

GEORGE DANIELL – 6/7/99

This is Madeleine Winter (MW) and I'm here with George Daniell. It's June 7, 1999 and we're going to talk a little bit about George's life today.

George Daniell (GD): I'm just getting over bronchitis but I hope my voice will work all right.

MW: We'll just take our time and—

GD: Well I, the right situation in, for, are you comfortable?

MW: I'm fine.

GD: All right. So am I.

MW: Oh good. We can start. Okay.

GD: Just remember to speak slowly and loudly.

MW: Okay. All right George can you please tell us a little something about your background, like where you were born and anything else you think might be good to put on the tape.

GD: Well, oh I'll just start with, I was born in Yonkers, New York in 1911, May 4, 1911. And I spent most of my life there until I went to Yale College and I graduated from there in 1934. And, I majored in art. Although I didn't really have any formal training in painting. And then after I graduated from college I took a trip to Europe and I was so impressed by an electric camera that I bought in Berlin that I got interested in photography. And at that point it took to make any money was very difficult with painting or drawing which I liked to do and I was doing. But I wanted the photography because I, I found that I could make money by taking portraits. So that led to a scattered or spattered career in photography. Quite a lot of travel. And I was interrupted around 1940 with the war. I was in the army for two years, which was a mistake but it's over. Thank God. And then I worked as a freelance photographer and I met my, my long time friend Steve Doland. I met him right after the war around 1945. And he was a marvelous

person. He was another artist. And I met him at an art school in the Bronx, New York. And we got a long very well and it lasted for forty years.

MW: That's amazing.

GD: We had a, a great relationship. He was, we were lovers and pretty monogamous (chuckles) which is—for forty years. And that is kind of a record.

MW: I think so.

GD: We've been through a lot together. And we finally, we traveled a lot. I worked as a freelance photographer. And he worked as a painter or a frame finisher in New York City. And then finally, we both got fed up with New York City so in 1960 we came to Maine and bought this house.

MW: What made you decide on Maine?

GD: Well we, I'm still here and Steve unfortunately died in 1983. So I've been living here alone since then. Um, he was irreplaceable. And I have many many of his paintings around here and I'm actually writing a story now about my years with him with illustra ... photographs. And I'll see what happens, it's just in the, the initial planning stage. But—and my [garbled] I completely switched back to painting, watercolors because it's easier for me - slightly debilitated to do them and I'll show, show you some of them later. So that sort of is a capsule biography.

MW: Okay. So what made you decide to come to Maine?

GD: Oh, well first of all I was fed up with New York City, the, the grind, the filth of, the fast pace and all that. You, you sort of use up a place. And I, earlier in my life before I met Steve I'd gone to Monhegan Island one summer and I fell in love with it. Then I, I went in September and the, just for the day and I stayed a month. I, I hired a fisherman's cabin for \$7.00 a month.

MW: Wow that's amazing.

GD: And I painted and photographed and I was very happy there – I loved Monhegan. And that is when I first got my taste of Maine. And then, then I went back into the city and scrounged around (clears throat) for quite a, quite a few years. Let's say that was in 19 ah, 38 when I went to Monhegan. Then when I was in New York City with Steve, I met Clara Fargo Thomas who was a famous mural painter. And she has, she had a house on Somes Sound here on Mt. Desert Island called Fortune Rock. It was rather a famous house. And she and I got, got along beautifully, yeah. Not sexually but we were just (chuckle) very great friends. So I came up to visit her on Mt. Desert Island and then finally decided I liked it so much that that was where I wanted to settle. So that's when Steve gave up his job as a (clears throat) frame finisher and we came up here and both painted. I, I, I worked with Downeast magazine for a while.

MW: For which magazine?

GD: Downeast.

MW: Oh, Downeast.

GD: Yes, I wrote stories, I took photographs for them. And I had, we both had exhibits up here in Northeast Harbor Wingsberry Gallery and unfortunately, time goes so quickly, and unfortunately Steve became ill and died which I certainly wasn't counting on because he was ten years younger than I and I was expecting that I'd go first and he'd look after me you know. But it, it wasn't meant to be that way, it wasn't fated that way so. Here I am, I'm, I'm content to live here. I'm, I'm glad I did all the traveling I did when I was young because my legs worked and everything was cheap. I mean when I went to Europe in the, in the forties and the fifties things were so cheap. And so when, enjoyable, nowadays I couldn't afford it. So I'm, I'm so glad I did all that.

MW: Yeah.

GD: And now I'm, I'm working probably in a more abstract way, but I'm about to have a show in Northeast Harbor the 24th of June until July 7th.

MW: Well that's great.

GD: That's the second show I've had at, at a big, fine art gallery in Northeast Harbor. I had one there last year, twenty watercolors. It was a sellout.

MW: Great.

GD: So it was very encouraging and so I'm looking forward to the, to the show this year. And that's where I am now. I have a very good friend, Roy, Roy Oxley who more or less looks after me although he lives in Milbridge which is a long ways from here. But he spends about two days a week down here. And he's a marvelous person. He, he builds houses. He's 33 so there's quite an age difference. But I'm not aware of it when I'm with him. So he, he just loves to, no he's sleeping. He's sleeping upstairs because he works part time as a night watchman at Wyman's blueberry factory in Cherryfield.

MW: I know where that is.

GD: So he worked all night and now he's sleeping today and he probably won't, won't wake up until about 1:00 or 2:00.

MW: So how did you meet Steve?

GD: What?

MW: How did you meet Steve?

GD: Steve?

MW: Yeah, Steven?

GD: Oh, I met Steven in art class in and of all the things I've written is, it was in art class in the Bronx in New York. And he was just there and we just took to each other. And it took a long time for us to get intimate. I mean we, we just became very good friends and took long walks around the reservoir there and he had just lost his brother George and I'd just lost my mother. I, I worshiped my mother, I loved her very much but unfortunately she, she died at 50 of lung cancer. And it hit me very hard and so Steve and I commiserated with each other about

that and other things and then we just grew slowly to know each other. I think maybe that's the best way.

MW: Yeah it is.

GD: Slowly. And then I had to go in the army for a couple of years but he, he kept writing. And when I got out of the army then we, we got together and consummated our, our, our love, our affair whatever you want to call it. Then we took a trip in the, in February sort of like a honeymoon we went to Mexico on the train, went down to Mexico City and Acapulco and spent a month.

MW: That's wonderful.

GD: And then ever since we've traveled together we've taken, we've ah, crisscrossed the country in my car photographing and writing and he, he painting. These paintings here are his. The big ones and this one here. The rest are mine.

MW: I also wanted to find out have you always known that you're homosexual or was that something you discovered.

GD: Well I had a lot of problems there. I'm, first of all I come from a, I'm an only child and from unsophisticated parents. And we sort of lived alone. They didn't have many friends and so, so I was really dumb about life, what went on. And it wasn't until I was a senior in Yale that I discovered I was homosexual. And it really knocked me out almost because all my friends at that time were rednecks and I'd been brought up with that attitude, homophobic attitude. So I went through sort of stereotype of, of somebody, some people, other people. I, I contemplated suicide. I went through a terrible time trying to accept myself and I finally did. I never came out to my parents which I've always regretted. But I, I—because I tried very hard not to be gay, that's, that's the word I'll use now. Then it wasn't in, in use. It was queer and or homosexual. And God knows I tried with the girls and, because before I made this discovery about myself I used to go out with them and take them to dances and football games and things. But I was always interested in them from the neck up not from the neck down. And so that's when I realized there's something different about me was that I didn't want to go to bed with these girls. So it was a terrible period of adjustment which I finally got through and I went back to living with

my family in Yonkers for a while. But I used to, I led a double life so because I used to go into, I had this Ford roadster and I used to go into New York City to the only gay bar that I knew there. I used to go in there quite often and drink. That's when I started drinking.

MW: What was the name of that bar?

GD: Flamingo.

MW: Flamingo.

GD: And the—I, as I said that's when I started drinking because I was very shy, I've always been very shy and I needed a few drinks to go into the bar. And I, I—it's the same old story I think about bars, not the best place to meet people and I mean I just drank and talked and came home by myself usually, usually. And there were other, there were other bars in New York then but not many. And the raid, raids, that was a chancy I was never caught and it was called the bird circuit. They had all the bars called the Blue Parrot and the Red Parakeet and what it is. There's just three or four bars but they were, they were sort of furtive I didn't enjoy them really. The Flamingo was very, was kind of nice and drew me back. And that went on, sort of my looking or cruising or whatever you call it ah, for years and drinking until I met Steve. And then when I met Steve it was a completely different picture. I was, we just stayed together for years and I, I, I cut out the bar scene. But we drank a lot together. And I have, I'm an alcoholic at present because I haven't had a drink in 15 years and I don't, I don't need one and don't have any hankering for it. But I was hospitalized here at Mt. Desert Hospital after Steve died. After he died it got out of control. So that's my story. Oh my God, I'm giving you an earful.

MW: That's what we're here for... I saw the exhibit program from your photographs that Sturgis sent to us that had the photo of Sophia Loren. Could you talk a little bit about your time in Italy?

GD: About what Italy?

MW: About Italy, yeah, you were in Italy for a while?

GD: Yes, well I loved Italy the minute I got there I felt at home. One reason because they,

they revere artists over there. You're, you're something special. When, when I left the army in, in Yonkers, New York they didn't think an artist was worth much. They'd always said well what do you do for a living and so you felt like a pariah. But in Italy you were the top. A—aside from that I, I loved the climate and the people are so beautiful. The food was so good. And I'm a, I'm a glutton, I would say gourmet or gourmand or something but I love food anyway and I love, I love garlic and olive oil and garlic and red wine and everything in Italian. So I was always happy in Italy and I still, still, I don't know when I'll ever be able to return but I, I like it the best. I've traveled around the world twice with Steve. And one, one trip that I took by myself was when I went to see the [not clear – place name?] with my Leica camera and snapped Audrey Hepburn and they, they liked the pictures and so I was hired for a short time to, to take her picture. And Sophia Loren was in the next set so I took some pictures of her. I only have one sitting but they're very good pictures.

MW: Yeah I really liked it. And what's interesting looking at that program is some of the photographs I have seen in different places not knowing who took them. So it was very interesting for me to see that.

GD: So you have one of my brochures?

MW: Yes I think the '91 show, the 1991?

GD: I don't know but I have a lot of them here somewhere. And I also have a, which you may not have seen, I'll give it to you. The Borealis Press ah, which is local ah, has printed I think about thirty cards of, with my photographs with different, very different photographs. With a—appropriate quotes under them. I'll show you, I'll give you a booklet which has them all in. And those are quite nice, I'm quite proud of them. And that brings, it brings in a good um, income from it.

MW: That's great.

GD: And that came out of the blue just ah, Mark Borman the president of the company came here and saw what photographs and transferred them into these cards.

MW: I understand too that you were good friends with Berenice Abbott?

GD: Yes.

MW: Could you talk a little about your friendship with her?

GD: Yeah (clears throat). I didn't know Berenice Abbott until I came to Maine. And, it seems that she was aware of me because she saw some of my pictures in New York City in Photo Researches. I think she, she has pictures there too. And I was aware she told people that she liked my work and she'd like to meet me. So when we were both over here in Maine I went up to see her and she was living in Blanchard. She had bought a big house up there and renovated it. It was on a river flowing through and she lived there by herself with her cat Butch. And she was a lot of fun, she was a lot of fun. And Steve and I we used to go up there quite often and spend the night. And we'd drink with her and dance with her, she loved to dance but she just [garbled ...] I guess. And she was a wonderful person and she was one of the first people I met who was open about herself, about being a lesbian. She was open about it, she never made any pretences or anything. And she used to tell us about her life in Paris and the personal and pre-war Germany when, when so many Americans went over there because it was so cheap. And, and she, she had quite a career in Paris. She had, she had many exhibits of her portraits over there. So Berenice and Steve and I were kind of a threesome. We got along very well together. She came down here for Thanksgiving a couple of times. She lost her cat once. The cat (chuckles) I opened the door by mistake and the cat went out. And it took us a week to find the God damn cat. (laughter) And then, then she moved ah, from Blanchard. She built a long cabin on, on Monson Lake. And a very beautiful cabin and she lived there until she died.

MW: Now both the photographs that you sent were, those were in the cabin or in Blanchard?

GD: Yes.

MW: The cabin?

GD: In the cabin. With her cat. And I miss her, I miss her. She never took my picture she, she kept saying she was going to but she never did. And she wound up with Susan, I can't

remember Susan's last name who looked after her until she did die. And Jackie Kennedy flew up to see her in, in the log cabin.

MW: Really?

GD: They were very, it was a very hush hush affair. She came with security guards to pay homage to Berenice.

MW: That's amazing.

GD: That was very nice. They're all dead now.

MW: Yes they are.

GD: That's the trouble with getting as old as I am so many of your friends are, are dead and family. But I, I thank God I, I'll show you, I'll take you in there and show you something. I count my blessings. And mostly Roy is a great great help. And he is, he is gay too. So, so I, I'm not completely out, only to people I trust because there's still a lot of homophobia around, rednecks and so on who are just waiting to clobber you if they—

MW: Yeah unfortunately that's true and we seem to have come, that's a long way from the days when you knew who you were but—

GD: But it, great strides have been made in Maine I must say because when I first came up here, not too long ago, Steve and I went to Portland. We'd go there occasionally and I think there was one gay bar and that was closed you know. It was soon closed, and there was nothing, and then it was closed. Now it's quite different there's quite a few. And they're recognized.

MW: So it was Roland's Tavern, that bar?

GD: What?

MW: Roland's Tavern, was that the name of the bar?

GD: I don't know, I don't remember the name of the, it. I don't remember the name of it. Cycles.

MW: Oh yeah.

GD: I went to Cycles. That was later on I went to Cycles. And I, I don't go anymore. I don't travel far. I go – Bangor and Bar Harbor are pretty much my, that's about as far as I travel. Oh, I'll get you this, you ask me any more questions you want because when I go in there and show you around the gallery we won't be recording.

MW: Right. Well is there anything that you might want to talk about, stories, adventures you've had?

GD: Well I don't know I think I've—

MW: Friends you've had, you know different things.

GD: I think I've kind of exhausted that vein of my, my life.

MW: I understand that you were friends with Tennessee Williams, is that correct?

GD: Oh yes I, I took pictures of him. But, and I admired him greatly, I think, I think he's underrated, a little bit underrated. Because he's really a poet and his beautiful language and I love his work. But when he, he was living in Key West when I was there. Steve and I bought a small house in Key West to escape the Maine winters, for about ten years we used to go down there in the winter. Since, I don't, I don't like it any more it's gotten, it's gotten too chi-chi and expensive boutiques. And it's too gay if you know what I mean. Too, too much, I don't like, I don't like 100% like them. But at that point Tennessee was in bad shape. I mean, I, I, I wouldn't say I was a friend that he'd remember because I, I went with the, the director who, who directed his plays. He took me to see him a couple of times and I photographed while, him while he was talking to the director. But at that point he was so full of alcohol and drugs he wasn't really making sense. He wasn't making sense. Although the picture I took of him they said was the best picture that he's ever had taken, which I still have it here. But unfortunately I, I couldn't

know him any better because he was unreachable then. And it was very sad what happened to him. And he was surrounded by sycophants, people you know that took advantage of him. Well, that's a horror story. So many of them. I had another unfortunate acquaintance was Tom Hagen who wrote *Mr. Roberts*. And he became a very good friend. He was not gay. I think he would have liked to have been but he wasn't. And, but he was a very depressive character and we, actually Steve and I and Tom Hagen went to Europe together on a trip on a tramp steamer for *Life Magazine*. And they, they wanted me as a photographer to take photographs if anything happened of interest to Tom Hagen who was supposed to write a story for them. Well one of his troubles was he had writer's block and after the success of *Mr. Roberts* which was tremendous and he was making a lot of money from the Broadway play. But he just had this feeling he couldn't write anything else. He couldn't top it. He couldn't write a second book. And he stewed about that all the time. And *Life Magazine* gave us a case of scotch to take with us which was a mistake (laughter). So all Tom did was stay in the stateroom and drink scotch and nothing happened. He didn't write a thing. So I couldn't take pictures of nothing. So we toured around Europe a bit and then he really got so tired of the whole thing he left. And actually he went to visit Ernest Hemingway in Cuba. And I read, just last week I read an article about Hemingway in the, I don't know what it was, which it mentions Tom Hagen in his letter, he mentioned Tom Hagen. And let me see, Tom committed suicide.

MW: Oh, he did?

GD: Yeah. We both lived in New York. He lived uptown, I lived in Greenwich Village. And, he had um, he had bought six of our watercolors, framed, he liked them. It was a new style of having—and he furnished them with Alan Campbell, he was furnishing his apartment uptown. And so I was, the next day he telephoned me and said he was very depressed. And this was late at night. And I was tired and I said, there was nothing I could do, and I said I'm coming tomorrow to bring you a watercolor. He said "fine, that's alright. So I arrived the next day with the watercolors, the police were there and he had, he had gone in the bathtub and slit his throat. And that's, that was the end of Tom Hagen. It's such a waste, because he had fame and he had money. And that's what Hemingway said in his letter, what a way to go, because at that point Hemingway did not believe in suicide. And as we know Hemingway finally did it but that was for ill health which is understandable. So you see, I hope I'm not digressing too much.

MW: Oh not at all, not at all.

GD: (chuckles)

MW: It's really very sad because nowadays there's so many treatments for depression. You know back then they didn't really know.

GD: Well there was, reasons, I think health reasons are justified.

MW: Absolutely.

GD: Now my father committed suicide when he was 70 and he had failing health. And I think he realized that it was not going to get better. That's what, that was what his thinking was anyway. And so he shot himself. And here I am 88 (laughs) my stepmother gave me the, the gun (laughs).

MW: Oh my god, family heirloom huh?

GD: There was a little coolness between us. See that bamboo tree? I think that's kind of nice. I, uprooted all the others because it got in the way. But that's kind of nice and I just did a watercolor of that.

MW: That's really nice. So did you do any further work for *Life Magazine*?

GD: No, I, I didn't. the, the thing didn't—

MW: So nothing ever came of that?

GD: Things didn't pan out. I've had pictures in *Life*.

MW: Oh you have?

GD: Yes, but just single pictures. Ah, I had, I've had things in *Coronet* magazine, I had a very nice article about Italy, my favorite pictures of Italy. And a present I have of an agent in New York City for my photographs. And he's trying to make a book deal, I'll show you

something him, would you have my desk book? The Man Nude. And then I have four photographs in here.

MW: Oh really, ooh.

GD: Yeah. There are two, there's two there and there's two another place. And the man sent me a, a copy of this free, it's a \$40 book and it's kind of interesting because it's, it's the male nude from the beginning when they wore loincloths and things.

MW: The one that I particularly liked was in also your exhibit program, the one that I particularly liked is the two brothers at the beach?

GD: Yeah.

MW: That one is a fabulous picture...

GD: Oh yes, yeah. Yeah and the, and part of my life with Steve we, ah, we went to Fire Island before it was really popular and I think the happiest time of our life we, we bought a little cabin that the Coast, the Coast Guard gave up the station there and there was a little cabin next to it. The Coast Guard cap—captain sold it to me for \$100. And so, so then Steve and I went out there, it was, it was unspoiled beach, it was all empty beach. We had to walk a mile from the, from the gay, the small gay resort which is called Cherry Grove.

MW: Right.

GD: Yeah, it wasn't big then, it was small. And then we had to walk up the beach a mile to this little cabin which was all by itself in, in, in the woods. And then that whole period we, we, we stayed there ten years at least until the developers took over and they were buying up property all around. And now I'd hate to go back because it's all high rises and everything else. It's spoiled. But then you could walk miles without any clothes on because there was nobody around.

MW: Right. So were you involved at all with the gay community there?

GD: No.

MW: Not at all?

GD: I wasn't involved in it except that we used to, we used to go down to the bar and the hotel.

MW: Was that Duffy's?

GD: Yes, it was Duffy's. In fact I have a picture, a picture which I think was, you'd kind of like. [goes through portfolio] I've got so much, I've got so many pictures around you have no idea of the ... (looking through photographs)

[pauses in the following section due to looking at photographs and watercolors in the portfolio]

MW: My father was a professional photographer, I know.

GD: I, I have a lot of my pictures color Xeroxed. That, that's another one that ... Fire Island. There's Duffy's Bar.

MW: Yeah. Have you seen Esther Newton's book on Fire Island/Cherry Grove? That's where I have the information there's a book about it.

GD: No, I haven't.

MW: Yeah you might be interested in reading that.

GD: It has all changed. I mean that was a crummy old bar which was fun. And—

MW: These are wonderful.

GD: This is a ... best thing here of Roy. I'm not going through all these but I have the, the original out in my gallery you see but—

MW: The lobster boat.

GD: Yeah.

MW: Yeah great. These are beautiful.

GD: This is Fire Island.

MW: Yup, just a little shack on the beach.

GD: And this is Maine. [pause] I should have majored in lobsters up here. We're back to Maine again.

MW: Yeah, oh that's funny.

GD: And then Monhegan. Wait a minute I'll—there's Monhegan which I did years ago when I first went out there.

MW: Oh this is wonderful.

[pause]

GD: Oh God. That was an early girlfriend before I discovered I was gay.

MW: It's a beautiful painting.

GD: I'm not showing you all these but some that's Grand Manan. And this is autobiographical, it's called Self Crucifixion. I'm trying to get over that you know I'm still, it's taken me years to accept myself as I am. I think I finally have.

MW: That's terrific.

GD: Unfortunately, I have drawbacks (chuckles) which keep me from enjoying myself, accept this. In other words, I had my prostate taken out because it was swollen, not because it was cancerous, and it limits me physically that way. So I'm sort of at half mast. (laughter)

MW: That's better than nothing at your age right?

GD: That's one message I, I give out to, to anybody. Don't let them take your prostate out because the doctor says 90% of my patients can function normally afterwards. Well I was one of the 10% that can't. So I, I say oh I've accepted myself but, but the limitations are not fun. Now ah, I'd so like to show you my gallery and I'll take you there if we have, if we talked enough.

MW: Well what we can do we can do that and if you think of anything else you want to add we can come back and do a little bit more.

GD: I think, you probably had enough anyway haven't you?

MW: Never enough. I could sit here all day and listen to stories.

[End of Tape]

What was Holmes' main argument against restriction?

How did the anti-slavery movement affect women?