

INCITE PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Alice Kandell

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

2020

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Alice Kandell conducted by William McAllister on January 15, 2020. This interview is part of the INCITE Oral History Project.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

Transcriptionist: ATC

Session: 1

Narrator: Alice Kandell

Location: New York, NY

Interviewer: William McAllister

Date: January 15, 2020

McAllister: My name is William McAllister, senior research fellow at the Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Theory and Empirics [INCITE] at Columbia University and I'm here today, January 15, 2020 to talk with Alice Kandell whose collection of antique Tibetan masterpieces comprise the Alice S. Kandell Tibetan Shrine Room at the Smithsonian Institute. In addition, Dr. Kandell has created a second shrine room at her home and continues to make gifts from her greater collection to leading institutions. Two books have been published about the Smithsonian collection, *A Shrine for Tibet: The Alice S. Kandell Collection* by Robert Thurman and Marilyn Rhie and *Assembly of the Exalted: The Tibetan Shrine Room from the Alice S. Kandell Collection at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Smithsonian Institution* by Donald Lopez and Rebecca Bloom. Dr. Kandell has at least four more lives of accomplishment.

One is collecting and making available to the world what has been called "One of the most comprehensive collections of Tibetan sacred art in the west." In this context she has lectured widely on Tibetan art. A second is her photography, which has been exhibited as part of private as well as public collections and is the subject of at least two books that she has written and provided the photographs for that have been published, *Mountaintop Kingdom: Sikkim* and *Sikkim: The Hidden Kingdom*. She has also produced four books of photographs for children including *Ben's ABC Day* and *Max, the Music-Maker* and has written for many magazines. The photographs will also be the subject of a photographic exhibition in Doha, Qatar and a museum

in Bangalore, India. A third career has been her work as a child psychologist, first at Mount Sinai Hospital then the Early Childhood Development Center before retiring from that field. As a result of her interest in and work for children, women's rights, human rights, and music she has also served on the U.S. Presidential Committee on the Arts and Humanities, been vice president of the International League for Human Rights, was a delegate to a U.N. [United Nations] meeting on child trafficking, chair of the International Vocal Arts Institute, and chair of the International Opera Alliance and also chairs the Athenians, an opera training and performing program in New York. She also performs at the Metropolitan Opera as an actress in operas on stage, and has done so for thirty years.

Mixed into all these activities have been her work as a philanthropist, obviously helping to conserve and donate Tibetan art, but also in music and other arenas. As well, she has been and continues to be the mother of two sons and grandmother to three grandsons. Dr. Kandell earned her BA from Sarah Lawrence College and her PhD in child psychology from Harvard University. Welcome Dr. Kandell.

Kandell: Well thank you.

McAllister: So let me begin by talking about your childhood and preteen years and perhaps we can begin by talking about the arts in your life growing up, especially in your home life. So let me start by getting you to kind of think back to when you were a child. What role if any did the arts play in general in your home life?

Kandell: [00:03:00] My father was in real estate. He was a business man, strictly a business man, especially in my childhood. And my mother was a schoolteacher, nursery school teacher, although she had gotten her degree from Barnard College in the classics. Women could not get jobs in those days and so she went into nursery school teaching. There was always art around the house and there was always music in the house. I can't say that there was any special emphasis on art, which neither of them had until my parents got older. But as a child there was always music. I always had music lessons. There was music playing. My parents would go to the opera and eventually started to take me. That's about it for my childhood.

McAllister: What kind of music was around in the house? It was just kind of always playing in the house and that sort of thing?

Kandell: [00:04:04] It was the radio and there were records. I had a record player when I was very young and I used to listen to all kinds of things, mostly popular at the time. Also when I was young we lived in New York City in Greenwich Village. And at that time it was the time of singers called Peter, Paul and Mary and they were also teenagers. And they would go and sit in Washington Square Park and there was a big circle there and they'd play their music there and we'd run out and listen to that. So it was classical at home but I was interested in western music and popular songs and things like that as well and still am by the way. I'm still very interested in those songs and Broadway songs and Broadway shows. I used to listen to that on my record player. In fact, if I liked a piece I'd play it over and over and over again because you could pick up the needle and put it back on that same song over and over and over again when I was a kid. I remember that.

McAllister: So thinking then, moving a little bit more in advance into your teenage years. You went to [Ethical Culture] Fieldston [School] and you were growing up in New York, this was in the 1950s. Was there anything that happened during these years that you think maybe, or maybe not, had any impact on your thinking in terms of art or other ways that impacted your sensitivity and your interest in the idea of collecting or at least of kind of being aware of art as a thing in the world?

Kandell: [00:05:42] High school years, no. I was struggling with a very classical education and very traditional. There wasn't anything for me there really. I really didn't like it. I'd grown up in a progressive school in Greenwich Village in New York City, which was very progressive and full of arts and music and building and everything like that. But in high school no, it was very strictly traditional. But once I got to college, which was Sarah Lawrence College, it was much more liberal and much more artistic. And there I took music and studied music and piano and not so much art actually but a lot of music there as well as science. I was a science major more or less.

McAllister: Okay, I was about to ask you what you majored in. So first of all let me ask you why did you go to Sarah Lawrence. Was there any particular reason that kind of attracted you?

Kandell: [00:06:41] Well I had a teacher at Fieldston, actually he was the only one that I liked. And he kind of took a liking to me and he was pushing me to go to Sarah Lawrence. Why I don't know. I didn't know much about anything. I applied to all kinds of colleges but he wanted Sarah

Lawrence and it turned out he taught there. [Laughs] But he was right. It made a big difference. I think Sarah Lawrence played the biggest role in my development because they were very progressive and open to everything and whatever you wanted to do was wonderful and you could follow whatever you wanted to do. I took history which fascinated me. I took science which fascinated me. It was in depth, everything was in depth at Sarah Lawrence. And I was open to everything and so are many Sarah Lawrence girls that I meet now. They still have that openness to almost anything, and when I look back at my life I've done so many things in different fields in the humanities and in the arts and all kinds of fields. And actually I was a science major and I was going to medical school. And my professors all wrote "If any of our students are going to go to medical school it's her, she's the one that's really—" and somehow I didn't want to sit around learning all the bones in the body and I ended up in psychology.

McAllister: It's interesting, so you were a science major but yet you still also were open to and interested in what Sarah Lawrence had to offer in terms of music it sounds like perhaps mostly.

Kandell: [00:08:16] Well it was everything. There was music and literature and history and contemporary history and it was all interesting to me. But I really in my life ended up going towards the arts I guess. But education and psychology were very interesting to me also. I did concentrate on physics, chemistry, biology. I liked those, but Sarah Lawrence was very open to all kinds of classes whatever you wanted to take.

McAllister: You wrote that you took courses with and had discussions with Joseph Campbell while you were there.

Kandell: [00:08:56] That was fabulous. That's when my Buddhist thing opened up.

McAllister: Right, so you wrote that through your studies with him you realized that you were drawn to the "Buddhist way of life." So what was it about the interaction with him that kind of linked to Buddhism for you?

Kandell: [00:09:18] I don't know that it was Buddhism per say. I don't think I was that far, although I was I guess. But it was mythology in general that I loved, following the myths. He wrote a book called *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and he traced myths from Asia and all of the modern religions all of them going towards the human psyche basically. All of them were so similar to each other in their very essence. And we looked at mythology from very early, "The Golden Bough," which was all about the early beginnings of mythology and religion, trees and animals and everything had spirits in them to the development of religion through mythology. The myth of Christ and his journey to his birth, the myth of Moses—I mean who knows if they're myths or not but the story stuff—Moses on a journey and the bulrushes down the river and his journey and Buddha on his journey.

Why did Buddhism stick to me? I had a friend in college. We were going with a professor for a summer tour of Russia. We were taking Russian studies. That's another thing. I took Russian studies. Why? Because it was wonderful and interesting and I did it. And he was taking us to Russia and I loved that trip. But she was going with us. We were both girls. And before the trip started—I think we were freshmen—she came to me and she said, "Shall we go to Tibet after the



trip?” I know at the time Russia and India were having a détente and there were cheap flights between Russia and India. And she knew how to go to Tibet and I said, “Sure I’d love to go to Tibet.” Somehow I knew in the back of my mind there was a war going on in Tibet at that time with China. And can you imagine two Sarah Lawrence girls on the back of a mule going into Tibet when there was a war and the Chinese were taking over? So my parents said no but she went anyway.

She went by herself because she wanted to go. I had to come home. She went by herself and of course she did not get into Tibet obviously but she got stopped on the border of Tibet. This doesn’t tell you about how I got interested in Buddhism but it does tell you a little bit. It tells you how it started. I mean I was still in college taking all these courses and studying anything I wanted to because that’s what Sarah Lawrence said, I could choose anything. So she went to Tibet by herself as a freshmen and while she was there at Hotel Windamere she was in the lobby I guess and she met the crowned prince of a small kingdom on the border of Tibet called Sikkim, which is nestled in the Himalayas and a completely Buddhist country. It used to be part of Tibet I gather, very Tibetan Buddhist. And he was a Tibetan Buddhist formerly a monk in the monastery training until his brother died and he had to become the king.

And anyway they fell in love, deeply in love, and they got married. And she was now the crowned princess. Well as time went on, the late king died and her husband became the king and she became the queen. And she sent me an invitation to the coronation. Well at that point, I was in graduate school and I couldn’t go. I mean you can’t just get up and leave, you’re taking courses. And I really wanted to go so I screwed up all my efforts and all my courage and I went

to my professor and said, “There’s this coronation in the Himalayas—” no one heard of the Himalayas then anyway—” and an American girl is going to become the queen.” What? And it was very bizarre. To which my professor said, “When fantasy becomes reality, a member of the Harvard psychology department should be there to witness it.” And that changed my life right then and there, boom lightning bolt. So I went.

And you asked me about my attraction to Buddhism. When you’re in college you wake up to life. When you’re an adolescent you wake up to boys and all that business, music, and being like everybody else. But when you’re in college you really wake up to life. And that’s where I was, so what else was I going to wake up to? I was there. So that’s probably the beginning of Buddhism. Yes Joseph Campbell had a lot to do with it. I had a friend who was interested in it. He was Catholic, he wasn’t a Buddhist. But I’m not sure that Buddhism is the draw for me more than the beauty of the art and the way of life the—I was so overwhelmed by the air and the mountains and the snow and the beauty of the whole culture and the wonderful people and the wonderful Llamas, and of all things the most incredible art. I’m not a Buddhist but I was only drawn to that part of the world. Maybe Buddhism had a part to do with it, yes.

McAllister: It sounds as if the trip that this attraction to Buddhism if you will, not necessarily as a religion but as a way of living, as thinking about things, and to Tibetan art and culture, happened kind of suddenly on that trip. The sense I have from the way you’re talking is as if you opened a door and boom it was right there and you were right there with it rather than gradually perhaps being attracted to it.

Kandell: [00:16:24] Well it's a little of both. Don't forget I was in school. I had to go back to Harvard and it was another number of years before I got my doctorate. I had to write a thesis and all, but in the meantime I was also writing, collecting photographs, learning photography, trying to get the best photographs I could. And on vacation from Harvard, I signed up at the School for Visual Arts [SVA] and also International Center of Photography [ICP], Cornell Capa. I took courses there in the summers, whenever I was free. But I was still in school and I was writing a dissertation, hard.

McAllister: Right, if I can so I can sort this out and have a sense of all these different things that are going on in your life at this time. So first of all did you stay in touch with Hope Cooke over the time period between when she went over there and got married to the point of the coronation when you were in school together? Were you much in touch with her and what was going on in her life in Sikkim at the time?

Kandell: [00:17:36] Well it was difficult. She was over there, I was here. Not as much as afterwards.

McAllister: So you go over on this trip, which was —

Kandell: [00:17:50] The answer is yes, the answer is yes I did stay in touch with her.

McAllister: I mean in some sense I would've assumed so because she wanted you to be at the coronation and presumably she didn't invite just anybody to come to her coronation.

Kandell: [00:17:58] Yes. No, no I can't remember which—she visited here and her husband stayed with me with the children. There were no babies. It was before her children were born. I can't remember if it was—they were certainly married. I stayed in touch with her yes.

McAllister: Right, and so then after the coronation you come back—

Kandell: [00:18:25] She went away. She left college and she stayed over there. Where is she? Nobody knew where she was. But then she came back and then yes we were in touch.

McAllister: After the coronation, you come back to continue your degree but you said you started taking photography courses and this is in the context of the idea of going back and taking pictures? Because I read that at some point *Redbook* got in touch with you and said, “We'd like to have you go over there and take pictures and write for us.” And so you're back in the States, you're pursuing your psych degree at Harvard, and then you're also simultaneously taking photography courses as you say over the summer. Why were you taking photography courses? Was it because you had a notion of going back over there in order to take pictures?

Kandell: [00:19:22] Yes. I stayed at Harvard I think it was three years until I finished my academic courses that I had to do and then you write your dissertation. And during that period, I had been to Sikkim and yes *Redbook* contacted me, other magazines too. American Queen over there they wanted an access to it and I had one of the few access permits, because India was not letting anybody in. There was something called an Inner Line Permit [ILP]. Anyone could go to

Sikkim but not anybody could leave India at the point of access to Sikkim. And she was asked to limit her number of permits and so there were very few people that were able to go in. I had one of the few and so I had access when nobody else did. So *Redbook* contacted me and I did a whole thing about her and her little boy growing up. This was for *Redbook*. Her other one hadn't been born yet. And then other magazines contacted me as well.

McAllister: So this is your second trip to Sikkim, after the coronation you go back and you do this trip for *Redbook*. How long did you stay during the trip? Do you have any sense about how long?

Kandell: [00:20:50] I don't remember but there were many trips. And each one was about a month, two months. There were many trips. I don't think it was ever less than a month. It was hard to get there, very hard at the time. Do you know they this year opened up an airport in Sikkim? I can't imagine that, I just can't believe it. It must be dangerous flying in those mountains.

McAllister: Now when you went back over during these trips for *Redbook* and other trips. We're now talking probably late '60s maybe early '70s, you were continuing to invest yourself, develop that interest that you first encountered when you went over for the coronation in Tibetan art? Not just the life. I know that you also took lots of pictures of peoples' everyday lives, but also was the interest in art happening then?

Kandell: [00:21:50] Now that you mention it, it's all kind of subliminal. It all is in there. Yes, we were doing so many different things. We were doing a lot of things with arts and crafts, developing the crafts industry, carpet industry, all of the arts and crafts that they had, particularly the carpets because they could sell over here. It wasn't any one specific, it was the whole life. It was just the pleasant, lovely life of being period. Yes the art hit me like a thunderbolt. I loved it. But so was the general very sweet life of just being there.

McAllister: On one of these visits, the king asked you to take some of these photographs? To go around into the countryside?

Kandell: [00:22:45] At one point, after I had studied a lot of photography, when *Redbook* asked me to go, I thought, What do I know about photography? So I went to The New School, I went to the International Center of Photography. I did know about photography and I was somewhat a photographer but not really special. And I got hold of Time-Life photographers and we went shopping for cameras and one of them said—because I had a Leica but he said, “Buy a Nikon.” A what? It was made in “occupied Japan”, who wanted that? It was a joke. We used to laugh. He was a Life magazine photographer. He said, “Just buy it. Throw it out at the end of the year and buy another one.” They're cheap and you can see through the lens [laughs]. Oh God. I still have the original Leica where you had a separate light meter and a separate setting and you'd hold the light meter on one hand and set the aperture. And then they made something very modern. They put the light meter on top of the camera but you still had to set the setting. It wasn't coordinated. He said, “Just buy this Nikon.” All right, so I bought the Nikon. I still have that Nikon [laughs].

McAllister: How did you hook up with this Time-Life photographer to be able to know how to buy this camera?

Kandell: [00:24:06] How? I had a friend who had been to Sikkim on a Time-Life assignment and she introduced me to them. And we traveled together, she and I, and I met the photographers. So I sort of had an in with those people and he took me and showed me around a little bit.

McAllister: Just to talk a little bit more about photography and your experience with photography, you studied with Cornell Capa?

Kandell: I did.

McAllister: And with Philippe Halsman?

Kandell: [00:24:38] I studied with Philippe Halsman quite a lot.

McAllister: What was it like studying with each of them?

Kandell: [00:24:41] He was—

McAllister: This is Capa?

Kandell: [00:24:44] Capa was [laughs] a wild man. He was wonderful. And for a while he stopped teaching classes and started organizing his museum. I remember when he first started this. There's a museum called International Center of Photography. And he called me up just as I was getting married. I said, "I'm getting married." He said, "What are you doing that for?" And then he called me a couple of days later and he said, "We just had a baby." What? He was an older man and his wife was similar. And they had started this center, International Center of Photography. Before that he was down in the village and they really didn't have anything any place to show—photography was not an art. It wasn't an art. It was just photographs.

McAllister: I remember when ICP started yes.

Kandell: [00:25:36] Well it was in the [New York City] Audubon Society on Fifth Avenue and it was wonderful. And then they started teaching courses and whatnot. But he was a real force in my photography life. I really loved it. And he started that.

McAllister: How would you say he's a force? Did he just kind of inspire you to want to take pictures? Is that it?

Kandell: [00:26:06] Yes, and he liked my photographs which I never thought were any good and he would help me with them. And we were friends and I'd go visit him at his house with his wife and he loved my photographs. I was doing all kinds of different stuff, not Sikkim, totally not. All kinds of stuff I was—



McAllister: Photographs around New York City?

Kandell: [00:26:24] New York and I remember one I took of the Chandelier at Lincoln Center the opera house, which was out of focus and there was a [unclear]. Anyway, he really liked all of it. And then Philippe Halsman came quite a bit later. But the *Redbook* thing, I hired the professor from the School for Visual Arts because I didn't have time. I mean I was going off to Sikkim and going back to Harvard. So I hired him and we went around the city and he showed me all about everything. We went to The Cloisters, uptown; we went all over the city. And he taught me how to do photography and he taught me about composition and this and that. He taught me everything because I didn't have time to go to class.

McAllister: And this was all prior to the *Redbook* assignment?

Kandell: [00:27:15] Prior and after because there were other assignments. And that was very, very helpful to me to be able to do it. At a certain point, after you learn all of this, you don't depend on learning anymore. Your creativity takes over and you are who you are and you take what you take. And I didn't know that. I just did what I did. I didn't necessarily follow what the teachers said. But as an artist, you have to do what you do. And now I get an email like two days ago from a museum in India saying, "We've looked at your photographs. They're so artistic. They're so sensitive. They're so—" this that and the other. What? [Laughs] I wasn't thinking of that at all. But at a certain point you don't depend on basics anymore, you just do it.

McAllister: I read a quote, I think it was from Savion Glover who was the tap dancer, and he said, “You learn technique in order to forget it.”

Kandell: [Laughs]

McAllister: And I think this is partly what you’re talking about is that—

Kandell: Maybe.

McAllister: —you learn it, you incorporate it, and then you’re not even aware that you’re exercising it. Not forget it in the sense—

Kandell: Totally—

McAllister: —that you don’t use it but just in the sense—

Kandell: Totally not aware.

McAllister: —that you’re not conscious of using it.

Kandell: [00:28:22] They used to say the definitions of a good photographer are F8 at 1/60th and be there. Okay, F8 at 1/60th nobody knows what that is. Do you know what it is? It’s a setting on

your camera. It's just a standard setting in those days you set. Now you look through your telephone [laughs]. But I was there. That helped.

After I got married and had children, I traveled into the kitchen where the kids were. And that's how I did four books on children, photography books. So you have to be there. I was there. And I was getting better and better. And I had four cameras, three Nikons and a Leica all at once because there were different films. There was indoor film, there was outdoor, there was low light, there was high light, there were long lenses, short lenses. I mean there was everything. And so I carried a hundred packets of film through customs with lead cases and God I was nervous. And bringing it back was worse than digital because it was all valuable, they had invaluable images on it. It was film. Film is still better than digital but digital is so easy.

McAllister: You're description conveys somebody who is fairly sophisticated at what she was doing despite you're saying that you were just kind of learning. It sounds like as if you acquired these skills of photography pretty readily that maybe you had an aptitude for it do you think?

Kandell: [00:30:05] Who knows? Sarah Lawrence you follow what your instinct shows and what you like. No other school would tell you that but maybe, I don't know, maybe they do now. But then you could follow what you wanted, it was okay. And so I did. Did I know I had a talent? No. Did I know until last week? Not really. I mean when suddenly museums want my photographs that's unusual [laughs].

McAllister: Now at some point on one of these trips, the king asked you to go around right? And document?

Kandell: [00:30:34] He did. That was wonderful. He wanted me to document—

McAllister: So how did that come about?

Kandell: [00:30:38] He knew I had a camera. He knew I was photographing. I was photographing him for magazines and this and that. I think he had an inkling that something was going to come. He knew something was coming in Tibet—

McAllister: Something was going to come you mean about India and Sikkim?

Kandell: [00:30:56] India taking over yes. I mean that was really the end of his kingdom. It's not the same anymore.

McAllister: So that happened in '75 so we're talking early '70s when he enlists you to do what we're now about to talk about?

Kandell: [00:31:08] Yes that's right, that's right. He said, "You should document the country and the way of life." And he gave me a Jeep and a driver and access to—they call them Dak Bungalows—that are six hours' walk between each one, it's a series. Tibet had them and everybody up there had them in the Himalayas. You go walking six hours and then there's a

Bungalow where you stay and there's a "Chowkidar" that stays there. The Chowkidar is like the manager of this—it's not really a hotel. They have beds and they have bathrooms.

McAllister: It sounds like in the Dolomites is hut-to-hut hiking.

Kandell: [00:31:56] Hut to hut. That's exactly what it is.

I had done a book already on Sikkim and I found it very difficult to write and to photograph at the same time. I did it and it was hard and I'll show you the book, and the book won some kind of a prize for best young peoples' reader. But it was too hard, so I asked Mrs. Salisbury who had been there with her husband, Harrison Salisbury, to come with me. And we shared the jeep together and we went around going from place to place and she stayed in the dak bungalow too. But one time it was so cold that the toilet was frozen and I'll never forget that. Oh my God it was so cold. But it's nice because there's a big fire in the room and the chowkidar, the manager, comes in and he stokes the fire for you at night. You're sleeping on a string bed with some kind of a blanket or something around you, a bedroll or something.

McAllister: Did you have any hesitation about doing this?

Kandell: [00:33:03] None whatsoever, nothing, absolutely none. I had no hesitation ever about any of that. I was young. And at one point my mother came to visit [laughs]. Can you imagine?

McAllister: This is the trip about—

Kandell: [00:33:17] No, no, no, not that trip, no, no. She stayed in the palace and she loved it. Of course she loved Sikkim and she kept wanting to come back.

McAllister: So what was your interaction with her about that made her want, do you think, to go? Because she had never traveled over to Asia to say nothing of a remote place like Sikkim probably right?

Kandell: [00:33:39] Well it was a Junius Bird thing and I'll tell you later. I mean I was alone in Nepal in the Himalayas trekking. My father did not want that to happen.

McAllister: You were trekking in Nepal?

Kandell: [00:33:52] Yes alone. I was looking for backstrap looms

McAllister: Right, so this is in the early '70s again?

Kandell: [00:34:00] Yes, yes, yes, yes. And my father sent her with me. He wouldn't let me go alone for that trip. Sikkim was okay because I had Hope and her husband. So we went from Nepal to the palace and [laughs] then she was very happy and came back twice to Sikkim. But she was a trooper. She trekked with me up in those mountains and she'd say things like, "It's getting dark now. Don't you think we should stop for the night?" And I'd, Oh really? [Laughs] I mean you don't have real judgment. I was on a mission. I'll tell you about that.

McAllister: Well so just talking about this trip, so you're meeting farmers, you're meeting traders; you're attending Buddhist religious ceremonies and engaging with the artisans and the children.

Kandell: [00:34:56] Well let me finish. The king gave me access to monasteries, which you wouldn't ordinarily be able to get to, all kinds of jeeps and roads and passes and checkpoints and whatever had to happen I was let through and let into the monasteries and the homes and that was very unusual and wonderful. And that's in the book and that's all that's left now of the halcyon years when there was a very happy life of the people and the religion was functioning and everything was happy. And it ended with the Indians coming and—

McAllister: How did the people respond to you as this white western woman? *A* white, *B* western, *C* a woman—

Kandell: Right.

McAllister: —with a camera strapped. Do you have any sense of how they thought of you? Were you this exotic odd thing or were they pretty matter of fact about it? Do you have any sense of how they responded to you?

Kandell: [00:36:06] They are very accepting, warm, lovely people. I never had a feeling that I was strange or peculiar or a white woman foreigner. Yes now that I think about it, I must've

looked—with four cameras strapped to my front, I mean I must've looked pretty weird. But they're so sweet and so accepting and so genuine, the Sikkimese. You have a sense of that when you go even now to China where they all look at you and line up in India to have pictures taken with you. They can't wait to see this, to have a picture taken with this funny looking monkey. And they do. I mean you can't go anywhere that they don't want to take your picture with all of their family and their friends and they all pile into the picture. Not so in Sikkim. It was a very gentle, accepting, warm—they were very accepting people period.

McAllister: On the other side, did you have any plan for how you wanted to take photographs and think about what you wanted to do exactly? Or was it pretty much free range, you were just going to grab in as much as you could and sort it out later?

Kandell: [00:37:20] I did not have a plan but I must've had a plan because there were certain things I went after. So I don't know. I wasn't saying, Oh I am going to go after village life, but I did. And I guess that's what I did go after. I also was looking for something beautiful, beautiful scenery. He told me to go document and so I had this general plan of a book in mind yes and how it would flow. And I've always done that. When I did my children's book I knew how it was going to flow. Every book I've done I have known how it's going to tell a story. And when I came back I had actually a photography agent and that was my specialty, reportage it's called. Not pictures of statues and landscape or whatever. There are specialists in pictures of statues and I had my shrine room photographed by one of them, John Bigelow Taylor. It's fabulous [unclear] statues but that's what he does.



McAllister: It's interesting. In some sense you reportage, it's kind of like Capa's brother with—

Kandell: Yes.

McAllister: —Robert Capa's photo journalism. It's of that sort right?

Kandell: [00:38:34] Yes, in a way, in a way yes. People and their lives and how they did—in stills. We didn't have video cameras then. I suppose they were invented but they weren't easy to use.

McAllister: If somebody were to look at the books and read them they'd have a sense that—sometimes books change in the development. Would you say that if you looked at them now, if I read them now, I'd say, oh okay now I understand how Alice was thinking about this project at the time?

Kandell: [00:39:13] When I came back I had a specific idea with the king's guidance. I mean my idea was to show some of the landscape, some of the country, but the lives. There were groups of people. There were the Buddhists who were the Tibetan people and they were the majority. And then there were plenty of Nepalese and they had their own way of life. And then there was an indigenous group called the Lepchas and they had their own different ways and different things that they did. And so I was documenting each one of those separately, I knew that. And then I knew there was going to be a part that was daily life in the country and daily life in the city and industries such as it was. They didn't have an industry. They had tea, they had canned oranges,

they had farming. So I put a section of that, I did have that. A kind of comprehensive approach to the country.

McAllister: Do you remember—I mean it's so long ago now that you probably wouldn't remember but was there anything when you went out into the countryside, aside from some of things you've already talked about, that really surprised you maybe even shocked you that was different from either what you had experienced or what you were anticipating?

Kandell: [00:40:44] When I went up there I felt very at home and comfortable. Why? I don't know. Especially way up in the mountains on the border of Tibet. It was cold, it was snowy, and I visited the homes. Some of the people are pictured in the book on Sikkim, very warm and very accepting and very happy. And I was just happy. There was nothing shocking or no moments of shock. It was all very comfortable and natural to me. It seemed very natural. At one point I thought of moving over there and living there because it was a very nice life. I knew of an American teacher who went over there and she had a little bungalow She had been brought over to teach the royal children and school. And she was lovely. She was very happy. She had a little girl. She was raising her daughter; her daughter went to school with the prince and the rest of the children in the village. She had her own cow that would come by and give her milk every day and then go on to another person and give them milk. Vegetables came. It was a nice life. It was a very nice life. They didn't have things.

McAllister: This is maybe a little bit afield but I'm just wondering if I could push you a little bit. I'm thinking at this point in your life you've had two, at least, intellectual experiences. One is

you getting your degree in child psychology so you've studied a lot of child psychology at this point. And you also had this experience at Sarah Lawrence with Campbell about myths. And I was wondering if reflecting on this now and how comfortable you felt in this environment that it just spoke to you like you were home, do you think that there's any relationship to somehow about maybe a familiarity with the myths for example, with myths in general, or your affinity for child psychology that also made sense in terms of immediately feeling comfortable with Sikkim? Because a lot of people who would've been in that environment would've felt this is quite alien to them and yet you felt enormously at home. As you said you might've moved there. So I was wondering about what's in your background at this point that maybe you think, reflecting on it now, made you feel comfortable at that time?

Kandell: [00:43:25] The village life, the lovely people. I was comfortable and wanted a comfortable, lovely, gentle life surrounded by lovely people who were friendly and warm. And not all things [unclear]. A cow would come and a vegetable vendor would come. I think life is a big pot [laughs] and everything goes into it. I don't know why I did certain things. There was that genuine life experience. Psychology went into it of course, understanding what happens in a person in a psyche in a child. The photography was the artistic side of seeing it. The emotional side of wanting to be a simple, genuine, quiet, happy life surrounded by friends, which didn't happen by the way [laughs]. That part never happened.

McAllister: Never happened there or here?

Kandell: [00:44:31] Well I didn't stay there.

McAllister: Not there.

Kandell: [00:44:32] I came home and got married and that started a whole different—with children and you know. Then you don't think about [laughs] a little hut in Sikkim.

McAllister: You mentioned your mom. And I think I referenced in passing the story about Junius Bird and his saying that the backstrap self-loom was unique to South America and you said, "Not so fast. I've seen it in Sikkim." And I wonder if you would tell that story.

Kandell: [00:45:14] When I got home I had some Tibetan things and I was interested in Tibet. Someone introduced me to the curator of the Tibetan Collection at the Museum of Natural History. Her name was Karen Burrows who incidentally was married to Abe Burrows, *Guys and Dolls* and all that stuff. A very funny man, I mean he was so funny. Even at his funeral they were telling jokes. They didn't know what else to do because all his friends were comedians. Anyway, she was not like that. She was the curator of the Tibetan and I told her—you know we were talking and she said, "You should meet Junius Bird. He's the textile curator." We met him and he was pontificating about South America. Apparently, as I understand it, he had been the model for Indiana Jones—he had led a wild life, but . he wasn't really Indiana Jones.

McAllister: You're about how old at this point, in your twenties?

Kandell: I must've been out of school already.

McAllister: Mid-twenties maybe?

Kandell: [00:46:14] Yes, maybe twenties. Yes. And he was telling me about the self-supported backstrap looms. And I said the self-supported backstrap loom comes from Mongolia. All of the South Americans come from Mongolia. What? This is what we studied with Joseph Campbell and nobody believed it. The Bering Straits was a strait. It was a land mass, an ice mass. And now it's a sea, Bering Sea. But there was a migration, at least that's what he thought, across from Mongolia to the Eskimos, the American Indians, down into Mexico and down into Central America and South America to the bottom. Campbell thought that by studying the mythology he could see the similarities between the Tibetan Buddhist, Mongolian, and early Mongolian mythology, religion, whatever you want to call it, that traveled through the Eskimos. And we studied all of that.

McAllister: This is Joseph Campbell?

Kandell: [00:47:28] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. It was one hero that had all these different iterations. This was before genetics. He believed that there was this migration. Nobody else believed him. So we studied maize corn in the bottom of South America and in Mongolia. But it was never for sure and everybody was yes, yes. Nobody believed him. Now since genetics came, it's obvious. So I knew that the self-supported backstrap loom was indigenous to Mongolia, Mongolia being Tibet. Mongolian is a generic term, Tibet and Sikkim

and all of that. I knew that and I'd seen the self-supported backstrap looms. And I told him about it and he said, "Oh yes, well prove it." So he gave me money to travel there.

McAllister: This is Junius Bird?

Kandell: [00:48:29] Yes, and I knew where to go. I don't know why I knew. I had been to Nepal before. I knew where to go. I had been to Nepal and I had met people there through Hope. She said, "Oh when you go to Nepal visit so and so." So I knew we had to go to Pokhara. There was a place in the Annapurna range. There was no road. There was nothing. And these people I knew. There was an architect living on the property of Boris Lissanevitch, who was a Russian who started the Grand Hotel in Nepal. It was famous. He also did the coronation for the king with elephants. He had a hotel so I stayed there. It was famous. And there was an architect who had done the architecture for the third prince of Nepal. The third prince was son of the third wife of the Nepalese King. Anyway, he had done this house and he had a mail plane that went up into Pokhara and then up into Jomsom up in the Himalayas near Mustang. And so I asked if I could go. At that point my mother came over and she was with me. It was okay in Kathmandu with this hotel but this plane was a little bit basic. There were no seats. There were hammocks on the side. Anyway, we landed in—

McAllister: Your mom went with you in this plane?

Kandell: [00:50:04] Yes, my father wouldn't let me go alone. That was the point. He didn't want me to go alone. So my mom who really was a lovely, elegant woman, she was a delegate to the UN. She wore nice clothes, designer clothes.

McAllister: Sounds like a trooper in the end.

Kandell: [00:50:21] She did. She was scared stiff. But anyway we went. And we landed in Pokhara, beautiful mountains, and there was this valley and there were buffalo all over this field, which is where the airplane landed and bounced down. The buffalo were running and it bounced down on this field. And we get off, now what? Well on the side was something called Airport View Hotel [laughs]. You can't imagine. Thatch roof, mud huts [laughs]. So we go over there, Do you have a bed? Yes. Well string beds. There was a shower in the bedroom. It was just one room. The shower body wasn't connected to anything. And I remember my mother said to the bearer, which is the hot and which is the cold? [Laughs] But it was very nice. They had people with hot water buckets. They'd come and they'd help you. It had a flushing cistern in the room, which wasn't connected to anything of course. But there it was. And they'd come and they'd stand there with hot water for you if you wanted to wash. They'd pour it in the thing if you wanted to shower. It was a canvas bag with holes punched in it and you'd stand under it and the bucket would empty and that was your shower.

And then you go outside and have this delicious wonderful meal. They were so nice. And the meal was by the mountains that in the sunrise it turned orange and beautiful color sunset, beautiful colors. And it was warm and then it got colder. It was so nice. It was just beautiful. She

loved that. And then they sent me with some guides up into the mountains and we went up my mother with me trekking up there. They knew where the Tibetan refugee camps were. And we went up there and I found in the refugee camp several women with these self-supported backstrap looms. So it's a piece of leather around their back and they'd tie it with string to a tree and they lean back and that is the warp right? Or the weft.

McAllister: I always get the two confused.

Kandell: [00:52:38] It's a warp I think. And that was a long thing and they put the shuttlecock back and forth, and I photographed them. I photographed the whole loom. I photographed all the stitches, bought the loom unfinished off her with all the wool. They would spin the wool.

Grandma was spinning the wool where they had sheep. So I photographed all of that, brought it back to the museum, and they hung it in their Hall of Asian People. And it was there for many years and they had it with a painting of Sikkim and that painting is still there. I went there last year, it's still there 50 years later. The loom is gone. But that was quite something.

McAllister: That's an extraordinary story.

Kandell: [00:53:22] It is for a twenty-five year old, or twenty-two, however old I was.

McAllister: Do you remember anything that Bird said to you when you returned with the corroboration that in fact the self-supported backstrap loom was not unique to South America?



Kandell: No I didn't follow up. He was ill and died soon. Well, at that point I was getting married and had children. And when you have children that's the way you are.

McAllister: Maybe we can begin to talk about putting together your collection. And every collection begins I assume with one piece and yours was, if I understand correctly, was not acquired actually in Sikkim but in Nepal, a Tibetan amulet bought called a gau. Is that correct?

Kandell: [00:54:25] Yes exactly, good for you. You've done your homework.

McAllister: So I guess my first question is since you were in Sikkim so much why is it that you didn't acquire anything in Sikkim?

Kandell: [00:54:40] Well the answer to that question is Sikkim is a Buddhist religious country and you don't sell religious objects. You use them. They are for your religious purposes. I had bought an amulet and a tobacco case and that kind of stuff but really nothing was for sale. And they don't sell you stuff unless they know you. The jewelry maker I was buying—because he was making it for me, but he would only make in Sikkim. In Sikkim the jewelry maker would only make one piece at a time.

McAllister: But that's not really just an artifact.

Kandell: [00:55:22] Because they are new, but they are not religious.

In the refugee camps in Pokhara, Nepal—I mean this is the hinterlands. There was nobody there. It was not a tourist place.

In the Airport View Hotel, we went out and bought quilts in the local market to put on the bed bottom and on the top because they had no mattress [laughs] and there was my mother. She's an elegant lady. She was a classics major from Barnard. She was not used to sleeping on that. I didn't care because I was much younger.

McAllister: And this is in Kathmandu we're talking?

Kandell: [00:55:56] No this is out of Kathmandu in this town called Pokhara that we took the airplane to with the buffalo all scattering.

McAllister: So it's on that trip that you acquired your first piece?

Kandell: [00:56:07] Yes. And further on, the plane went again to another place. It was a mail plane and I couldn't go on it because at that time the United States was supporting—I don't know if I should say this. Yes it's known, there are books on it. The United States was supporting—the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] was supporting Tibetans to go across the border and fight the Chinese. Those Tibetans were the Khampas. They're the fighting group. They're from Kham. They're the fighting group of these tough, strong warriors. And they were up in Mustang and they were fighting off the Chinese up there and nobody was allowed to know that. That was not to be known. If I had known that I would've been in big trouble. So I stayed

down in Pokhara and met the people that were coming down. There was only one American I met. He was a fascinating guy. I mean, who goes up there?. They walked. I mean it's crazy taking life in your hands, but people around there were crazy, otherwise they wouldn't have been there. It was dangerous. Not where I was, but where they went and were coming down. And there was this one Khampa guy, a warrior who was up there fighting, and he felt it was a losing proposition. And his father told him that if he felt that he could never go back to Tibet he could sell that. It's a prayer box. Did you see the picture of it?

McAllister: I did see the picture.

Kandell: [00:58:04] Okay, it's a prayer box. It's now at the Smithsonian. It's beautiful. It's raised work. It's really beautiful, unusual, and I fell in love with it right away the minute I saw it. But it was his and I didn't want to take it from him. And I didn't but he wanted a hundred dollars for it and he was going to sell it. He needed that hundred dollars and his father said he could sell it if he knew they would not get back to Tibet. And I thought about it for a while and I finally went back to him and said okay I'll take it because I knew he was going to sell it. So I have it, I have his picture, and I'll remember him forever. He's probably an old man now. That was my first piece.

McAllister: Did that piece spark an interest in saying okay I've acquired one piece maybe I'll get a second or how did that begin to kind of think in your mind?

Kandell: [00:59:12] I don't know. And I don't think you do know ever what affects you. I mean maybe you do, maybe some people do. I don't. I just loved it and why I loved it I don't know why. And was I thinking of buying another piece? I don't know. I know I loved that stuff. I loved it right away. I don't know. I don't know if I ever thought of buying another piece.

McAllister: Just to kind of pick up on this thread, do you remember, and probably not, but do you remember the second piece you bought? Do you remember what you did after that?

Kandell: [01:00:00] [Laughs] I don't remember the second piece. When I came home I found—there were things at auction and I was buying at auction but they weren't really appropriate for me—I did buy a lot of pieces and then I eventually gave them to Tibet House, a friendly Tibet House for repatriation.

McAllister: Right, so you come back after this and, as you said, you begin to buy some pieces, not necessarily with any notion of a collection in mind. One can own lots of different pieces of art without it being a collection.

Kandell: Right, right, exactly.

McAllister: And it sounds like you were doing a little bit of that, maybe with [crosstalk] Tibetan stuff.

Kandell: Yes I had a piece here, a piece there.

McAllister: Right but nothing that you would think of now as a collection. One of the things that you touched on when you were doing this was that you were buying from auction houses and that you subsequently stopped doing that. That was not a way in which you put together your collection.

Kandell: No.

McAllister: Why did you think that auction houses was not the way to go in putting together the collection?

Kandell: [01:01:08] I didn't think it was not the way to go. That wasn't my intention. I mean that is the way to go I guess for a lot of people.

McAllister: No but for you, why did you decide it wasn't the way to go?

Kandell: [01:01:18] Okay, I mean at that point I had children and I didn't have that much money either. I didn't really start going to auction galleries until afterwards. But at one point I had a friend who called and said, "I'm taking you to Brooklyn." I said, "I'm not going to Brooklyn. I don't want to go to Brooklyn." He said, "Just get in the car." He takes me out to this nowhere in Brooklyn and I walked into this lovely, old, paneled apartment. It was beautiful. And there was a Russian American man there And I walked into his bedroom and there was a complete Tibetan shrine room and I suddenly felt at home. I don't know why. Don't ask me why.

You never know what's going to happen in your life and you never know what affects you, but that was the first time I'd seen it in America and the only time it was. Nobody else ever had anything like that. And it really affected me but it was his. It was his bedroom. His TV was there, his bed was there, but it was a shrine. He did have a real Tibetan shrine room. And I really suddenly felt at home. I didn't know the guy. That was Philip Rudko. He was in a Russian monastery when he was six years old. His grandmother sent him there. And he would go across the street to this Kalmuk. —this Tibetan Kalmuk monastery. The Kalmuk monks were Tibetan monks who lived in Russia and they didn't like what was going on in Russia. They came en masse and started a monastery here. And Phil, as a six year old boy, would leave the Russian monastery and go across the street into this Tibetan monastery. He would sit at the Lama's feet, old men, and they'd tell him stories about the paintings and stories about the statues. And it was very much part of his life. He grew up with that.

Phil became a restorer of Russian icons in the monastery, but afterwards he began restoring Tibetan pieces, so he knew. When you restore you're looking at every little fingertip for an hour while you're trying to—so he knew. He really knew. He knew his stuff. And the monks would tell him stories and everything. But he was the one that collected that shrine room. He knew what he was doing. He was buying from this guy Rudy who was buying from a Tibetan wealthy man who saw the handwriting on the wall and got a lot of his stuff out of Tibet and brought it here and opened up a little shop. That's the stuff. And that was probably before 1959. So maybe Phil was in college at that time and he didn't have any money. But Rudy liked him and he would let

Phil pay monthly a little bit and he would get a piece. Phil got to know and love Tibetan art. He is now my advisor. He knows so much. He researches everything.

McAllister: So your meeting in Rudko's apartment happens in the mid '90s as I understand it. But during the '80s and even into early '90s it was not as if you were unknowledgeable about Tibetan art. You had collected some pieces, you had some familiarity with it?

Kandell: [01:05:06] I was not knowledgeable. He taught me everything I know. And that was a period, '70s to '80s, I was having children and raising children and worried about doctors and schools and nursery schools and elementary schools and high schools. Well not high schools yet, but I had a few pieces.

McAllister: So in part it sounds like what you're saying is that you go to Philip Redko's place and you are immediately enthralled. And I want to talk about the impact of that in terms of your collection both how it animated you as well as the technical expertise of Redko. But it sounds as if you're in part saying you raised your kids, your kids were getting older, and you maybe had some more time on your hands.

Kandell: I waited until they were in high school.

McAllister: People use that time in lots of different ways. Somehow you decided to use it in terms of getting involved as a collector of Tibetan art.

Kandell: I'll tell you how it happened.

McAllister: How did that happen?

Kandell: [01:06:15] It didn't just happen. I felt so comfortable and happy in his room. That was his room, I didn't buy anything, I didn't offer to buy any. He called me up one day and he said, "Well I have a small piece. Would you like it?" Yes. Anyway this went on and on. Eventually he said, "I want to deaccession my collection and move to a house." So I bought him a house and he gave me—I mean I traded his house for my collection. That was the way it happened. And suddenly I had a big collection. It was all over the house. It wasn't in a room.

McAllister: All over this house?

Kandell: [01:06:57] Well my other house when the kids were small and then yes all over this house in pieces. I had a piece here, piece there. The thing is—I don't know if you need to know that but I had a terrible leak in my apartment [unclear] penthouse and they were fixing the roof and I was out of my apartment for thirteen years before the landlord bothered to fix the roof but I couldn't live here. So the stuff was kind of just sitting around for thirteen years. Anyway, I finally got back into this apartment and that's when I knew I was going to build that shrine room. And that's when we put it together as a shrine room. What year was that? I don't remember, maybe twenty years ago, fifteen.

McAllister: And when you said, "We put it together," you mean you and Redko put it together?



Kandell: Yes. It had been in his possession.

McAllister: But you did it here in a different way from—

Kandell: [01:07:49] Maybe that's about the time that I got it from him yes. I don't remember.

McAllister: And did you put it together in a different way than it had been in his apartment or did you reconstruct it pretty much as he had it?

Kandell: [01:07:55] I tried to make it the same with the pyramid with the Buddha at the top. It was much smaller and there wasn't as much in it but it was the beginning. Gradually that's when I started collecting aggressively and he too. He knew where the pieces were and he would bring it to me. I wouldn't go out shopping because I was a disaster at the auction galleries. I always had to give away everything I bought. It was not good.

McAllister: I wanted to ask you about that. So how did this collaboration with Redko actually work? So he would find the pieces in auction houses or among private collections and you'd collaborate by talking about them?

Kandell: [01:08:42] He wouldn't find anything at an auction. He wouldn't go either. He was friendly from the old days in college with the Tibetan families who had come as refugees. He's still friendly with them. Unfortunately, they're dying. They do die young. And he was friendly

with them and he knew they had pieces, and slowly he would convince them to let a piece go that they'd had in their families. That's how he collected too because he knew the families from way back, way back. And that's how I got these. Lucky me. I mean I really got them from him and lucky me to know him. And it's because of him that I know what I know and that I have what I have. Because who knows those families in Queens? Not me.

McAllister: So through each piece he would—when you said that you learned from him, he would bring a piece to you and you'd talk about the piece and—

Kandell: Absolutely.

McAllister: —you'd learn about it in both the religious and the cultural context through his knowledge of how to situate the piece culturally and religiously?

Kandell: [01:09:56] Exactly. And what it was he was more technical. It's this old, it's from here, this position is kind of like that rather than where to put it in the shrine room. That was me, that design is me. And I had advisors, lamas, who would help me. But basically the visual is me. That's my room.

McAllister: Were these pieces adding to the shrine room that you had from Redko or were they a set of different pieces such as the pieces that are in the room here that we're sitting in and talking?

Kandell: [01:10:27] We gradually started putting pieces in a shrine form, and more and more and more I would put objects in the shrine. The shrine room was the same size but the collection was smaller. Once I got his whole collection then we put the room together and gradually. It was very gradual. Then we started lighting it, started painting the walls, got the floor prop. It was all slow. It didn't become a really nice shrine room until later.

McAllister: It sounds as if in some instances there's no such thing as a completed shrine room. That there's always the possibility of adding or moving pieces around or taking pieces out or in.

Kandell: [01:11:19] I do that all the time, move them all the time. I move this and then I moved this the other day. And I bought a small piece the other day. The only thing is there's not much around. He can't find pieces. His families are not with us anymore and what they had they've sold. There's stuff coming around at the auction galleries but it's missing a base or it's missing an arm or a head or they take a head and put it on another head. They'll find a piece here with no head and they'll find a piece over there with a head and they'll put—and try and sell it. My pieces are all complete. He wouldn't bring it to me—mostly I only buy what he brings me. After a while I just gave up. And I only would buy what he would bring me. And he would never bring me a piece that wasn't complete.

McAllister: And if I understand correctly, partly from what you're saying now and from our earlier conversation, what you mean by complete is that a piece that would have been recognizable as a religious object rather than just as a, if you will, as a piece of art. That is that

the pedestal for example that you were talking about before of a statue that the pedestal was integral for religious reasons—

Kandell: [01:12:43] The most important part of the statue.

McAllister: —to the statue because that's where a lot of the religious import was. And so that if you take out the base then you kind of lose not only some of its artistic value but you lose its religious meaning.

Kandell: [01:13:03] Totally. The prayers, the jewels, everything is in there. And it's sanctified and they close it and seal the bottom of it. The bottoms of the statues are sealed. Pieces you buy in today's market base is cut out, they're open, it's hollow. Now some of them are emptied already [unclear]. Nothing's perfect but they all have bases. One museum in New York was featuring a piece there was just no base at all. But anyway, most of the museums you go to probably have a piece with a wooden base. It's been replaced because Americans, foreigners, Westerners buy for the sculptural aspect of the art. And the Tibetans figured that out quick and they sell the base for more money to the Tibetans. I don't have a single piece without a base. I did have one but I gave it away. I gave it to Tibet House. It's a beautiful, beautiful piece. That's why I bought it.

The paintings, which are called thangkas, have a brocade around the top. You see the brocade on the top and then on the side and on the bottom as well. They put that brocade on it. And then at the bottom there's a stick and on the end of each stick is a silver finial. That's important. Many

museums, including the Rubin Museum, started that way only they would cut the brocade off and put the picture in a frame. Well that is not the purpose of a thangka. A thangka is given to you when you're born according to the stars and that is yours to meditate on and it's a certain image and you cover it. We'll go down to the shrine room. I'll show you again. It's covered so that you don't—what's secret is sacred. It's secret and sacred. It's not for anybody else. It's not art.—it's an iconographic representation of a religious figure. I had this real argument with—I don't know if I should say it—with Donald Rubin. He said, "We're an art museum. We're not a religious museum. We don't want your shrine room." Now they have one. They wanted my shrine room, which I gifted to the Smithsonian. It was only on loan to the Rubin[laughs]. So they built their own.

McAllister: Well this is interesting because if you were a Buddhist—so some people might think for somebody who's a Buddhist that removal of the bases or other parts of the piece that it kind of undermines or impairs its religious quality is at the most extreme sacrilegious but at least it diminishes its meaning and its value—

Kandell: Oh totally.

McAllister: —because it loses the religious—

Kandell: A hundred percent.

McAllister: —but if you're not a Buddhist you might think that's kind of okay maybe because you want to appreciate it as a piece of art. But you as a non-Buddhist are saying no that's not okay. And I find that curious and interesting because this is the position in some sense of the Rubin people. They're saying in effect, We think of this as a piece of art and that it can be understood as a piece of art independent of its religious meaning.

Kandell: Well it is.

McAllister: And that's maybe because they're non-Buddhist. But you as a non-Buddhist are saying no it only has meaning as a religious artistic artifact.

Kandell: [01:16:51] But to some extent I preserved what was Tibet and I seem to have—you don't know what you're doing half the time in your life. Do you? You don't know?

McAllister: Three-quarters of the time.

Kandell: [01:17:02] I mean I didn't say, Oh I'm going to Sikkim so I can collect a shrine room and give it away. No. You don't know what you're doing. But it turns out I wanted everything authentic. Why? I don't know why. I could've just thrown out the—I wanted everything to be the way it was in Tibet. I could've preserved the artistic. It is. It's very artistic. It's beautiful, especially the really good pieces. But you don't know what you're doing and you don't know why you're doing it until suddenly it happens. And that's what happened to me. It just happened

and I don't know why. Well Phil helped me a lot. Phil is a religious man. Phil is a Russian Orthodox Priest. He knows religion and so that was probably—

McAllister: I was going to say, I suspect that Redko probably would not have wanted to work with you unless you were interested in preserving the religious quality of these artifacts.

Kandell: [01:18:01] I don't think he thought of it that way. He trained me. He really trained me. He trained me in everything I know about it. He'd research the meaning and he knew about religious—he practices to this day. He's probably in church right now.

McAllister: I want to wrap up this first session in a couple of minutes and let me just do that by talking about more recent collecting. As you say, to some extent you've cut back because there aren't many pieces around.

Kandell: [01:18:42] Well Phil cut back because he couldn't find anything else because his families were dead. There were no more sources. I have collected a few pieces. Like last week I bought a couple of little pieces. I'll show them to you.

McAllister: But even now or even since the Smithsonian collection, you also buy pieces that don't necessarily have anything to do with shrines? You buy artifacts that are not—I don't know, they may be religious but they're not about shrines, is that correct?

Kandell: [01:19:14] I don't think I would buy it now. Okay, that piece. See that document, twelve feet high—that's a twelve foot ceiling—

McAllister: It's beautiful.

Kandell: [01:19:23] —is not religious. It's written in chancellery Tibetan. Robert Thurman thought that was tourist gibberish until somebody by the name of [E.] Gene Smith, who was a Tibetan linguist who lived over there studying Tibetan languages, he said, "This is a great thing. It's chancellery Tibetan." That is a document of the fifth Dalai Lama, who is appointing his successor when he dies. And then he would go into seclusion to meditation and his successor would be the Regent until the Dalai Lama died. The document declares that Sonam Gyatso is his successor as a Regent. That's not done. The Dalai Lama is supposed to be reborn and his soul found in another young boy, perhaps under a tree and by a brook, you know? This document is not religious. In those days, there were no magazines, nothing, no newspapers. And so when an important decree came down they painted a copy of it on the walls of a monastery. That is painted on the walls of the Potala, which is the Dalai Lamas' home. It was the tallest building in the world until they built skyscrapers. The document is painted on the entrance so that everybody will see it and it's documented in a book called *The Dalai Lamas* by Martin Brown. People have pictures of it on the wall. It's a little different shape, it's more square. Now, this document is going to the Metropolitan Museum in New York this year.



McAllister: Well let's conclude our first interview on that note and then we'll pick up in a couple of weeks with more about how you thought about collecting and about collecting in general and some other matters relating to collecting and your collection if you will okay?

Kandell: [01:21:32] Right. Well there's more to my life than collecting. I mean I was—human rights and—

McAllister: And that too, and that as well.

Kandell: [01:21:38] —and children and psychology and all that business. I worked as a psychologist for a number of years.

McAllister: Right, no I want to pick up on all that as well.

Kandell: [01:21:46] I mean there's more. And my own children.

McAllister: No exactly.

Kandell: [01:21:51] We ended up talking about the shrine room—

McAllister: So thank you.

Kandell: [01:21:52] —because I don't know somehow you asked me that.

McAllister: Yes that's fine but we'll pick up on all that as well.

Kandell: Okay.

McAllister: Thank you.

[END OF SESSION]