable had – I'm sure that ArtTable, whether it even tried or not, gave women confidence. You know, talking to one another, and being with one another, and seeing how somebody got ahead and so forth I think it gives women confidence.

I think that women – the old-girl network thing is undoubtedly a good idea because the more contact you have with people that are like you, and more ideas that come forth and more energy and confidence comes forth, so I think it did a lot.

But you asked me about how I started and so I liked it being in New York. I liked the idea of going to a theatre, getting a little shopping in, and so forth. So then when 1992 came – was that the first year that – is that when Clinton was in?

MR. PACHTER: 1992?

MS. SOLINGER: So in '93, there were several women that he appointed to jobs, or his administration did, such as Diane Frankel and Sondra Myers, and Cissy Swig [Roselyne Chroman Swig] and a couple others that had either been – had been ArtTable members – in Sondra's case, she lived in Pennsylvania where there was no chapter, but she had wanted one. And they called, I guess, Diane or Sondra – one of them – called national and said, "We'd like a Washington chapter."

So whoever said, "Well, call Janet Solinger." I don't know why they selected me out, but they did; and they did call me, and as I say, I wasn't really enthusiastic because I liked going to New York, but I couldn't resist all these really wonderful women who wanted the chapter, so I worked with them. I remember our first meeting at the Cosmos Club. It took us about a year. We could have formed the chapter right away, but there's a – the whole official thing we had to go through with ArtTable, and now it's a booming chapter here. And everyone that isn't a member that's eligible wants to be a member.

MR. PACHTER: Really? Would you say it corresponds to a booming art world here? I mean, is there more of a connection among the art institutions? Is there more of a community forming broadly? Is it any different from when you first got to Washington?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, that's hard to say because at the Smithsonian it was different: there's so many museums there and so many are art museums, so there's bound to be a connection. At the Corcoran, there's probably some connection. Our chief curator came from the Museum of American Art – American Art Museum, as it's now called, and so she keeps her connections somewhat. And our head of education comes from the Baltimore Art Museum, so – and she lives in Baltimore, so they have more connections. But I think in general – in general, I don't think there are too many connections between our women curators, unless they get very active in ArtTable.

And as I say, many of them have joined – either have asked me if I would sponsor them, or that I've asked. Mostly they ask me, but often the other way.

MR. PACHTER: You know there's a curious parallel in the male world, in a sense that as somebody in the arts, as a man I really have no organization. There may have been just an institutional structure out there that supported me, but where I come into contact with colleagues, except in formal, professional ways –

MS. SOLINGER: Well, don't you have a director's council or anything like that?

MR. PACHTER: But that's not at a sort of sharing, networking, mentoring level.

MS. SOLINGER: Right. Doesn't it happen before or after meetings though?

MR. PACHTER: Not very much. Not very much. I think in some ways ArtTable becomes an exemplar of something that doesn't exist in the other way. And I see that sometimes even in high schools where the mother-daughter banquets developed a certain kind of spirit, that then the boys sought. So –

MS. SOLINGER: That's interesting.

MR. PACHTER: – I'm curious. Women have found these ways to create –

MS. SOLINGER: Of networking.

MR. PACHTER: Yeah, that I think can benefit everyone.

MS. SOLINGER: Well, that is interesting. Also, I was thinking, though, when I lived in New York and I mentioned to you the administrators' meetings once a month, and that was a very good way of networking and finding out – didn't do me any good because even though I was accepted as a colleague, I wasn't accepted as a staff person because I wanted more money than they wanted to pay. But –

MR. PACHTER: Were you one of the few women –

MS. SOLINGER: By the way, I don't think I wanted the money so much because I needed it. I wanted the money because there was a certain amount of status of having that kind of thing.

MR. PACHTER: Right, right. Respect.

MS. SOLINGER: Uh-huh.

MR. PACHTER: Were you one of the few women in that?

MS. SOLINGER: The only.

MR. PACHTER: You were the only. Would you look back – do you look back and see yourself as the only women in a lot of contexts until relatively recently?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, I'm not a good looker-backer. I don't know. Probably when I was the administrator of the Jewish Museum there wasn't any other women administrator. I know that; we just said that. When I went to NYU, I mentioned that I was the highest paid woman there, or maybe I didn't. I said I was the highest paid woman in the Smithsonian; I was also the highest paid women at NYU.

MR. PACHTER: Oh.

MS. SOLINGER: And that wasn't saying so much. I didn't get that big of a salary, but –

MR. PACHTER: So your role has been almost more as a –

MS. SOLINGER: Well, it was a stand-out role, I mean. I don't say money wasn't the – money was not the judge. I mean, maybe it was in some ways, but why did I get the money? I mean, you just don't get handed the money; you have to be doing something to get it. And I think there was a sense of pride in your own work. You have to feel good yourself about what you're doing, and that makes them feel like, well, you deserve the money. And money was not, as I mentioned – as I said, it wasn't the reason, but it was a – it was an element in your self-respect.

MR. PACHTER: Right. Well said. I'm going to end with the world noticing you. You've gotten a lot of awards. There's no time to go through all of them, I'm sure you wouldn't want to. Was there something that – some that had particular meaning for you?

MS. SOLINGER: Well, yes, of course. The one that I – one of the ones I really like was becoming an honorary member of the AIA [American Institute of Architects] in '79. It was very funny because we were talking about Barbaralee [Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel] before and she told me that she had just gotten honorary membership in the AIA. This was about two months ago she told me. And I said, oh I said, "Yes, that's nice" or something like that. And she said, "Are you?" I said, "Yes", and I told her when I became a member. And she said, "Who was there?" I said, "Oh, Barbara, it was so long ago." Which is what you would say to Barbaralee, right?

MR. PACHTER: Right

MS. SOLINGER: But, that was very exciting. It was in Kansas City. And I loved the award. I don't use it for anything, but it's very nice. I of course liked being decorated by the three countries. I appreciated the gold medal from the Smithsonian, and I loved, maybe the best of all, getting the honorary degree at the Corcoran because David made it such a surprise I had no idea I was getting it. He had programs printed without my name that he saw that I got – my whole row got. He really went to a lot of trouble. It was wonderful.

He said "Now we have a surprise honorary degree." And I looked around the whole auditorium to think, "Who was the surprise?" So when he said my name, I was absolutely shocked and, you know, almost unable to – and Jack knew about it and I didn't want to wear my cap, I hate wearing caps. And Jack kept saying, "Put your cap on." I said, "No, I'm not going to." So when he called my name I quickly put my cap on, and go up there and it was really lovely. I appreciated that David did that.

MR. PACHTER: I think that's a perfect last word. Thank you.

[END]

Last updated... *August 28, 2006*