

Transcript: MARY E. MILLER, Author, *Baroness of Hobcaw: The Life of Belle W. Baruch*

Interviewer: BETSY NEWMAN

Interview Date: OCTOBER 25, 2010

Location: BELLEFIELD HOUSE, HOBCAW BARONY

Length: 2 HOURS, 15 MINUTES

Betsy Newman: Anything you'd like to say on how it must have been for Simon Baruch when he decided to move to New York?

Mary Miller: I imagine it was a very alien kind of lifestyle for them, to be in a huge city like that. And yet he was such a creative individual in his medical field. And, you know, it was—he was one of the people who lobbied for public baths. You know, we take that so much for granted now, but most of the people lived in apartments that had no public bathrooms whatsoever, and no way to take a bath, and so they would go to the public baths and pay a nickel or a dime and have a bath. So, he was quite an enterprising individual. Highly intelligent. And Mr. Baruch really admired his father.

BN: What was it like for him here, in the Reconstruction era?

MM: Very challenging and very difficult because of the way things were. I think it challenged his principles, it challenged his basic beliefs, and that he didn't find them compatible with society as it was in the Post-War period. And I think that's what prompted him to move to New York.

BN: It must have been an awful time to be in South Carolina.

MM: Yes. Anywhere in the South, really. For people. Well—for native people.

BN: Let's talk a little bit about Bernard and the beginning of his career and life.

MM: Well, he had a lot of energy and a lot of excitement and a lot of intelligence and he was able to see the big financial picture that most of us really can't quite comprehend and he would be up at dawn so that he could—he made a lot of money in arbitrage—and he would be up at dawn talking on the telephone with Europe before the markets opened in the United States so he would know how situations were. So, he brought a lot of intelligence and energy to what he did. He worked very, very hard. And... I think that Belle was a lot like him in that respect. She had his energy. She had his intelligence. She had his view of things.

BN: Was her name Anne or Annie [Anne Griffen Baruch]?

MM: Her name was Annie legally, but she was called Anne by the family.

BN: Tell me about their courtship.

MM: Well, it was quite long— eight years. And her father objected because Baruch was a Jew and Annie was the granddaughter of a very prominent Episcopalian minister, and he just felt that the marriage wouldn't work. But her mother favored this suit and so he got to see her quite often with her mother's cooperation, shall we say. And he also had great expectations of himself as far as the kind of home he wanted to offer to his bride and the financial situation he wanted to be in and he was learning his trade. He would make a lot of money and then he'd lose a lot of money and they he'd make a lot of money—[laughs].

So finally, he made a *lot* of money, I think around \$60,000, and he decided that this was the time to get married. And so, they were married in the family home, but her father didn't go to the wedding. And...but her mother approved of the

relationship and they did get married. And I think when Belle was born, then grandfather came around. So-- But it was a love match, there's no question about that. And I was struck, I was looking through some photographs, how tall Anne was. She was easily six feet tall. A very tall woman. That kind of-- I don't know why it surprised me, but I noticed it when I was looking into some photographs.

BN: She was almost as tall as Bernard.

MM: Yes, she was!

BN: The Baruchs were tall people.

MM: Yes they were.

BN: Especially for that era.

MM: For that time period, yes.

BN: How do you think Belle's life was growing up?

MM: It was a life of great privilege. And she had nurses, of course, and tutors later on. And, and I think when Belle was small her father was still very much involved in the family scene. He hadn't become as prominent and as important as he would become later on. So I think she had an opportunity that the younger children didn't have to have a more intimate and friendly relationship with their father and to spend more time with him, especially when they were very young. And so I think that colored their relationship. And she had a great deal in common with her father. I think they thought alike and they liked the same things. And, of course, she was the only child and only grandchild for quite a number of years and she enjoyed that. She

enjoyed that. And she had things that children normally long for. You know, a pony, and a cart, and riding lessons, and many, many privileges.

BN: And she learned a lot of languages, didn't she?

MM: Well, she learned French because her governess was French.

BN : They did experience some anti-Semitism. Talk about that?

MM: I don't think they really experienced it until they were older. Not so much when they were young because they were in a very protected milieu. Although, when she wanted to go to school, her high school, she could not go to the one her mother had gone to because their father was a Jew. And later on, especially, there was a period of really rabid anti-Semitism in the United States, and the Baruchs were subjected to a lot because of his prominence. Particularly, I think, between the two World Wars was the worst period. And he just handled it, I thought, very gracefully. He didn't respond in anger. He didn't respond in an uncivilized and-- and-- a lack of civility that we find in politics today. He was always a very civil man, and always well-mannered, and well-spoken, and courteous, and thoughtful. And I think the way he handled it gave the children an example of how they should handle it.

BN: Talk a little bit about the Second Northern Invasion.

MM: Well, I think it was a time, you know, the South was really in poverty. There was a lot of unemployment, there weren't many resources to them now that the rice was no longer being raised as it had been. The rice plantations were really lying fallow in many respects. So, it was a time when the Northerners came down and they bought a lot of property but on the other hand, they preserved a lot. They preserved a lot of the Old South that might not have been preserved had they not

had the money to do so and the interest and the love of the beauty of the South. So yes it was an invasion, but I think in some ways it was a very beneficial invasion. Particularly in terms of preserving the old plantations and the houses and the properties.

BN: And to some extent providing employment.

MM: Yes! Providing employment. Certainly minimum wage, but at least it was something. And I remember reading and hearing that the African Americans on the Baruch property—Hobcaw Barony—were very concerned because he wasn't a Southerner and he didn't know the traditions of the South and they were afraid that perhaps he might actually want them to leave the property or he wouldn't know the custom of employing everyone he possibly could. But after all, he was from Camden, originally. And his mother was Southern and his mother discussed these things with him. So I think by the standards of his day he did the best he could.

BN: What about paternalism and the attitudes of Southerners?

MM: Yes, Yes. Well, he was paternalistic. I don't think there's any doubt about that. But I also think he was-- it was a benevolent type of paternalism. It wasn't...there was no malice in him. You never found any malice in Mr. Baruch.

BN: He seems so genial.

MM: Yes, he was. And he liked to be liked. It was important to him to be liked.

BN: Tell us about her [Belle Baruch's] athleticism.

MM: She was a superb athlete, really. And she loved to sail, and she was the first person to win the Queen of the Bay yacht racing. She was only 17 at the time when she won the cup. And she won many, many sailing competitions. And I think those cups are preserved now over at Hobcaw House. And she loved to ride and she'd been riding since she was a child, so she had a lifelong love of sailing and riding and... she liked to even play baseball here on the plantation sometimes and she always was very, very competitive and wanted her team to win, and usually it did. So she was competitive and athletic and she loved it and she loved to hunt. Very good with a gun. Won a lot of amateur shooting competitions, nothing formal. But things like on board ships she would win the shooting competitions and that kind of thing. It's amazing to think that they used to travel with the gun under the bunk. With their shotguns—that's how they traveled, with their guns right in the stateroom. Today that would never be allowed.

BN: She was a great nature lover, too.

MM: Oh, yes. She loved this property in particular. She called it "the friendliest woods in the world." That was her term for Hobcaw Barony. She thought it was just paradise and she grew to love it. The more she knew it, the more she loved it. And Captain Jim Powell had a lot to do with that. He was one of the caretakers and supervisors here and he just took an interest in children. I think he just liked children and he was-- he came along at a time when her father was becoming more prominent and less available to the children and to the family, and so she spent a lot of time with Jim Powell and I think he was intrigued by her, her love of the place and all of her questions. I'm sure she drove him crazy asking questions.

But she was so eager to hear and so eager to learn that he enjoyed just talking with her and taking her places and showing her all of the things that he loved because to find someone who shares your great love and who has a great interest in

the things that you love and care about is a wonderful thing. It's flattering and comfortable and it's pleasing, so he liked being with Belle.

BN: Talk about Baruch's guests.

MM: Oh, he loved to entertain. And I think that Belle learned the art of hospitality from her mother and her father. Her mother was a great hostess and Belle learned a great deal from her mother and she learned congeniality from her father and she was considered when she grew up to be a wonderful hostess. Someone once said about her that she welcomed you and made you feel at home and then she left you alone to do what you wanted to do and didn't feel like she had to entertain you every moment of the day. And she allowed you to wander at your own leisure and enjoy the property in your own way, but was available if you needed her or wanted her to be with you. So she learned a lot in that respect. She was, however, a more private individual than her father was and usually people who were invited to Bellefield were people that she knew well and she cared about and was comfortable with.

BN: Unlike her father.

MM: Yes, well, he was a very social person, he was also a very political person. And he loved—he liked moving in the circles of power. In the circles of influence. And those things really didn't mean much to Belle. That was one way in which she differed from her father.

BN: Describe what the situation was like for the blacks here when he came.

MM: Well, the first thing he did was reassure them that there would be employment for everyone. And he did upgrade the homes that they lived in. And he

built schools for the children. He upgraded their little church. He arranged for a minister to come here and live on the property, which was a wonderful thing for them. He arranged to have a doctor here once a week to treat anyone who was ill, and if there were any other medical problems he saw that they were taken to Georgetown to see the doctor. So he did look after them in a very paternalistic way. But he cared about them, he sincerely cared about them. He had friends among them. He thought highly of William Kennedy, for example—Minnie's father. And he just—he really did care about the people. He wasn't indifferent in any way whatsoever to their needs.

Now, he might not have been politically correct as we are today, but he also cared for them. He provided for their college educations. As Minnie said, he promised and she called him on his promise and he did keep it. But he educated many other besides Minnie. So he was a caring man and I think that you see that in his relationships with everyone who ever worked for him. If you check on that, you know, he had the wonderful habit of when someone—an employee retired, he provided them with a home, a retirement home. And he provided them with sufficient income. So he was a very benevolent employer in many ways. Not just to the African Americans, but to the other employees. And he provided the same services for the white children that lived on the property—you know, schools and medical care and that sort of thing.

BN: Why do you think he told them [African American staff and residents] that if they left they couldn't come back?

MM: I think because it was upsetting the balance of how things worked at Hobcaw House—Hobcaw Barony, I think he had an image of Hobcaw Barony in his heart and when they left that upset everything. And I think he saw it perhaps as a repudiation of the life that he had provided for them and I think he didn't quite understand that yet. And so I think perhaps he did that because he was hoping that

that would make them stay. And of course it didn't. It was just a normal change in society and none of us like change and the world was changing and he was not comfortable with it. I think that change later on—you know, later in life he began to understand it, but he didn't then.

BN: Must have hurt his feelings.

MM: I think it did hurt his feelings, yes. That's a good way to put it.

BN: Let's move up to WWI. Can you talk about Belle's involvement in WWI?

MM: Well, when she graduated from school in 1917, we were in the midst of WWI so there weren't any big debutante balls or coming out parties, which suited her just fine. Because, after all, she was 6' 2½" and the average man at that time was 5'6½", so there was a huge difference although she loved to dance and was very graceful on the dance floor. But her father at that time was very much involved with the War Industries Board. Next to the president he was considered the most powerful man in America and Belle was old enough at that time that she certainly shared the table with a great many influential political leaders and newsmen-- prominent news people, so she knew what was going on in the world and she wanted to be a part of it like any 18 year-old.

And she did the Red Cross but that wasn't too exciting for a girl with Belle's energy, so she joined the Women's Radio Corps. And that was more interesting and more exciting. And she trained aircrews and pilots in the use of Morse Code and she knew that all her life. And she kept up her abilities at it, she even had a key that she used to practice on. So, she always loved Morse Code and she would tap out messages to friends sometimes who knew Morse Code. So she had a lot of fun with that. But also she felt she was really making a real contribution to the war effort

rather than just sitting in the Red Cross office. That was passive, whereas being in the Women's Radio Corps was active and Belle was an active person.

BN: Talk about how she went to France.

MM: Her father was the financial consultant for the Paris Peace Conference, so he invited Belle and her mother to travel with him to France and while he was in the conferences she and her mother traveled to various places in France, including some of the battlefields and she just kind of fell in love with France. She really liked it and later on she would be spending a great deal of her life there. Especially in the 1930s, between the mid-1920s, mid-1930s, she lived in France a part of each year. And it was there that she began to ride and take an interest in grand prix show jumping and was very, very gifted.

She also became very interested in politics while she was in France and in this whole concept of the League of Nations and when she got back home she and her friend, Evangeline Johnson, who had been great friends and suffragettes and interested in women's liberty and women's vote, they together began to work very actively for the United States and lobbying for the U.S. to pass the-- to sign the treaty and become part of the League of Nations. And so that was partially an outcome of her trip to France where she became aware of the greater world and not just the U.S., but the need for peace throughout the world and she thought that the League of Nations would contribute to that, so she put a lot of her own time and her own money into that effort. Helping to staff an office in New York and staffing the office in Switzerland when they would have conferences there. She would contribute her time and her efforts to that. So that was very influential and of course, getting the vote. She was out there campaigning, much to her grandparents distress. Her grandmother actually had been publically opposed to having that passed but Belle was out there marching and demonstrating and was one of the first American women to vote in her national election, so that was a great coup.

BN: Must have been exciting to be 20 in 1920.

MM: Oh, I think so, yeah. And then you know, when Mr. Wilson was very ill and they still had not passed the treaty for the League of Nations, when Congress wouldn't agree to it, she arranged the first radio program - she and Evangeline - of an American president like that to speak to an audience and Mrs. Wilson never forgot that. She always loved Belle and they were very, very close friends and a lot of it stemmed from her work with the League. And he addressed an audience of over 3 million people—the largest audience that had listened to radio. Which we don't think much about it now, but it was very, very impressive at that time. So, there's not much that Belle left undone. When she took on a project, she really got involved.

BN: Would you discuss Belle confronting her sexuality?

MM: Well, there's a letter that Evangeline wrote to Mrs. Wilson saying that she didn't understand why Belle thought that she was losing her, that they would still be friends. And I think Belle was somewhat bewildered herself at the beginning and very confused about her feelings over this whole thing and was a little upset with herself at not being able to join whole-heartedly into this celebration. But she controlled her feelings and tried to put Evangeline's feelings first and she did. She was one of the few people that was present at the wedding, which was a very private affair. But then when everything was over with, she came home here, she came to Hobcaw and she spent time walking in the woods and hunting and fishing and looking at her own feelings trying to imagine what this was all about and I think that's when she realized that she really preferred the company of other women, why she had never felt any great attraction to any young man. Certainly, she had a lot of suitors, but she never was interested in any of them. And I think that's when she came to terms with her sexuality. But, she was - as I said in the book, she was not

willing to define herself by that. It was part of who she was, but it certainly wasn't all of who she was. And so she learned to live with that and lived with it pretty much on her own terms, especially as she matured. The older she became, the more confident in herself as a person she became, the more she tried to live with integrity and be who she was.

BN: I'm sure it wasn't easy.

MM: No, it was very difficult, it was a very homophobic society at that time and it wasn't something you ever discussed. It wasn't, even when I was growing up, that wasn't something you discussed or talked about. So it was kind of like always living with this secret self that you couldn't reveal to people, especially in the beginning. As she grew older, she probably-- today they call it "coming out," but nearly everyone who knew her, who knew her well, was aware of her sexual preferences. And I think that's one reason she lived in Europe, especially in France, they were more accepting over there. Not so judgmental.

And also I think another reason she spent a lot of time in Europe was that people didn't think of her there as Bernard Baruch's daughter. She was who she was, she was Belle Baruch, whereas in the US she was Bernard Baruch's daughter and that was always kind of a joy and yet sometimes a burden because her father would often caution them. They were told never to speak of him and his business affairs and his political affairs and things they heard at the Baruch dining room table—that sort of thing. And people would approach her sometimes just because she was Baruch's daughter not for her own sake. And she didn't like to discuss her father and she didn't wanna be asked to influence him one way or another or to obtain political favors, that sort of thing. So I think living in France gave her a lot of freedom.

BN: Was she involved with a lesbian circle in Paris?

MM: There's no evidence of that. It may be true, but there's no evidence of that. Belle was a very private person. She would never have been affectionate in public whether it was heterosexual or homosexual relationship - she just wouldn't. And it would have been no one's business but hers.

BN: What about her engagements to men?

MM: Well, with Monroe Cuthbertson... Monroe was homosexual and I think it was very much going to be a marriage of convenience that was very common in that day. Particularly, a lot of homosexuals married and gave the-- presented a normal lifestyle to other people. Might even have children. But, it was understood between the couples that the one or the other was homosexual. I think it was that kind of relationship, plus they liked each other very much. They were good friends and they thought "well, maybe this will work."

But with Chita Davila, I think she might really have been in love with him. In fact, she did comment to Nolan Taylor one time when she was looking at a photograph of Davila that sat on the big piano, "That's the only man I ever loved." And apparently they were just two kindred souls. They loved wild horseback rides and dancing and wine and song and they just-- hunting, he just cared about the same things. --Had a wonderful time together, and apparently it was a very passionate love affair between the two of them. It took place in Europe and it came over here, so it was an intercontinental romance. But it was just bad timing. A lot of anti-Semitism in his home country of Romania and the king did not want him involved with a Jewess. Even though Belle was Episcopalian, she was the daughter of one of the most prominent Jew in the world and he just wouldn't have it.

Belle's father was furious, he didn't want the relationship. He—I think he often discouraged his daughters and their confidence in themselves by saying, "He only wants you for your money." And so Belle was pretty heartbroken when that relationship ended. Her father had said, "I'll give you two million dollars if you don't

marry this man.” And she had no intention of not marrying him anyway. If she had wanted to, I think she would have done it. But I think he gave into the pressure from his government, so she gave in to the pressure of her father but she collected her \$2 million. Belle was nothing if not practical. And also she was hurt and she was angry.

BN: She put that into her stables in France. Talk about what it was like in France, her relationship with (Paul) Larrigan.

MM: She was his pupil. She always admired him and liked him and they were great friends. She credited him with her riding capabilities. That he was the one who helped her and trained her for grand prix show jumping and she—he also served as her broker so to speak. Finding horses for her in Europe because he knew that community very well. And introduced her to a lot of people. He’s the one who found Souriant for her, her beloved horse who she won the Paris Horse Show with and many other riding competitions. But she had several horses in her stable and he was usually the person that helped her find these horses and helped her evaluate them and guided her when she first entered the show jumping circuit. So they had a very close relationship. Granted, it was business, but it was also friendship. And I think too that he introduced her to Jean Darthez, who was her stable master and her head trainer and her very good friend. They got to be great friends.

BN: --Her desire to own part of the property.

MM: Well, she loved it [Hobcaw Barony]. From the time she was 5 years old, it was like she had come home. That this was the home of her heart, so to speak. And yes, she maintained apartments in New York and one in France at the time, but Hobcaw was home. And she longed for her father to sell her a piece of the property and she had been begging him to do so for years and he never would say yes or - and he didn’t say no either. And she also I think felt that this was, she called Hobcaw her

“American roots.” This was where her roots were, and her American bit of home that she would come back to.

And when WWII was looming and he knew more than most people, Baruch did, that it was inevitable, that the US would somehow get involved in it, he was also worried because she would be considered a Jewess even though she wasn't a practicing Jew and he really wanted her to come home, and so finally he more or less bribed her. He said, “I will sell you the piece of property that you want and I will also let you take over managing the whole property if you will come home.” So she finally agreed. And she started building her home, and she moved her stable, and she moved her trainer and his whole family, Jean Darthez, to the U.S., but that was his way of getting her home.

BN: Tell us about the time she was invited to the dedication ceremony.

MM: I think it showed the esteem that people held her in. That people respected her for herself. She had always kind of been in her father's shadow and certainly the fact that she was a Baruch factored into the choosing her to raise the flag at the war memorial but also it showed a lot of respect for her and the respect the French people had for her. Belle was very much her own person in France and they admired her greatly. And so I think that was very important. Plus she was very patriotic and she was very honored to be asked to do this. So I think it was an affirmation of her personhood and her patriotism that she was invited to do this.

In August of 1937, she was invited by the American government and by the French government to participate in the dedication of the war memorial in France to those fallen during WWII, and she accepted and she raised the American flag at the appropriate time over that property. It was also an unprecedented international broadcast that had never been done before. President Roosevelt spoke from the US and it was broadcast live in France, so that was a very unusual thing, too. And Belle was honored to be a part of it.

BN: Talk about the Christmas of '37.

MM: 1937 was Belle's first Christmas in her new home at Bellefield and so she gave the big Christmas dinner that year and there were many, many guests. Her father, of course, was entertaining and all of their guests came with her mother and father and her brother and her sister and their families and the different political figures that were there at the time and it was a wonderful, festive time. But Annie Baruch got sick, and she developed a really bad cold that had gone into her chest. And my understanding was that the doctor really didn't want her traveling, but she wanted to go home. You know, when you're sick there's no place like home. And so she did, and ironically enough, there's a photograph that Varvara Hasselbalch took because she was here visiting, and in it, Annie Baruch was waving goodbye with a handkerchief. And that was the last photograph taken of her, so it's rather poignant and rather sad.

Annie went home and she just got worse. And so they wired Belle to come and she left. So it was a bittersweet memory, her first Christmas in her own home. It was colored with a touch of sadness by the loss of Annie Baruch. Belle was very close to her mother, but because of her sexuality, there was not that intimacy that she would have like to have had with her mother. There was always that slight barrier, that knowledge that it was a disappointment to her mother, but there was certainly a great deal of mother-daughter love there. There just lacked that intimacy that we all want, the total acceptance that we want from our parents.

BN: What about Belle's relationship with Barbara Donohoe?

MM: Belle met Barbara in Europe when she was riding and it was just an instant attraction and rapport between the two of them. They loved the same things, they traveled in the same social circles, and I think it was sort of a love at first sight

in that Barbara was the great love of her life, and the first great love of her life and they-- Barbara had only one horse. Malicorn was his name, so she kept him in Belle's stables. And they traveled together throughout Europe riding in horseshows and partying and touring and having a wonderful time together. And when Belle would come home, Barbara would come to Hobcaw Barony with her.

And Barbara actually was responsible for a lot of the landscaping at Bellefield. She and Lois, Lois Massey, told me how she and Barbara would travel all over the state and up into North Carolina, into Georgia sometimes looking for just the right plants to bring back. And although Belle had a professional landscaper, Barbara had great influence on what was chosen and where it was placed and how it was done. And she did a lot of transplanting of plants herself onto the property. So she had great influence on the external of Bellefield.

There's a turkey walking right outside our window [referencing outside the window]. Several of them as a matter of fact. Belle loved them.

BN: Barbara up and left.

MM: Well, she was called home to San Francisco because her father was ill and she left and she just never came back. What exactly happened? I don't know. I don't think Belle ever really knew, for sure. I do know that when I spoke with Barbara about it later, when I was writing this book, she just said, "Well, one can't ride in horse shows forever." And she had some family responsibilities that she, had to be fulfilled. I think that probably is it was an arranged marriage for the family and they wanted to bring her home.

BN: That must have been very hard for Belle.

MM: Oh, she was heartbroken. And Barbara never even came back for her horse. She asked me about her horse, if I knew what had happened to her horse,

Malicorn. And I said, "Oh, it lived at the Bellefield stables all its life." And she was very pleased about that. But even her saddle and boots were here. So, she never came back. It was just a very abrupt ending. Those kinds of things are always very painful and always leave unanswered questions.

BN: Belle got her pilot's license.

MM: Oh, she loved it. I think part of the attraction was, she still rode but she had a lot of arthritis and she'd been injured in a lot of falls and so riding wasn't the great joy that it had been. But she found that same freedom in an airplane that she had found riding pell-mell with the horse. And so it was a great sense of freedom that she just loved. And it appealed to her nature. She had a bit of a wild nature and she loved to be free and adventurous and that just was right up her alley. And so she got her pilot's license in single engine aircraft and then co-pilot's license in twin-engine. And she flew all the time, everyday, weather permitting when she was here.

Now before WWII she had her hangar in Georgetown. It wasn't until after WWII that she moved her hangar here and built her own runway, which some people found rather frightening but she loved it. And she would patrol the area and watch for poachers and if she saw them she would fly very low and buzz them, so to speak, and take pictures with her camera. And when they got back to the dock, in Georgetown usually, she was waiting with the sheriff because she would not tolerate poachers on the property. And they always said that they would rather meet Nolan Taylor on the property than Belle. There's something intimidating about a 6 foot 2 inch woman with a shotgun in her hands.

BN: And that kind of look on her face.

MM: Well Nolan might be inclined to let them off, but not Belle.

BN: She was the informal truant officer.

MM: Yes, she really believed in education and she realized that things were changing, and that for young African Americans to make it in the outside world they needed an education; they needed to be able to read and write. And so there were the schools and the teachers and by-golly the kids were going to go to school. And if she found them wandering around the property during school days she would take them to school; make sure they got there. And one time the kids ran into the swamp because she was on horseback and they thought, "Well she's not going to risk her horse to come into the swamp after us." So they ran and hid in the swamp. Well, she got off her horse and waded right into the swamp and pulled them out of there and took them to school, so she was very insistent about that.

BN: Talk about her relationship with Dickie Leyland.

MM: Well, I think Belle was on the rebound and she was very lonely without Barbara and she went to-- a-- well it was during the war [World War II]. She went to like a Red Cross, but the British, the British equivalent of the Red Cross canteen or soldiers, and that's where she met Dickie Leyland. Dickie was British and there was just this attraction between them. And Dickie came, was invited to come here with her then companion. And it was kind of a, sort of from the very beginning, in a sense, in that Belle and Dickie were very attracted to each other and Dickie's partner felt betrayed. And she ended up leaving the property, or being invited to leave the property and Dickie stayed on.

And Dickie, of course we can only speculate, but Dickie seemed to be a very possessive person. She wanted all of Belle's time and all of Belle's attention and she set about alienating people that were close to Belle, such as Jim Powell who had been Belle's lifelong friend. She was so unpleasant to him that he finally stopped

coming around every morning like he used to. Belle would still, he'd still see Belle, almost every day, but he wouldn't come to the house like he had in the past. And one by one she just managed to get rid of people that she felt Belle had affection for and that Belle cared deeply about. And she, Dickie drank a lot; she encouraged Belle to drink a lot. And so Belle was drinking more probably at that time than anytime in her life. And of course she could refuse, so you can't blame it all on Dickie. But Nolan Taylor told me that she drank a lot less than people thought; that he saw her pour a lot of glasses of liquor down the sink and only pretended to be drinking. So who knows?

But she was very jealous, Dickie was very very jealous of Lois Massey. She was not only jealous of her relationship with Belle, but of the esteem that she was held in by Mr. Baruch and the rest of the Baruch family. Mr. Baruch would invite Belle to things at Hobcaw House and not invite; tell her not to include Dicky because he didn't like her. And I think it was difficult because of Dickie's personality for them to deny Belle's lesbianism. So he didn't want Dickie present at any functions especially where he had other guests. But Lois was always included. And Lois was loved and respected and honored by the whole Baruch family. So I think she became sort of a symbol for Dickie and she wanted to get rid of her, and she finally persuaded Belle to fire Lois. And it was really in my opinion a low point in Belle's behavior too, because rather than dismiss her one on one, she wrote her a letter, which was very unkind, was very cruel. And certainly Lois deserved a lot better from Belle, and I think Belle was always ashamed of it, always ashamed, and it was something she had to learn to live with.

BN: And Lois forgave her.

MM: She said to me, numerous times, "I never blamed Ms. Belle, never blamed Ms. Belle." So with Lois there was never any animosity towards Belle, there certainly was towards Dickie Leyland. But she continued to love Belle and care about Belle. All of her life I've never heard her criticize Belle, not one time. Isn't that

amazing? As far as we know she and Belle never talked again. It's a very sad way for such a long and loving relationship to end, and it doesn't speak well of Belle; but she was a flawed human being. Like all of us, she wasn't perfect.

BN: Ella Severin?

MM: Ella was there; she was at Bellefield at the time that Dickey left. You know she ran off with a daughter of one of Belle's employees, which really hurt Belle. Not just that Dickey betrayed her but that she would take that child with her, that young girl, and have that kind of influence over her. She was very upset over that. It really violated Belle's own standards of behavior. These were things you didn't do. And Ella was there. And Ella was very fond of Belle and it grew into a loving relationship.

And she was very very different; she was very well organized, she was a good manager. She was a wonderful cook and she liked to cook. And they were very peaceful days. She didn't enjoy hunting like Belle did. She was really an animal rights activist. She would fly with Belle once in awhile and she didn't enjoy horseback riding, but by then Belle was reaching the point where she couldn't ride too much anymore because of her arthritis. So they started growing camellias together and entering flower shows together. And then later on Belle actually sponsored the prizes for the flower shows at Camden so it was a very peaceful and loving relationship. And Ella was very, very devoted to Belle. And when Belle was sick and was in New York on the final days of her life, Ella was there day and night, just stayed by her side the whole time, and then spent a lifetime honoring Belle's wishes for this property.

BN: How did she do that?

MM: Well, I think I mentioned earlier that Belle left her quite a bit of money and lifetime residency at Bellefield and the New York apartment, so she could have

lived a life of leisure and traveled extensively and done anything she wanted to do. But she, for the most part, stayed here at Bellefield and saw to it that Belle's wishes were honored; that the stipulations that she set forth in the trust for the property were respected and she had a great influence on the development of this property. And I think it says a lot about Ella Severin that she loved Belle so much that she would honor her wishes particularly where this is concerned.

BN: What is the real importance of Belle's gift?

MM: I think it was this property. I mean Belle was an ecologist and an environmentalist when most Americans didn't even recognize those words or know what they meant. And it was just a great love of the land and her observation of what was happening. Certainly she saw what had happened in Europe as properties were developed and she saw what was happening in the U.S., particularly the New Jersey shores, where she used to go as a child and other-- you know, she traveled extensively. She saw what was happening. She didn't want that to happen here. And I think it was also very typically Belle that it was set up in a private trust. It wasn't given to the state; it wasn't given to the federal government as a federal park, because she knew that sooner or later they would do some kind of public development on the property and she wanted it left as nature intended for it to be. And also she was in control. She had very good lawyers and they spent oh, two or three years developing that trust and writing it in such a way that it could only be used in the way that she wanted it to be used. And so I think it was very clever of Belle to set it up the way she did, and be able to monitor the property even after her death.

BN: And you live in the neighborhood?

MM: I live in Surfside Beach, which is about a 35-minute drive from here, but you know that this property has the only pristine estuary left on the eastern coast of the U.S., and that's all due to Belle Baruch. And people come here from all over the world to study ecology and environment, and that's due to Belle Baruch. So that was a great gift that she gave not only to the people of South Carolina, but to the people of the United States, and to scientists from other parts of the world, so that was her great gift.

BN : Wonderful, very well said. Thank you.

MM: You're welcome. She was an exciting, dynamic woman, and the reason I wrote the book was I wanted everyone to know about her; what a remarkable woman she was.

BN: You provided a gift, so thorough and timely.

MM: The board of trustees has to be given a lot of credit for maintaining it the way they have. You know Ms. Severin had a lot of influence on the decision never to pave the roads, to leave them as dirt roads. And you know it makes a huge difference, it maintains the integrity of the property.

BN: Talk about how they protected Belle Baruch her from the knowledge of her cancer.

MM: Today we would say that's a mistake, but I think that was rather common in her day. But I agree with Cynthia Taylor that Belle would have handled it, and she had a lot of courage. And also I think one of the things about her death that impressed me was that she was a great philanthropist and she gave generously all of her life; not only her money, but her own personal time, and her interest. And

even in death, she gave her corneas. When she died she donated her corneas for transplant for the blind and that was very rare in those days, it was very unusual, and again it's typical Belle. You know, she was always way ahead of her generation in her thinking and her viewpoints, and donating her corneas so someone else could see was very, very symbolic of who Belle was as a person.

END OF INTERVIEW