

Kelly

KELLY: I have pictures of that too, when we were in Dallas, both of us receiving our fashion awards.

MAXWELL: You receiving our fashion awards, and you reciting Shakespeare's sonnets absolutely floored me because I could never remember them, and loved them.

KELLY: I don't remember any of them.

MAXWELL: You had a book of it, or I did, but one of us had it -
- you probably did.

KELLY: In Texas, was it?

MAXWELL: Yes, a little book of sonnets.

KELLY: I do have one sometimes in my handbag because I love having little books to travel with because my handbag is my survival kit. I have everything in that.

MAXWELL: You had your make-up kit then, and you have it now, I remember.

KELLY: The same one. I do. Absolutely

MAXWELL: The same one, I know, which I love. That's one of the things that -- that also -- [01:00] when I was talking about clothes and you said "Oh, I still have a Zuckerman suit," and I said "Oh, that's marvelous; that's just the way I feel about clothes," you know that you should keep them if you --

KELLY: Well, when they are old friends you hate to depart with them, but with Caroline and the other -- when was it last year she showed me something in a magazine -- she said "Mommy, now look at this. This is exactly the suit that I want this year, now this is what I'm trying to find." And I said "hold on." And I went into my -- the depths of my closet -- and came up with the identical suit that I had made in London years ago when I was making *Mogambo* and it was one of these beautiful tweeds that would never wear out and Caroline put it on and it looked as though it had been made on her, and she wore it. And I said "I am lending it to you, not giving it." (laughter) Tell me once --

MAXWELL: Some woman wrote you and you felt sorry for her asking [02:00] you had so many clothes and would you please send her something and you sent her a suit and she --

KELLY: -- that was a terrible story. It was a woman out of the country, asked if -- she thought she was just my size and she asked if I had any old clothes to send her that she would be happy to have them. And , so I sent her what I thought would be suitable for someone living in the country and I gave up one of my lovely, old, tweed suits that I really cherished (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) and I think she was expecting rather glamorous Hollywood clothes and was very disappointed with what I sent her and she sent

it back. And I took out my green tweed suit and put it back in my closet and wore it for a few more years.

MAXWELL: I know. I remember that. She probably had ideas of one of those things you wore in high society. Which were beautiful.

KELLY: I suppose. I was sorry to disappoint her.

MAXWELL: Watching [03:00] children grow up, and I don't know -- an awful lot of my memories go back to Switzerland somehow.

KELLY: Well, we had some lovely times in Switzerland, and of course when the children were younger --

MAXWELL: We were all relaxed.

KELLY: -- we could stay there longer and weren't confined to school holidays. It was fun.

MAXWELL: But Rainier seemed to have much more fun with the children somehow in the country.

KELLY: And of course they were all starting to -- you know -- I was teaching them to ski and of course now they have to wait for me. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

MAXWELL: One dog I had once, didn't last long. This one, I think, was one of those valentines -- we were there February 14 and we were all making valentines.

KELLY: No, when we had our George Washington party --

MAXWELL: Oh, George Washington, that's right. That was such fun.

KELLY: Lovely. That's a cute one. [04:00]

MAXWELL: Here we are at the Roget, and talk about coats --
having coats a long while -- I still have that coat.

KELLY: You still have that one.

MAXWELL: Pink Harris tweed. That's when I --

KELLY: That's a lovely shade.

MAXWELL: -- had them do Harris -- they never did Harris tweed
in pinks, or blues, you know. They were the men's -- this
was all then --

KELLY: But do you still go up to those factories and to those
-- of course those were probably -- it was more of a
cottage industry --

MAXWELL: Well, those are -- they are coming back, as everything
does. I was disappointed for five or six years. I had
collections in tweeds and nobody used them. I had tweeds
on my shelf and now everything is that Ultrasuede.

KELLY: Well, is that -- I was going to ask -- is that because
Ultrasuede has taken over for the tweeds?

MAXWELL: Well, for me, unfortunately, I think several other
designers have been able to do things with tweeds, but they
are coming back now and asking [05:00] me for tweeds and
grey flannels, which I love. All those fabrics.

KELLY: You've always done those things so beautifully.

MAXWELL: This fall I'm doing a line to line copy of my own clothes from 1935-40.

KELLY: No.

MAXWELL: It ought to be amusing to take the old ones out.

Because when I show the old ones everybody says "oh, I wish I could have that."

KELLY: Well, the show that we had for the Lindberg evening, that was such a success. They were lovely.

MAXWELL: Those first ones are the ones everybody wants to buy. There's a long camels-hair coat and a black watch dress that everyone wants.

KELLY: And what was fun the men were so interested that evening and they loved seeing the old clothes and how contemporary they were. They were really interested in it, I thought.

MAXWELL: I think -- I always am amused -- I don't go out very often now -- but when I used to go out, and men would come in and shop for their wives were always insisting on their wives buying my clothes [06:00] which I thought was rather nice. They said "Well, it looks as if it's going to wear a long while." (laughter) And I love men's commentary on clothes. I like -- once I had a young man review my spring collection a long while ago and it was one of my favorite -
- I'll send you a copy sometime --

KELLY: Really?

MAXWELL: -- a young man in Arizona, and he apologized for having to cover -- he said he was an art critic and a literary critic and he was sorry he didn't know much about fashion.

KELLY: I think they should do that more often. I think it would be fun for the critics, too.

MAXWELL: I think they should, yeah.

KELLY: That every once in a while a film critic should come and do clothes and a music critic should review an art show or something. I think it would be stimulating for them as well and it would be fun for the public.

MAXWELL: Well, I'll send you this because I think he had a much more interesting comment on the clothes than anything I've ever had written [07:00] about me in these press things, you know.

KELLY: Because the people who do this over and over and over again, they see so much more than the ordinary public does so that their viewpoint has to be different and they do become jaded in their outlook a little bit.

MAXWELL: Yes, and they see the same thing too much. And they're looking for --

KELLY: And they're looking for fashion news, whereas the average person is looking for something that is useful that

fits into her lifestyle that is going to hold up a few seasons and -- I mean for practical reasons -- the average person just can't change complete wardrobes every six months or every year. It's just not possible, and everything is so accelerated that the fashion news has become so accelerated that every six months they are looking for dramatic fashion -- and I think that's why your clothes have been so successful and that it's, you know, [08:00] they are just classic. One is always comfortable; one is always -- your fabrics are always so elegant -- I've always adored the raw silks that you used to use so much of. And they're still so good looking.

MAXWELL: They get unpopular and popular again; it's very strange, but I still have them. I've used them for 35 years now and this year they are a little more popular. I have a couple of high colors, but that is what I call a [thermostatic?] fabric. I've had pants of that and I've been warm in them when I want to be warm and cool when you want to be cool. I don't know it is about that particular fabric that does that. You know, you can wear a cashmere sweater under a coat of that and I'm sure you'll be just as warm as -- not a very heavy wool overcoat.

KELLY: Well, I had one of your raw silk coats that I wore all fall, over trousers and -- [09:00]

MAXWELL: Well, if you had a little, warm sweater on underneath it, you'd be warm.

KELLY: And it was fantastic.

MAXWELL: But I think that the hectic changes, especially in the '60s was absolutely disastrous for women, I mean, for the way they look. You look on the streets today and even in its lowest common denominator what we saw the other night was horrifying, I thought.

KELLY: Well, I think the '60s was a moment where it was -- where the attitude was "I don't care what I look like." It was this expression of freedom and "I don't care what I look like." And when kids would say that to me, "I don't care what I look like," I would say, "Well, you don't care; you don't have to look at yourself all day. I have to look at you." (laughter)

MAXWELL: That's a marvelous comment.

KELLY: Dressing is a question of consideration for others who have to look at you all day long.

MAXWELL: Sure. And also manners have lost their significance and manners [10:00] aren't something that are artificial; they have to be natural and they are a cushion in life, good manners are, of course. But even today, the uncombed hair look -- they are always afraid of being a little --

you don't have to be too polished to be relaxed and comfortable in your clothes.

KELLY: Well, I think the important thing is to dress for the occasion and when one feels comfortable in clothes for an occasion, this is what makes all the difference.

MAXWELL: Oh, it does. There's where you are marvelous with your clothes. The first time I noticed that I remember up at [Rockeshelle?] once, you had a charming cotton dress on, and I looked down at your shoes and you had the oldest pair of -- but beautiful because they were leather -- sandals. And you said, "Oh, I wore those in *Mogambo*" and that was about 10 years before I guess, and you'd had them ever since. But you looked so right because they were comfortable and they went with the cotton dress and looked [11:00] relaxed in your clothes. And I don't know if you remember the time in London when -- I think you were probably pregnant with [Albie?] and you had a big raincoat on, and you had a scarf on your head and very comfortable shoes. And you walked out and I took a picture of you and some absolutely asinine woman wrote you up and said, "Look how un-chic she is," and I wrote back to her and got a letter I think I sent to you -- and I said, "There's a woman that knows -- who knows how to dress. She goes to a coronation of say, the shah, and she is dressed absolutely

impeccably and if she's going out shopping on a rainy, London street, you wear a raincoat," and they weren't long at that time if you remember.

KELLY: That's right. It's when the short skirts were first coming in and I was criticized for having a rain coat a few inches too long. (laughter)

MAXWELL: It was so stupid. They did retract it. [12:00]

KELLY: I mean now -- that's what's nice, a little bit, about the freedom of styles today that people aren't measuring hemlines. You can wear more or less what suits you and what you feel like. I mean the length of dresses doesn't matter so much. But I remember years ago, when the Dior new look came in, and the dresses were eleven-and-a-half inches from the ground and they were measured -- even -- and I suppose up until about five years ago, it was the hemline too. The "nth" of an inch was measured and important.

MAXWELL: There Chanel was so wonderful because I (inaudible) Chanel -- she said always keep your skirts about an inch-and-a-half to two inches below your knee and leave them there and you won't have to worry.

KELLY: And she held out through all the ups and downs.

MAXWELL: Through all the ups and downs.

KELLY: The battle of the hemlines.

MAXWELL: (inaudible; overlapping dialogue) today, if you wear a straight skirt and [13:00] cardigan jacket. But the great big, bulky look -- and the strange part of it is -- they are selling size two and most of the young designers today don't make anything old -- larger than a 12, and they go from 2 to 12.

KELLY: Well I -- when I go into stores they say "What size?" I have no idea. I can only go by measurements and pull out a tape measure and start measuring things. The sizes are so crazy and each manufacturer has a different (inaudible).

MAXWELL: And a different look, in a way, because the bulky look has been in for so long that I hope it's going out soon.

KELLY: Well I think so. It seems to me --

MAXWELL: I think the slender skirt --

KELLY: -- waistlines appearing and I think young girls go to so much effort today to keep trim and to keep thin, that why cover it all up in a -- [14:00]

MAXWELL: -- with a great big, bulky look. But there are two types of figures in women. There are so many, but there are two distinct types and that is: a feminine figure with a small waist and fairly rounded hips and some bust, of course, and preferably large shoulders, you know, fairly broad shoulders. You can dress that woman with a belt and she looks marvelous. Then you have the boyish figure which

has slim hips, a larger waist, and not much bust and they fall into all variations of the same thing. Some of them appear shaped larger up here and smaller on top and they are difficult to dress, but I like to make clothes that fit both of these women. I love -- I can't wear a belt at all. And even when I was a model I never liked a belt particularly; I liked sort of a loose jacket and straight skirts, [15:00] but I loved to do the peasant look with a full skirt and a little waistline. Actually it's a prettier look and more feminine, especially in the evening.

TOOEY: That was fantastic. That was really wonderful.

(inaudible)

KELLY: Can Fanny pick up that phone do you think?

MAXWELL: I'll get it.

KELLY: I don't know if that's yours, or mine, or what.

TOOEY: Princess Grace, you have been a friend of Ms. Maxwell for close to 25 years, I guess.

KELLY: Yes, it's been a long while.

TOOEY: And obviously as a friend you've looked at her both as a friend and as a great designer. What have been your impressions of your design through the years? When you have thought of her as a designer, as a [16:00] person that made clothes that you've been comfortably wearing, what have your reactions been?

KELLY: Well, I think what I like about Vera's clothes, first of all, is that they are classic and I think she designs for the woman who has a busy life, who wants to be elegant, but wants her clothes to be rather classic and rather -- how can I say -- it's hard to find just the right words (laughter) -- but, and of course every woman wants to feel well-dressed, whatever the occasion. And one's whole -- you know -- if one isn't dressed properly for an occasion, a woman is unhappy and feels self-conscious and dress is so important, and I think Vera understands the psychology of a woman and the different aspects [17:00] of life and activities and designs accordingly and as she has explained herself she understands the problems of certain types of figures and silhouettes and takes this into consideration and, I think -- I've always been very comfortable in all of the clothes that I've had of Vera's. I'm a great fan. I have been with her often when she has been shopping for materials or for accessories or certain colors and she is very inventive, although her things are very classic, she -- her imagination is wonderful as far as buttons, or trimmings or the types of tweeds, the types of materials, the colors and she's done so much with the new ultra-suede. Her speed suit is [18:00] really quite a novel idea and I think very practical and wonderful for today's style of

living. And she has had to continue for so many years, been true to herself, to her own ideas of fashion, and also kept with the time, shows that -- what a really classic designer she is.

TOOEY: As a consumer, what do you think of the trends that women have been forced through, through the years? You certainly have had to be subject to it as a person in the public eye.

KELLY: Yes, of course my life dictates a certain type of wardrobe, but there are certain styles that I've liked more than others. I've tried to -- first of all, I've tried to dress -- to put my good points [19:00] to advantage and hide the bad ones and still tried to stay, you know, up-to-date. There were some trends in the 60s that I didn't find suited me particularly and I kept on with my own kind of classic wardrobe that I felt was right for me.

TOOEY: You also have three very lively children, one of whom has just been married, and you've had to deal with them as consumers. Do you have an image of the fashion industry as it relates to a mother and children?

KELLY: Well, I've always been interested in fashion, and my daughter Caroline is too. She certainly is too; she has her own sense of style, and I've -- you know, I've had fun buying clothes for her, but she likes -- she has her own --

I think [20:00] I understand her sense of style and also with my younger daughter who has her own very definite ideas. But each one shows her personality in the way she dresses, and I think that's what's important and good instead of following the fashion absolutely to the tee to be up-to-date I think one has to develop one's own personal fashion sense.

TOOEY: Through the many movies that you've given to the world as a great actress, were you directly involved in the selection of your clothes or what was the role of the designers?

KELLY: Well, I was, very much so. I worked with -- the very first pictures I made, perhaps not -- but afterwards I worked very closely with Edith Head and Helen Rose who did most of my clothes in pictures and if I did a costume picture I had great fun researching the period [21:00] and, you know, finding the kinds of things I'd like to wear.

TOOEY: Did you find Miss Head and Miss Rose -- did they work with you in a sense as opposed to being --

KELLY: Oh yes, yes, absolutely. Both had a great -- you know, how can I say -- respect for the part -- what was necessary for the character -- and Edith Head and I would -- I did three pictures for Alfred Hitchcock and Edith Head was the designer for those films and we worked together

very closely and would exchange ideas and Mr. Hitchcock would leave us very much on our own and gave us his trust (laughter) to come up with something that would be right. So, it was great fun for me to be able to work that closely [22:00] with the designer.

TOOEY: Didn't you do some modeling yourself as a very young person?

KELLY: I did, yes. When I was a student here at the American Academy I worked as -- I did photography, modeling in the afternoons -- I didn't do that much fashion; I did a little bit, but I did more of the -- it was called "illustration modeling" of ads for toothpaste and shampoos and refrigerators (laughter); those kind of -- the healthy American look rather than the chic fashion beauty. (laughter)

TOOEY: We were talking about your three children, of course, and your being a very active mother and needing to support both roles, that of mother and figure of state. You must've -- have you ever been asked to in essence buy a designer, [23:00] to promote a designer by selecting their clothes? Or do you really feel that it's been independent?

KELLY: No, I have always tried to be independent in that way that I like to choose as I wish and there are certain designers in Paris that I have gone to more frequently than

others, of course, but I have -- I get quite a few of my things from Dior, some from Saint Laurent, (inaudible), Madame [Grey?] and here in this country I used to -- as Vera mentioned -- I used to very much like the suits of Ben Zuckerman and many other American designers I've worn their clothes frequently. But I've always been very faithful to Vera - first of all because she's [24:00] been a very close friend, and I've admired her work.

TOOEY: It's very admirable work, for sure. Just in summary, can you think back through -- let's say the last 25 years or so, last 30 years -- of the highlights of design that you felt were important rather than simply trendy, but they were really making a statement?

KELLY: Well, I suppose the first big fashion news that I was aware of was the new look of Dior just after the war and that was just at the time I was coming to New York to study, and so it was an exciting time when I was modeling then. A time when his new look had swept the world and was creating all kinds of fashion excitement and then I don't know -- I suppose when I was doing a film working with [25:00] Edith Head, the style was very much the stiff petticoats and the big bouffant skirts and I wanted to get away from that and so in one of the pictures we did together we tried a whole different look, sort of brought

back some of the mousseline dresses and chiffons and soft fabrics which hadn't been used for a long time -- which was quite a departure at that time in Hollywood, which was about 1954, I suppose, 1953, 54, and then -- I don't know -- I didn't care very much for the sack look and that period. And I didn't like the mini-skirts, but ...

TOOEY: Good classic design, I think is --

KELLY: Well, I feel more comfortable in something like that so naturally one tends to [26:00] like what suits oneself best.

TOOEY: Well, thank you very much, Princess, for these few moments. I certainly appreciate it. That's great. That's really fun.

END OF INTERVIEW

TOOEY: [27:00] We're sitting in the offices of the Library of the Fashion Institute of Technology on the afternoon of March 14, 1979. This is John Tooley speaking, and with me is Ms. Nancy White, a certainly historically important person for her role as editor of *Harper's Bazaar* and her lifelong involvement in the fashion industry, and we certainly are thankful for Miss White's continued

involvement at FIT and especially, of course, for her involvement on this project on the life of Vera Maxwell. Welcome, Miss White.

WHITE: It's good to see you again.

TOOEY: I know that you're here working in the library. You seem to never stop, from one project to the next. What is this project you are working on now?

WHITE: John, this is a book on a very important photographer called Martin [Luncatchy?] who's a Hungarian. He was the first -- he was a photo journalist originally -- [28:00] and then when he came to the States and Caramel Snow took him under her wing -- she put him -- she asked him to photograph fashion and he indeed was the first photographer to make fashion move. Dick Avadon, and a piece he did for the Bazaar after Luncatchy's death, credits Luncatchy with his -- with the inspiration for his work of becoming a photographer. [Cartier Brasson?] as well -- he was -- he died tragically, not tragically, he died very suddenly, happily watching, I think, a soccer match. He loved athletics and sports, but he died penniless and was about to sink without a trace when Hofstra, in the process of doing a show on fashion photographers, asked me to help them, and when I went out there, I found that they [29:00] knew very little about Luncatchy; I was fortunate enough to

know him and to work with him. So, I became, you know, the person that was answering questions on Luncatchy and John Aston, who was at that time a Fashion Director at *Harper's Bazaar* for the Promotion Department -- not the Editorial Department -- became interested and asked me if I would work on a book about Luncatchy. It's been fascinating, but difficult work because so little of it was left because in his latter years just before he died he was so broke, he had lost everything and didn't keep track and it's been a search, search, search project. So, what I was doing this afternoon was making photocopies of the bound volumes of *Harper's Bazaar* in which his work appeared in order to reproduce them in this book that John and I are working on. It's a book we hope will be out for Christmas next year -- I suppose it will be about [30:00] 180 page, 200 page book. Chiefly photographs and we'll reprint, I hope -- I haven't talked to him, but I'm sure he'll say yes -- Dick's piece on Luncatchy. There will be a scholarly piece by Bill Ewing from The Center for International Photography; a little thing from Cartier Brasson, and that's about it as far as text is concerned. I've written something that's very brief and rather like Luncatchy's work -- fast. He was a riveting guy -- did a great deal of work in Hollywood -- they adored him out there because for the first time

instead of those, sort of studio shots -- stiff studio shots -- he took pictures of people moving. I mean they are just wonderful pictures. There's a picture of Elizabeth Arden standing on her head, you know, which is a classic. And there are marvelous pictures of Crawford and of Deitrick and there's an old picture of [31:00] Garbo under a big beach umbrella so all you see are her legs, but that's kind of fascinating. He had terrific history; he started off in Budapest and then moved to Berlin, but he was the highest paid photographer in Europe at the time and he was one of the highest paid ones here, and it's just, you know, there he was sinking without a trace and it's a labor of love, but it's a labor I love -- sort of getting things down on paper and going over his work. I mean, it's so contemporary; everybody uses that word -- but when you realize these pictures were taken in the 30s -- early 30s -- they stand up superbly and he was always -- I worked with him from the time I was a kid -- and he [32:00] never, you know, he would never let the girl stop to calm her hair, or brush her hair or look in the mirror. He made -- the first famous picture was in *The Bazaar* of Lucille Brokaw running on a beach on a cold, January day and he just made her run whereas normally bathing suits would be photographed in the studio or in a -- you know -- static situation. Well, he

stopped all the static and as you go through the volumes it's incredible the influence he has had on many, many photographers. I'm not going to name names, I just mentioned Dick and Cartier Brasson because they have written on the subject but his influence was so strong; still is. I just ran into a picture of a girl on roller skates; it looks as if she could've been photographed today. So, that's really what it's all about. [33:00] This is the tedious part, in a way, but thank heaven for FIT and your bound volumes because we couldn't have -- we really -- there would have been no way to produce the book without your files and your volumes.

TOOEY: Well, that's great and the purpose of the library. Not only to serve the students but also the industry and people such as yourself serve as researchers and editors and publishers. Miss White you have had -- in fact -- certainly not to embarrass you -- but I must tell you the respect that is held for you at FIT is really wonderful. I mean from my vantage point, the few times I've had the pleasure of working with you or being with you, there's no question why it's there. You've had a very, very involved, very full career in the fashion industry. From an unusual vantage point -- that of the critic so to speak, the observer, [34:00] at the times the promoter. At times,

when I'm sure you felt it was necessary; your magazine could step out and stay to a designer "stop, you're doing the wrong thing; you're going the wrong way." In other words, your influence was critical, but obviously very positive in that regardless of what you said -- you were helping -- whether it was negative or positive -- there was help behind the statements that you made. And to a library collection, of course, that kind of person is a hero. I'd like you -- if you wouldn't mind -- to look back to those earlier years when you met so many of the designers who were fighting their way through The Depression, trying to make a go of it [35:00] in the 30s, and you worked with Dorothy Shaver and her whole publicity effort to promote American design and of course *Harpers* has always been a supporter of American fashion. There is one person, in particular, I'd like you to think back about, if you would, and that is Vera Maxwell, the American Designer, and could you sort of draw a picture for us of what she was like when you first met her -- or what the circumstances were all about?

WHITE: John, when I first met Vera, I knew that I was on *Good Housekeeping* --

TOOEY: I'm sorry.

WHITE: Well that's -- quite-- I mean -- that's when I knew many of the designers -- and I remember Vera even in those days -- I'm not sure whether she was in business for herself at that time, I don't think so. But Vera was one [36:00] of that group -- the second wave of Dorothy Shavers American designers. Clara Potter, and Vera, and Clara McArdle, and a couple of others, but the thing that I remember most about Vera in the beginning when I first knew her was that she was so friendly and so interested, and I was young and her clothes were a little rich for *Good Housekeeping's* blood. I could not use them in the magazine frequently, but I tried to, as best I could, to report on American design and the American designers in support of what Dorothy Shaver was doing. We did very well with children's clothes at *Good Housekeeping*, [37:00] and so I asked Vera one day if she would do some children's things and she was thrilled at the idea and, you know, just rolled up her sleeves immediately and made some absolutely enchanting children's coats -- she was in the coat world then -- she was not making dresses. I remember a grey, flannel coat she made that we photographed that was just marvelous looking and was just the shot in the arm that the children's market needed at the moment. But it was -- it's so typical of Vera -- she's such an open minded person --

she's interested in so many things. I don't know how well you know her, but when you realize that Vera was originally a dancer; is still interested in the dance, and in opera, she's interested in cooking, she's interested in [traffic in background; inaudible], she's interested in her grandchildren. She has the most incredible mixture of friends. For instance, [38:00] just yesterday that she met Reggie Jackson, and he took her to Studio 54. Now Vera's candid about her age and says she's 75 and we've celebrated her birthday, but that's so typical, there's she'll be at her desk designing in the morning, then she'd fly home and have a luncheon with Brandon, Gill and -- oh, it could be -- Princess Grace, it could be Kathy [Tankas?], it could be Jim McMullen, who runs the restaurant. She's absolutely incredible and she's a catalyst the way she brings -- marvelous catalyst -- the way she brings so many different people together. When you lunch there, there's always a writer, I don't know Mrs. Avery Fisher, for instance, Netta Logan; the conversation just flows like magic. And it's all because of Vera. [39:00] She's really a renaissance woman and in the truest sense she is beautifully read, and wonderfully travelled, and she just makes friends wherever she goes and she doesn't let the ball drop. If she meets somebody, she continues that -- I mean if she meets

somebody that interests her -- and practically everyone does -- she doesn't let it drop there. She continues the relationship and continues the friendship. I talked to Kathy Tankas yesterday who you may or may not know. She's very beautiful and very chic and travels the world over. And she said of Vera's clothes, something that I'd like to repeat to you -- she said "Vera is a designer who understands women and understands their needs." There's a timelessness about her clothes as we know and thank heaven there is, I think that's one of her great [40:00] and wonderful qualities, the fact that you can -- if you still had a Vera Maxwell from the early 1930s you could still wear it today you'd just have to put a zipper in it instead of hooks and eyes." (laughter) And the way she's traveled the world over to get her fabrics to the top of a mountain in Africa, someplace like that, to get a [gelaba?] cloth that came in just piece by piece. Going to the crofters in the mills and working with all the woolen people, the small people in Scotland, and Ireland, in England, too. But she never stops. She's constantly full of ideas and full of an enthusiasm. I think that's one of the great qualities of Vera, along with all the other things I mentioned. She has an [41:00] undying curiosity about people, about things, about the theatre. She's an avid theatre-goer, but if you

talk to her -- if you say you've been to a new, little restaurant -- she'll be there the next day because she'll never will let any grass grow under her feet and I'm sure that -- oh she was a skier, she was an awfully good skier, according to a friend of mine, who, he was a very good skier -- he was absolutely -- he would rather go skiing with Vera than with anyone else, and he was a very attractive gentlemen with a vast number of ladies in the wings. But it was Vera that really intrigued him the most. Loved to dance with her. She's a marvelous dancer. My husband happens to be a good dancer, and he loves to dance with Vera. They Viennese Waltz up a storm, and have a [42:00] marvelous time. She's interested in -- she's so generous to the lighthouse -- she's generous as far as Channel 13 when I was working for Channel 13 on the auction. Every time you call Vera, you strike life. If you get a turn-down, which is rare, it's always with a beautiful explanation, but it's just marvelous to talk to her on the telephone about anything. You know, she has a marvelous thing where she puts a cabbage in the middle of the table as a centerpiece and I can't make mine work the ways hers worked, but she has offered to come up and, you know, work with the cabbage so I'll have a centerpiece too. These are all just details -- but I think they are things

that make her the person that she is. I find about her clothes [43:00] in thinking a minute ago -- you know, she makes clothes work for you rather than you having to work for your clothes, which in this day and age I think is terribly important. None of us have the time or the self-indulgence to go through the business of going to work for your clothes. Your clothes have to work for you, and she thinks of you the entire time, she thinks of the customer. I happened to be in the showroom last week and over and over again she said "but think of the woman out there who is not 5'8" or 5'7" and-a-half, as her models are, and think of where she wants her pockets and if she's going to buy a cape she has to have the pockets to anchor the cape down. The pockets can't be too low because she -- her customer [44:00] or the average customer -- doesn't have long, long, long arms -- those are models, not customers. And she does understand -- she loves going out, although I'm sure it's terribly tiring, to her customers and to the shops that carry her clothes -- talking with them and making sure that -- learning -- that's the other thing about Vera -- she's still learning. There's darn little that she has to learn but I think every time she talks with a customer she learns something and brings it back to her work. I think she -- we're very fortunate to have had her

for low these many years. As you know she is celebrating her 30th year in business for herself and her 50th year in the fashion industry and her contributions have been numerous and she has always stuck to her last, she's never [45:00] gone off on tangents, ever. She believes in classics, she believes in quality and she believes in simplicity and she believes in function. Now ...

TOOEY: Wow. That certainly is a statement. Miss White, when Madame Grey was in New York last fall, we had the privilege of interviewing her as well, and one of the questions asked of her was "do you think there is such a thing as American fashion as an American fashion, as an American style?" And her answer was -- first of all, she avoided the question, she did not want to answer the question -- but then she said that since we had asked it, [46:00] she would indeed answer it. And her answer was that she did not -- she does not think -- there is such a thing as American fashion. She thinks there is only French fashion, that Americans receive their inspiration from Paris. However, she was quick to add that what Americans do with that information is much more successful and a much better product than what the French do with it. What is your opinion on that statement? Do you define American fashion as an entity or do you see it as a result of other influences?

WHITE: No, I see it as an entity. I'm terribly proud of American fashion. I admire Madame Grey extraordinarily. I would question only one thing. I remember some years ago when I was working for Bergdorf Goodman, [47:00] I asked Madame Grey to come to store and go through it with me. And she had not seen anything like that before and I think she perhaps has not had that much exposure to American fashion. I admire her opinion and I certainly admire her designing. She's, after all, I guess, the last great, French dressmaker. She is such a lore unto herself and she designs so specifically in her own sort of world with her little pin cushion at her waist, and the turban on her head, and her fingers flying over the model as she does her fittings and she drapes on the figure as you know and not on a form -- [48:00] that's my only comment on her statement. I'm not for an instant arguing with what is her opinion because I think she has every right and I can understand it, but I would really love to have her exposed, perhaps more to American fashion. She doesn't come here very frequently and when she does she is so busy and she's so rushed and she doesn't have that much time for exploring. But she was very interested in what I showed her at Bergdorf's. She was interested in the prices too. And the prices at Bergdorf's in those days -- they weren't

quite as high as they are today, but like all prices -- but it seems to me that was what intrigued her more. She looked, you know, and then she'd understand immediately what she was seeing from the fashion and the manufacturing from a workmanship [49:00] standpoint. But then when I tell her the price, that really limited it (laughter).

TOOEY: So then, I guess I could've guessed the answer to the question. In the American fashion scene, in the history of American fashion, where would you place Vera Maxwell?

WHITE: I would place Vera as, with all the things I've said of her before, I think she is part of the backbone of American fashion.

TOOEY: Good. Miss White, thank you very much for your time and I've certainly enjoyed these few moments with you.

WHITE: Well, I've enjoyed talking to you and thank you again for your help on [50:00] the book we are working on.

TOOEY: Great.

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