

*Transcript of an oral history interview with Martha Orr Davenport (born 1943), conducted by Richard Woodward, Curator of African Art, and Sarah Eckhardt, Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia on December 19, 2011.*

*Davenport was a Charter member of the Council of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in 1955 and served as President of the group from 1967-1969. She remains an Associate member 60 years later. In 2011, she donated two lithographs by Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamín to the Museum's collection.*

SE: ...just asking general questions...

MD: ...just to get me in the mood!

This was my husband and I, and we wanted to go to South America. He had a month's vacation, so we had plenty of time to plan it. And we started off in Colombia, and worked to Ecuador and went all the way to every country except Chile. The United States was not having anything to do with Chile at that point. So that's the only country that we didn't go to, was Chile. So we had been to Colombia, and I had talked to some people there because I thought, well you know, I'm going to see if I can buy some works of art, while I'm down in South America. And sure enough, our guide knew of somebody who would sell me something right "off the bat." But we had to leave, so I didn't do that.

So we got to Ecuador. And Quito is a beautiful little city, and it's right in the middle of hills and Pre-Colombian things, all around, and we were so excited. And we do all the tours, as you know, to every temple, cathedral, and so forth. We liked the people, too. So we've taken pictures, and I always have to go to an artist's studio if I can find one, cause you know, I've been working at the [Virginia] Museum, and I need to do that. So we went to an artist's studio, and I didn't remember his name, because I couldn't pronounce it. And he was doing interesting things, and we were there for a short while. But we began to see his name on his paintings all over Quito, and we learned that he was the foremost artist in Ecuador. He was Inca born, and he had had three wives. His first wife was an Inca, and his second wife was French, and he was married the third time to another French wife. And at the moment we were there, he had gone to Paris for an exhibition of his works. So we never met this artist, and we saw his work. He made jewelry. So he was the number one guy, but we didn't buy anything.

So the next night we went to a little place down in the village where they had lots of music, and they played pipes that they made from reeds and all sorts of interesting things, and had art hanging on every wall for sale. So I was looking around with my husband, and I didn't see anything I really was particularly interested in, although it was interesting. But I saw a painting that was propped on the floor, not hanging on the wall, and it interested me because there was a



Picasso type painting, obviously Picasso, in South America. So I thought, I like this. Something about it appealed to me. And it was a good size, and it was an oil. But it didn't have any tag on it. So I went to find the lady who, she and her husband owned this little place. And I said, "Is this painting I see in the next room for sale? It's just propped against the wall." And with that she went into a flurry, and she threw up her hands, "I hate that man, I hate that man!" I said, what is she talking about, "I hate that man!" And it turned out, that that man, the artist, who painted that painting, was her ex-husband. And she hated him, and that she'd gotten this one painting at the divorce settlement. And there it was, and she didn't really want the painting, because she hated him so. And her husband who was there, her current husband, he said, "Are you sure you want to sell that painting?" She said, "I hate him, I don't want the painting around." So she said she would sell it to us. It was only then that I found out, that the artist of the painting was the same one we had been to his studio the day before— whose name I couldn't pronounce – so I hadn't remembered it, and he was the foremost artist in Quito at that time. That was back in what? '72 when I went, back in '80, when was it? '72, '73? Since, I sort of forgot about it, but at the time she sold us the painting.

And, then I told my husband, "Well, let's go back to his studio, cause I want to look again at what he's doing now," because obviously mine had been done quite a while before. So we saw what he was doing then, and they were all "Hands." He was well known, our guide told us, for his "Hands" – the poverty, the poor people. So I said, "Well, I want to get one of these prints, because I want to have one of what he's doing." And so I bought one, and I said, "I sure would like to have him sign it for me, but he's not here, he's in Paris." And our guide, who was named Elba, was one of the best guides we've ever had. She just knew how to take you around and show you everything. She had an answer for everything. She said, "Well, he's coming back. I'll get him to sign it for you." And I said, "Oh well, that's great." So we bought both paintings. I mean, we bought this one too, and she promised that she would get it signed. And I told a lot of people about that later, and they said you'll never see that painting, that print again. But sure enough, both paintings came back to the United States, and when he got back to the United States – Guayasamín – it was signed, and they sent it to me.

I had all kinds of correspondence, and I've given you all the correspondence, who I think was Guayasamín's third wife at the time. I don't know, you've got it all, but I ended up with the oil and the print not knowing really anything about Guayasamín except that he was the foremost artist in Quito, Ecuador. And I never met him, and I'd love to see whether he looked like an Inca or not, although his pictures sort of do. So I kind of lost touch with him, because not many people in the United States apparently were buying him then. I found several that maybe were border states, California. Somebody in Southern California had one. So I lost track of him, but I put my "Primavera" oil here in the Collector's Circle in Richmond after I got back, and oddly enough, there was one young man who was working here at the Museum who was from Ecuador. And he knew all about Guayasamín. So I was in two different states not knowing anything about

Guayasamín, and then somebody would come along who knew all about him that you never thought you'd ever see.

And I think this happened again on this tour when Richard [Woodward] told me that you'd just hired an intern who was here working for the summer and where could she be from, but Quito, Ecuador. And she could look at my slides list, and she could read everything on it. 'Cause I could read it under my machine, but we know that ink fades, you know, and it's all in ink. So she could see all these castles, and castles and temples and all we went to in Ecuador, and even the two pictures of Guayasamín's studio. But I've had such a good time with all the things I got in Quito, because I think a lot of people thought that they really weren't worth anything particularly. You know, they didn't know what they were. I bought them, as Richard could tell you.

I wanted some Pre-Colombian things if I possibly could get one down there, because you see them everywhere. I love the Pre-Colombian artifacts. And our guide says, "Well, I've got some," and I said, "You do? How did you get them?" And she said the little boys dig them up out of the desert and bring them to me. And I buy from them, and I've got some. So I've got three whistles that were Pre-Colombian, I got from her. And I took them in a hat box all the way through South America – because in every country, I have to declare them. And nobody paid any attention to them, until I got back to the United States, and they said, "Where did you get these Pre-Colombian whistles?" And I said, "Well, I got them from my guide, my tour guide." Well, they just smiled and thought, there's another Yankee who's gone down, and somebody sold her something. And I told Richard this.

And I got back to Richmond, and I came back to the Museum, and I talked to Pinkney Near. And I said, "Can you tell whether these are authentic or not, and you have a machine that does that?" It turns out all three are authentic. So I did a pretty good sample of things down in Ecuador. And I think my guide was, why, she was very knowledgeable, and she wanted, she was trying to please people you know, if she could possibly do it. So I ended up with three whistles and two paintings from Quito, and almost no connection ever again with Quito, or Ecuador, or Guayasamín. But in my heart I knew this was an interesting little set of things I had. I'm so glad the Virginia Museum is interested in them. And now I've learned that you have another painting by Guayasamín on loan. And you sent me the catalog that you wrote off to Vanderbilt University which has everything about Guayasamín. And I understand there's a whole museum with just Guayasamín. So maybe Richard, maybe you better take us down to Quito, Ecuador.

MD, RW, SE: [Laughter]

MD: Well, I never had a better time than I did on this trip, but Ecuador was the best. And when I got the print back signed – I don't know whether he signed it, but it was signed. You all weren't sure it was his handwriting, but I think it is. But they got our names kind of mixed up – mine is Martha and my husband was Warwick – WARWICK. So he signed it to Marta Warwick



Davenport, so we were one person, which sort of makes sense, because we really were. So anyway, it's unique, the whole thing. And my experience with the artist's wife, his second wife, and how vehement she was with this man she hated so. And she sold me the one thing that I guess she had left over from that marriage. Now, I've always been curious to know whether there were more "Primaveras," the other, I don't know. There are none in this catalog.

RW: Did she say, or was it assumed that she was the subject?

MD: She was the subject. Yes, it was of her, because her current husband thought she ought not to sell it, you know. And she said no, she didn't want it around, and that's why it was just sitting on the floor. So it was, that's why she got it in the settlement. Maybe he didn't want it either – who knows. But anyway he married again, and he died much later. And there's this whole museum full of his things. I think it's incredible that you all wanted two of mine. But I am really excited about it. So I'm glad she sold it to me. And Ecuador was a beautiful country, all around in the hills. And a lot of his paintings – I also gave you a folder that I bought down there that has – which I thought I ought to buy while I could find it. A lot of his early paintings are of the hills around Ecuador and Quito. And he did the hills in red and green, different colors. And to ride up in the hills is absolutely beautiful, with the animals just running around wild you know, and the rocks that are so close together you can't put a pin between them. It's wonderful work in Quito. And I would love to go back one day really, but now if I went, I'd go straight to the Guayasamín Museum. Now, maybe you have some questions.

RW: I can imagine...

SE: I just wanted to make sure... I think you said earlier it was 1973?

MD: It was '73, not '72.

SE: Do you remember what... I think it was already shown here?

MD: That was when I came back, I put it in my, as my exhibit for Special Collections.

SE: Right, we have a document that said it was here November 27 through December 30, 1973, it was already in Collectors' Circle.

MD: Yes, right, that's right.

SE: Do you think it was a summer trip, maybe?

MD: Well, their climate is always exactly opposite from ours, and I don't know. It would seem like summer, I think it must have been. No, it, maybe not, South America is a huge country. By the time you get down to the southern part, you would expect it to be. I remember it was – we were there when it was warm, so it's the opposite. So I must have gone in the wintertime, well, not in the summer anyway.



RW: I think it could have been February or March, or something like that.

SE: Yeah, and his wife, I think it's de Perón de Cruz, maybe? We have a letter from her October 26, 1973.

MD: This was what I think. I think she was his third wife.

SE: Or second, I think.

MD: No, "Primavera" was the second one.

SE: Oh, right, but I think it was the second wife who sent us the letter saying that she was giving you "La Primavera," that she was selling it.

MD: Yes, ok, because I gave you that correspondence.

SE: I did, I looked her up, and that was indeed his second wife.

MD: Well, that's his second wife.

SE: Tumultuous ending to the marriage.

MD: Well, I don't know that she had anything else or even wanted anything else but...

RW: What years were they married?

SE: It was based on a very short, and it was the mid-fifties... [inaudible]

MD: You know more about that than others. Now, I understood his first wife was an Inca.

SE: That's the wife I think he had his children with.

MD: And so are there any children now?

SE: Yes, I think they're still involved with the museum, but the second wife, I mean I think he was involved with her before he was married, so actually, as far as the date, it could be anywhere in there, I think the marriage ended by...

MD: Now, she was French, too, I think.

SE: The second wife.

MD: I'm not sure. Her current husband was French. And they owned this little shop together, gallery together. And he's the one who said, "Are you sure you want to sell it?" The implication I think with him was, you know, he's a foremost artist, you sure you want to sell it?

SE: Sure.



RW: Were you and Warwick traveling alone?

MD: No, we were on a tour, which was one of the best tours we've ever been on, and we learned a lot of history about our tour guides. Elba was our tour guide in Quito, but our overall guide was one of those refugees from Czechoslovakia. A great number of people over there left because of the Russians, you know. And many of them went to South America apparently. And our overall guide was, she could speak eight languages. I mean really an intelligent woman. And every place we went in Argentina, she'd have a cousin or an uncle. There were many people who came from that area to escape Europe. And they were intelligent people, so they were very good guides. And we met all of her family who were scattered all over South America. But Elba was the one in Quito, and she had some children, and she was just one of those good guides. She knew how to please you, and she was smart and she took us all over the city. I couldn't believe it when I got out my tapes, because I've labeled them all and everything is in order, and the trips and all the ones. But I didn't put it on the outside of the case, but it's on the inside on a paper, written in ink, and it's fading. I can read it under my machine. I read under a machine that's to blow it up. I couldn't possibly do it without, but under the machine I can gradually see a word. It's in my own handwriting script that I know I can find out what it is if I studied it.

RW: So you have the paper and you have your collection slides? Have you found the two slides of the studio?

MD: Yes, well, I made the mistake. It's my vision. When I look at the slides, I can't really see the small details in them.

RW: I'm sure one of us would help with that.

MD: Well, and I almost brought that slide stand here, cause I know the number except I took three or four out thinking I could look under my machine. It doesn't work that way. But all the names, you know. I can see a castle or something, you know. And I can see it's a scene of the mountains or the hills around Quito. And there are two slides that say Guayasamín studio.

RW: Well, let us know how we can help because those images would be of interest to us.

MD: Well, I wanted to see if they would have been of interest for you all. I don't know why it would be interior. I really don't know.

SE: Well, the studio would be, especially since you bought the prints from there.

MD: That's what I was trying to get done, and I got the thing put up and everything. And then I realized I couldn't really determine, because one of these numbers, it almost looked like a stained glass ceiling. I could see that, but I'm not sure that's his studio. But it's all right there in my slides.



RW: We should be able to figure it out.

MD: Would you want to?

SE: Sure.

MD: Well, you know, I almost put it in this morning. And I tried to decide whether to, but I had taken out yesterday about four, just thinking that if I could look at somewhere under my machine. But it doesn't work that way. Then when I put them back, I'm not sure I put them back in the right order. But I only took those out, but I think anybody else could determine it, because most of them were landscapes. And I was thinking, I wondered if there was a picture of Warwick and me, which would be fun, but I don't know. It's all a mystery. And just this very morning, I almost put them in my walker, thinking if you were interested, they are right there.

RW: We'll do it. We'll be in touch.

MD: But at the time that he did these "Hands", and our tour guide told us that was what he was famous for at that period of time was his "Hands", she mentioned... So we got one that would typify his period at that moment, apparently that was what he did. There are some "Hands" pictures in the catalog.

SE: Definitely, you're right, that was the period when he did the large hands.

MD: Yeah, he was also doing a lot of jewelry. And I didn't buy any of the jewelry. But of course, I wonder how many – I think he did a lot of these "Hands". You say you've got another one of his paintings here. Are they of the "Hands" period?

SE: No it's closer to, it is even earlier than this. I think the one we have is one of his earliest phases. And Sylvia [Yount], the Chief Curator, wants to meet you, so we thought when we're done...

MD: This is mine, isn't it?

RW, SE: Yeah, that's yours.

SE: These are the two. They're just copies so you see them while you're here.

MD: Well, the art evaluator sent me two pictures, you know, cause I told you I wanted pictures. But this one is... I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed this painting in Richmond, because I had it in my house. And it was in a long living room at the end, on the right of the fireplace over here. As you came into my house, there was an entryway with a great big mirror. And here's the living room over here, and this was way back here. And if you were in my living room looking at this, you could see both faces, but the reflection in the mirror all the way across to the next room – it only looked like profile. It was fascinating, and I really enjoyed seeing how a painting can change depending on lots of different angles, you know. But I used to have people



come, I'd say, "Oh, now look at this now." And I'd take them out, I'd show them how all the white showed up. And it looked like only a profile. And when you were down looking close up, you could see the both faces. And Picasso, of course it's Picasso. I knew it was imitation, but I don't know how many other... It must have been a period. Isn't it usually, if you're in a period of time you're doing Picasso, you do more than one? I've always been curious to know if he did another one.

SE: Yeah.

MD: But this is his second wife.

SE: I think he was definitely... he said freely he was influenced by Picasso. Picasso and El Greco were the two that really that Guayasamín looked to for as influences. But I think more Picasso in this period in the fifties, and El Greco more in the "Hands" period, a little bit later. So you've got two prime examples of his work. I think they're great pieces.

MD: Well, I'm excited. You all have made me really happy about this.

RW: We should go downstairs later, on the way.

SE: Sylvia wants to go with us and show you the Guayasamín we have on loan, installed in the...

MD: Oh I'd love...that is just a loan?

SE: Yeah, another complete coincidence.

RW: That's on loan from whom?

MD: That's what I said.

RW: Florida?

MD: Well, Florida and California, they're the ones that I found that they were on sale, you know, back when I was looking in catalogs and things. The appraiser went to Sotheby's and Christie's to get what the going price was. Then he had some pictures of that, too. So he is collectible much more around the world than he was when I was down there, except he was in France with an exhibit of his work. I don't know a thing really about him. I haven't heard much about him.

SE: Well, I think from what I've read, he was pretty political, and so I think he stopped being able to show in the U.S. for a good period of time, and it was so close to his death in the 1990s that he started showing again in the U.S. So it was for good reason that he wasn't known very well, for political reasons I should say.

MD: I see.



SE: It made sense he wasn't known very well in the U.S. in those years, because he wasn't showing. He wasn't showing too much until close to the end of his life.

MD: Well, there's nothing political about Picasso, though.

SE: No, but he was good friends with a lot of the Cubans. He painted a portrait of Fidel Castro, so you can imagine how popular he was in the U.S. after the '60s.

MD: Well, I see, that's interesting, because everywhere we went in Quito, all the buildings we had to go see, we'd go in and there was often a painting by Guayasamín. So he was all over Quito, so I knew he was their foremost painter at the time. But that changes from time to time. But apparently, he remained the foremost painter if he's got a museum named after him.

SE: Definitely. He definitely stayed their most prominent painter.

MD: And you say he's got some family there?

SE: His children, I think, have stayed involved in the museum. And his legacy is definitely important there. And here, I mean now, I think Latin American art is becoming... more and more museums are putting more emphasis on it and collecting more.

MD: They are.

SE: And I think he's in the top five as far as twentieth century Latin American painters, he's a major figure. So this is really important for our own collection.

MD: Well it could be, I just felt that it was. But anyway, regardless of that, I enjoyed this painting for many, many reasons, and that's why you buy a painting.

RW: That's a good reason.

SE: That's a great reason.

MD: And it's not that everybody else is supposed to like it, but I liked it. And my husband told me one time – Warwick – he said, “Some of these paintings you bring home I kind of wonder about, but you know I'm kind of getting used to them. I like them now.” [Laughter] So we would look at art together, but I must say that my real beginning interest in art was at this Virginia Museum.

RW: Well, Martha, that's wonderful. I'd love to say that it does not surprise me that you've been very involved with stories and storytelling over the years, because you are a master storyteller. And it's wonderful the way you have told us about your trip and the experiences that you had with Guayasamín. And I know there are a lot of stories involving the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and so I was wondering, what is your first memory of the Virginia Museum?

MD: Well, I'm not from Richmond. I'm from Anderson, South Carolina. I can tell you some more about that, but when I went to graduate school at UVA, and that's where I met my husband who was going to art school.

RW: What did you major in?

MD: English Literature.

RW: English Literature.

MD: And I never had a better time in my whole life than I did there. I was doing... everything went together. I mean, not every author, but everything I was working on was in the same field, kind of. I didn't have to worry about math, which I didn't know.

RW, SE, MD: [Laughter]

RW: My favorite subject, honestly!

MD: So I really enjoyed it. It was all writers, and I had a good time doing that. So when we were married, and then the war came on, and my husband had, he'd been to Yale. But he had taken ROTC at Yale, which he liked. He always liked the Army, and then he was in law school. So when he graduated from law school, he had a job here in Richmond, which he practiced for one week only at Hunton and Williams, because he was a Second Lieutenant from ROTC at Yale, and they were looking for people who already had some training at that time. It was before we were at war. So he ended up in Washington on General Marshall's staff for the entire war. So that's another experience. So when I came, we were in Washington, when I came back here, is when I lived here. And that's when I joined the Junior League here.

RW: Mid '40s?

MD: I can't remember when I joined. It's all in my scrapbook.

RW: But after World War II?

MD: Oh yeah, it was after we moved back to Richmond. And you could choose different things you wanted to do. And I had done several things, and I always like everything I do, but this time they had a new one, a new job you could do. And it was the first time at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. And that was when Mrs. Christison, [Associate Director] Muriel Christison had joined up here.

RW: 1948.

MD: And she had brought the idea to [Director] Leslie Cheek – it might be good for the Museum, you know, if we could use some volunteers. So there were about eight of us who volunteered, maybe six or eight to come to the Virginia Museum. That is the first time they'd

ever done it. I went to see Mrs. Christison, she handled it. And she said, “Well, Martha, I understand you wanted to do this to learn about art.” And I said that’s just it exactly, because I really wanted to learn more about it. So she said, “Well, we have a new exhibit, a traveling exhibit that’s just come in down in the basement, and it’s all on the Mexican Muralists, Rivera and all of them. How about going down there and see if you can help out with that.” So I did. I went down in the basement, and they had just unpacked it. And I ended up writing the labels, believe it or not. They didn’t have the staff that we do now, the Virginia Museum. But I got all the information, so I always had Siqueiros and Rivera, I’ve always had a yen for again. That’s when I first started learning about it, and I’ve enjoyed it ever since.

Everything I did at the Museum I’ve enjoyed under Leslie Cheek. And I’ve done lots of... in fact they interviewed me once, because I was one of the organizers of the Council, the first, there were about eight of us they were, when we formed the Council. That was Mrs. Christison’s idea. And Beth Powell, Mrs. Angus Powell, they asked to be the first President. So she got us all and we each took a job under her. She asked me to be the Secretary. I don’t like that kind of thing, but I’ve never been a Secretary. I’d rather be the President, but she asked me to be the Secretary. I said I would. So I went home, and I wrote up the first minutes of the meeting, and all of that. And I thought, well, I’ll ask Warwick if I’m doing this right. So I asked him, I said, “Now, does this sound right?” So he read them. He said, “Well now, Martha, I have to tell you one thing,” he said, “when you take the minutes of a meeting you are supposed to record what happens, not interpret it.”

RW, MD: [Laughter]

MD: So there went my English language out the window, because I had to take all my adjectives out, and things like that, and just put the bare facts, and that’s what doesn’t interest me. But anyway, I had a good time doing that. I really have learned a lot about how you look at art, and how you respect it. And this showed up in this trip I think. And I’ve done it all around in one way or another. I’ll pick up something out in the middle West. I remember going to... I love the West here, and I wasn’t familiar with that. And I wanted a buckle to put on a belt that...and I don’t usually wear belts. You know, you spend a lot of time looking for things, and you don’t know whether you want it or not.

So I was in this art museum. I always go to those places and galleries, and I found a buckle that I liked. And I’d have to get my own belt for it. It was just the buckle. And so I bought the buckle, and I had gone home, and I realized on the way back where we were staying, that I hadn’t gotten any information about the artist, since the artist is so important. So I went back to ask them. I said, “Now you told me something about this artist.” And they had a little thing about him in the gallery, and they said, “Oh, did you buy that buckle?” And I said I just bought it, you know, an hour before. And it was by some well-known artist there. But I bought it, and they gave me a sheet about how he created it in gold and the different things, and the buffalo at the hill where he’s being run over, and how they run the buffalos to jump. And so I’ve got that



at home, and I've never made a belt out of it. But I've got the buckle, so I'm always looking, something kind of, a little bit different, you know. And I think I learned that at, right down here at the Virginia Museum.

RW: Was your first experience with art in this sense? I mean, being cast right into the exhibition that Mrs. Christison suggested that you help with?

MD: That's the first thing I did.

RW: Did you have prior experience with fine arts growing up?

MD: No.

RW: Or was it through the Junior League?

MD: Well, I knew something about art, and I had an uncle... my aunt, her husband was an artist. And he did... They lived in Europe. This was before the War, and they lived in Europe, mostly Italy and France. And he was a great admirer of Whistler. So most of his work was engravings and etchings of Europe. They are all over my apartment because I have a lot of them. He was well-known in Europe, my father always said. That was his prime thing. But he also did paintings of children, or landscapes, and his name was George Aid, A-I-D. And I had seen all through the family, because we all had those hanging on our walls, you know, from him. And at one point, I remember having seen a postcard up in the mountains, where we had a little shack, of a painting, I thought it was a painting of Uncle George's. He used my Aunt Missy in a lot of his paintings, you know, and I've always liked it. I came down here to ask you all about George Aid. He's written up in some of the books, you know, as this type of artist. But there wasn't anything you could find out about this one painting that I liked that I've seen a postcard made of. And later on, when we did a retrospective of him in North Carolina, Tryon Mountains, where he painted after he came back over here. This was a much later date. They found out that that painting had been sold that year at one of the major art galleries in New York City. I would have bought that one if I could have found it.

He was not from Virginia, he was from another state, and he never was that popular. I didn't know any of this country. I've got a lot of his etchings and engravings. He did the Loire River, and everything over there. So that was my experience with art as a person who was an artist, was Uncle George. But I have to tell you when I moved from the farm into Anderson, South Carolina, in the fourth grade, and I love to tell the art we had in the fourth grade in a public school down in Anderson, South Carolina. We were given a print of the Audubon birds, and then we were supposed to color them. And everybody had prints you know. The idea, this was the way they taught it at that time. Don't go over the lines over here, get in the lines.

RW, MD: [Laughter]



MD: I remember I was the new one in the class, and they asked me to be the President of the Audubon Bird Society. That was my only introduction to my being an artist, was coloring within the lines on the Audubon bird prints.

RW: We're glad that your path led you to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts because you certainly have been illustrious in your volunteer work.

MD: Well, I had one job here, which fit in with my training at UVA, which I really enjoyed. And I've talked to... who was it that came in and interviewed me on the Council? I can tell you all about... I got everything in my scrapbook of all the Council stuff, pictures of all of us. And I did the first Viennese Ball, 'cause we hadn't done one of those before. All my experiences are going to touch on Leslie Cheek, because he was the one in charge. I'm not sure, maybe it was Mary Ross, Leslie's wife...

RW: Mary Tyler.

MD: Mary Tyler, who's a friend of mine. But the idea was conceived by somebody here to have an exhibition of the wardrobes, or the dresses worn by heroines in famous novels.

RW: "Habiliments for Heroines"

MD: And it was titled "Habiliments for Heroines." And they asked me to do the research on that, which was right up my alley. And so I would go to the library, and I'd come home with stacks, and I knew the books. But I knew also at that time, I knew how to scan. So I didn't have to read the whole book, you know, again. But the stipulations were exact, so I had to go by those. It had to be the heroine. It had to be what the heroine was wearing, and a description, and it couldn't be historical fiction. It had to be currently of the time. And those were my rules I had to go by. So you had to read the book or scan it, and find a description of the heroine and what she wore, that particular thing. Well, and yet of course that limits you. You start in the eighteenth century, and you know there are certain ones you want in there, you know, certain authors that you really want. The ones that people had read, you know. And so you got that list to go with. It took me so long to find a heroine that had a dress that was written up. And I learned later that Leslie Cheek had said, "Martha's taking a long time to do this." And he started looking through some. You think about it the next time you read a book, where it describes what the heroine's got on. So I finally got my list together. There was one... I wanted a Henry James novel, because I liked Henry James. And I found one novel that I thought had two heroines. So I got my research together and went up and knocked on Leslie's door. And I had it all. I think this one has a better description, and she might be a secondary heroine, but she's a heroine. And he agreed that I could use her. Why I mean, you know, this sounds ridiculous, doesn't it. But it was so hard to find within the concepts of what it had to be.

RW: So, now who made the dresses?



MD: Alright, so here's what happened, and I've done my homework, you know. They got Pauline Trigère in New York, who was the current one making ladies' dresses. And this was an evening dress. She designed the evening dress of the book. It was a Josephine Pinckney novel, and a current novel. It was a short dress, and she designed it and came down for the opening. And the other costumes came... Mrs. Christison got from the Metropolitan Museum's Met Collection.

RW: Fashion Institute, yeah.

MD: And so what they did was they had a little vignette scene of each one, and with the heroine described. And this is the fabulous part, they had all the description because if they had the heroine in the dress, all they'd say was what color the eyes were, how tall she was, or something. And Thalhimers gave the money to have the models made in New York. Well, the heroines of each of these stories, if the heroine was short, the model was short. And the dress came from the Metropolitan, the shoes were all period, everything had to fit the date. And I've got all that written up, too, I've got all that information out in my plastic. I've never had a better time than that. And it was very interesting. I don't believe you all would do a show like that now that has to do with English novels. They didn't have to be English because it was the art of the costume, the costume was the art. But it was just more fun, and so Leslie gave me some credit for that, you know. And so I did that one, really, the research, and that was an entirely different way of looking at art, so I've got all of that. So, I did a lot of things like that down here, which I enjoyed very much. And because of that, I picked out this Guayasamín, and you've got it.

RW: That's very interesting. Do we want to get together with Sylvia and go to the gallery before lunch or after lunch?

SE: Let me go see if she's there.

RW: I saw her walking by.

SE: Good, ok.

MD: I could talk a long time on this, but I think you've got me on Guyasamín.

RW: We've got you on Guayasamín, but this is a very good, shall we say, introduction to the possibility of interviewing you more in detail.

MD: Well, I can do that because I've kept scrapbooks.

RW: You have kept scrapbooks, but you also lived it, and you have a lot of it upstairs.

MD: Well, I'll tell you what I've just done, I've just finished, like two weeks ago. I wanted to write some of the things that happened when I was up in Health Care for three months. Maybe I told you about that.



RW: You mean when you stepped out of the SUV, when you were laid up with your hip? When you said the ground was harder than you thought?

MD: I was there for three months, and interesting little things happened as I was recuperating, and I kept telling people about them, and they'd laugh because it's slightly humorous. And I decided I just had to write them down, some of them, and I'd gotten interested in the Health Care part out at Westminster Canterbury because it should be tops out there, and it's good. But I thought, I'm going to do it. I just had to do it. It's a joke about me, now, who likes to read, but I can't read.

RW: It's a cruel punishment.

MD: Well, no, it has its humor in it. So I said, well, I have got to write these down. So I sat down one day with a yellow pad and for two hours, I just wrote because it's all in my head. And I wrote, but I can't read my handwriting back, the script, I can't read it back. So I have to wait until somebody came who works with me on something else, and they'd try to write it out, working with me to figure out what that word is. I can remember in my mind what it was, but I can't read it. And we finally... well, it took me quite a while to do, back and forth, and I finally got this written together. And I took it two weeks ago to the Health Care people. And I used to give something to the Fellowship Fund out there, this year, I decided instead of that, I'm giving only what I want to give to, in the Health Care. And I gave them that, and a copy of that.

Oh, it's just this thing about when I first went, you'd have to read it, and afterwards, some of us that met each other up there got together downstairs and ate. Well, that was kind of the end of it, it was just a little thing, but it, I took it to several people, other people, and one of the ladies that I'd eaten with said, "Write some more of these! These are funny!" So this is what I'm doing out of my head. And I said I don't want this to sound anything like great writing, I just want it to sound like I'm talking. And if I've got a comma where you don't think there's a comma, just leave it in there, it's a pause.

RW: A pause in your speech pattern.

MD: And so, I've just finished that, and I'm getting some feedback on that.

RW: Good, I'm sure they enjoy it.

MD: Well, I've got some funny little things that happened here, so, but nothing as great as happened as my being down at the Virginia Museum. Even my mother-in-law, who grew up in Richmond, knew everything about the Colonial Dames and the DARs and all that, which I didn't do any of that. I went to the Museum. And she told me, she said, "Martha, you know, there's one thing you've done I really am envious of." I said, "What is that?" She said, "You're doing things at the Virginia Museum," because she'd never done that. I was so glad that the Junior League gave me that chance to do it. And I'm so glad I met Mrs. Christison who was ready.



Leslie Cheek was ready. But it was all in the original building without any of the renovations. And we were down on the lower level. Leslie had an office on the top level. Down here all the offices were... the room dividers were the bookcases, everybody in the same... Bill Gaines was there, you know. He was one of them that taught the children that came to the Museum.

RW: Yes, he started in the 1950's.

MD: That's where I did everything that I did. And when they wanted to do a ball, Leslie liked the glamorous things. It was his idea, the Viennese Ball. I can tell you all about how we did that. And we didn't have any money, we had nothing to do it on. You know, we'd never done it before. And we had such a funny time. My husband didn't want to come to it, a Viennese Ball dance. And where were we going to sit? That is a whole story itself.

RW: I know and all the lighting, you know. The Viennese Ball was an annual event for how many years – fifteen or twenty?

MD: At least, and it's gone now, but the first one was the one that I was Co-Chairman. It was from scratch. We'd never done anything before, but we knew that Leslie wanted the symphony players upstairs, you know, where we would have the tables for dining, you know, all that sort of thing, the orchestra. I got Mallory Freeman to write up a scenario of the dance, the evolution of the waltz, the dance. And I got Arthur Murray dancers to come out to exhibit.

RW: Oh, really, well that's a name from the past!

MD: Because they would be the exhibit. We were in the Marble Hall, you know, took the horse out. That's where the most... But everybody was eating in the galleries, and the idea was that's dangerous. It was incredible, but I then learned at the end when Mallory had given a great thing he had written all about the evolution of the dance, and he's a great narrator. And they showed us the dances. And it turned out that none of the devices that fed into where people were eating were working, so that nobody heard anything.

RW: The P.A. system was out?

MD: So everything doesn't always work out the way you plan it.

RW: The Museum used to have a P.A. system that was in all of the galleries, I remember that.

MD: But it was the beginning.

RW: You really had significant engagement...

MD: I had engagement...

RW: ...from the 1940's into, probably into today, at least, that's marvelous, forty or fifty years.



MD: Yeah, I did and I kept, as I've told Richard, I've got twenty-five scrapbooks I started keeping when I was in high school. So I have all the pictures that came out in the newspaper from the beginning, a few things from the Viennese Ball.

RW: So, you've kept a clipping file to rival that of the library? You know, the Library kept a file...

MD: We made a dance card out of Reynolds metal. They'd just moved to town, and we got them to give us a lot of Reynolds Metals things. And I've got one of those. It's in my scrapbook, how we made them. And that was for your dates you know, like a Ball, with a little cord on it. I've got one of those.

RW: Well, we'll have to go on to talking about some of those other chapters at another time. Let's step downstairs to the American Galleries, though, so you can see the Guayasamín painting.

MD: I'd love to do that, anything that you have time to do.