Diego State. I became very interested in compiling bibliographic studies of contemporary American writers and each time I would pick an author that I was interested in, I would find that some scholar had beaten me to it. So, through a series of trial and error, I determined that contemporary American playwrights, other than Eugene O'Neill, had little or no research done on them at all. So, I began to do research on Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee; all four of them, a rather grand idea as I look back on it. The faculty here gave me a small grant which allowed me to travel to the East. And the research grant that I received as a scholar in residence from the University of Texas was specifically focused on doing research on these four playwrights; they wanted me to come there and do the work there because they had the archives of Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, George Bernard Shaw, Maxwell Anderson and so forth. Eventually, my research led me to being hired by the agent for Tennessee Williams to catalog all of his manuscripts for a tax appraisal on a gift. When I completed that task, I persuaded Williams not to make the gift to Harvard, where his publisher wanted to go because he was an alumnus of Harvard, but to give it to a southern university, and I didn’t distinguish which one. Eventually he settled on the University of Texas. And this further encouraged the university to give me a fellowship hoping perhaps I might . . . [Brown talk drowned out by laughter]. So I was doing work on Williams as well as the other major playwrights at the time, and that’s what Dr. Kenney was referring to.
Question from the audience: What are your plans about the Gotham Book Mart and what is the future of . . . [inaudible]

Andreas Brown: Well, I'm thinking a lot about retirement. [Laughter] First of all, I don't think it is in my genes to live as long as Frances did, and secondly I really don't want to be standing on my feet three hours a day selling books at the age of ninety or ninety-five. I'm planning, and it's only tentative in my head, to retire within the next five or ten years. I am training very, very carefully several staff members to assume the responsibility of continuing the Gotham Book Mart. I will see to it that the store continues, financially. It's inevitable that we will have to sell the building that we fought so hard to retain. We are in the middle of what's called the Diamond Block of New York City, which is one block between Fifth Avenue and the Avenue of the Americas, which consist of nothing but diamond merchants, people dealing in precious stones and precious metals. Many of these are twenty and thirty story buildings. It's perhaps the largest concentration of commercial wealth anywhere in the United States and our small, humble, little book store is right in the middle of all that, selling three dollar poetry pamphlets. [Laughter] So, it's inevitable with the rise in the value of our building, which I can say is astronomical at least in the the world I live in, we will eventually sell the building and relocate the shop. My plan is to return to California and retire. I am in the process of trying to set up my own little foundation or some kind of plan, but it is all very tentative.
still have five or ten years of work to do, just to train my staff, so that they can confidently carry on. I suppose I will be as difficult as Frances the first three or four years, hovering over them to make sure they make no mistakes.

Question from the audience: What is the funniest title you ever managed to sell?

Andreas Brown: The funniest title, well, I’ll think of that on the way back to the hotel this afternoon. [Laughter] Well, I don’t know the answer to that, but I can tell you that some of the funniest titles that I’ve ever heard are when the customers don’t have the correct title. [Laughter] [For example] somebody says, "I want to read this wonderful southern novel that everyone’s been reading called Lost in the Storm," and they mean Gone with the Wind. [Laughter] They get it almost right. This is a game that our staff plays all the time. I mean, our favorite inquiry, of course, is when they start off by saying, "I don’t know the author and I don’t know the title, but I am wondering if you have the book I want." [Laughter] But the next best step is where they have the title all wrong, and often the wrong author. I can’t answer your question, but a lot of funny titles do come our way.

Question from the audience: Does anyone have any idea what the true wealth of that collection is at the University of Texas?
Andreas Brown: Well, it's beyond measured now. I remember when I was there, it was Dr. [Harry Huntt] Ransom, the Chancellor of the university system, who persuaded me to come there on a fellowship. He had been an English professor who rose to chairman of the department and then he became the dean of arts and sciences and rose to vice chancellor and then eventually to president of the campus and chancellor of the system. And he had a passion for books. He had many discretionary funds available to him as chancellor, and he would channel those into books. And his theory was "I may only be in the position of power and authority for five or ten years, so while I am here I am going to buy every book that I think we need." And he was voracious, he would buy entire family libraries in England and France, and he was absorbing authors' archives at such a fast pace, they couldn't even be unpacked and cataloged. Although he came in for regular criticism for his policies, he's now practically considered a saint. They've renamed the institution—instead of the Humanities Research Center it's now called the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, which is rather long-winded, but in honor of his astuteness in acquiring things. While I was there, he bought what was called the Gernsheim Collection of the history of photography and he paid three hundred thousand dollars for it in about 1963 or 1964. This created an outrage not only on the campus but throughout the rare book world that he had paid an exorbitant amount of money for a bunch of old photographs. Since then, of course, there has been an extraordinary boom in interest in vintage photography, it's history and techniques, and I would
say now that the Gernsheim Collection is probably worth many, many millions of dollars. And archive after archive was acquired by the university under his policy; the holdings are priceless.

It's my opinion that their holdings in twentieth century, English language manuscripts and literary correspondence is superior to Harvard or Yale and I think probably any other institution in America. An extraordinary collection.

Question from the audience: Tell us a little about Jackie Onassis.

Andreas Brown: Well, she is just one of my many customers. She buys books almost on a daily bases. I think the most interesting story I could tell is how I met her. I was sitting in my office, which is in the back of the store, working, and I glanced up and I saw a woman and a small boy browsing and I paid little or no attention. I think she had on a bandana and dark glasses. Eventually, they were standing right outside my door because they were looking at Melville books and the alphabet happens to be right there, the M's. So, eventually they were having trouble, and I said "May I help you?" When she said yes, she took off her glasses and I realized who I was talking to. I think John was about seven or eight, and she said "My son is having trouble with his reading." And she said "He's not interested in reading and there's only one thing he likes, and that's the high sea--clipper ships, sailing ships, whales, stories of the sea. I have gotten him some C.S. Forester books and a few other things and I thought
perhaps I could read Melville to him, to get him interested because he likes whaling a lot." President Kennedy had collected scrimshaw, and I think that is where the interest came from. Anyway, she said "May we come in and sit down?" And I said "Certainly." She turned to John and she said (and he is seven or eight years old), "John, I think it is time for you to open a charge account at a book store." [Laughter] And he moaned and he groaned. And she said, "But while you are doing that John, I am going to open one too and I am going to open one for your sister Caroline." And she said, "Could we have some applications." And my secretary brought in three applications and she took two of them and handed one to John. And he said, "What am I suppose to do?" And she said "You're suppose to fill it out." And he said, "Oh, I can't do that." And she said, "You have to fill it out, you're old enough now." So while he struggled, and I still have the application which is almost illegible, she filled out two for her daughter and herself. I then made a concerted effort to try to find books in his age range in the subject area that she had expressed an interest, and found several things which he liked very much. I got him on a reading program and she was very grateful. And over the years we became good friends. When her daughter was in school working on term papers, she would come rushing to me at the last minute and say, "I have to write a term paper on Catherine the Great and have it in by tomorrow or I can't go to the country club and ride horses" [not clear]. So we would run around the whole day and scoop up fifteen to twenty books on Catherine the Great and rush them over to the apartment.
and she would make a selection and off they would go to the country to ride horses.

Over the years, [Mrs. Onassis] has been a wonderful customer in the sense that she appreciates good service that we give her, along with a lot of people, and has recommended us to many many of her friends, and that's what makes good business. She is a very bright, very charming, very literate woman. She is a senior editor at Doubleday Publishing Company. She is always looking for new projects, always picking the brains of my staff for ideas. I discovered an obscure Russian illustrator named Boris Zvorykin about fifteen years ago by stumbling on a manuscript in Los Angeles, which I purchased for, at that time, an astronomical sum, but it was so beautiful I couldn't leave it behind. And the thought occurred to me, because it was a complete text of Russian folktales, that it should be published with the illustrations. And I took the project to Mrs. Onassis, she was at Viking Publishing Company at the time, and she became enchanted with it. Viking had to buy the manuscript, of course, that was my angle. The book was published and it was a huge commercial and critical success. I then searched all of Europe eventually finding two more of Zvorykin's unpublished manuscripts. So it's become sort of a project for Mrs. Onassis to publish these. Another one will be out this next fall—the third one that we found. They are very beautiful books.

Question from the audience: [inaudible--possibly:] How did you come to go into the book selling business?
Andreas Brown: That's a good question. I came very reluctantly to the retail book trade. While I was at the University of Texas those two years, I puzzled a great deal about what I wanted to do—did I want to go back into the academic world, get a Ph.D. and do scholarly research, which was really my instinctive interest. I felt certain I didn’t want to go into the commercial end of the book world. To this day I can’t read a financial statement. I have little or no interest in that aspect of the business and I have good accountants and a good bookkeeper to compensate for my ignorance in that area. And it was with a good deal of reluctance on my part to buy the Gotham Book Mart, although I was fascinated with the prospect, so I must say that I have approached the responsibility of owning the Gotham Book Mart in a rather unorthodox way. I insulate myself from much of the business aspect of it with a very competent staff. And I try to do the scholarly aspect of it; I love to be called in by John Updike or Saul Bellow or somebody to catalog and evaluate their manuscripts and put them into the proper order and advise them on the disposition of their papers. One the great experiences of my life at the Gotham Book Mart was when I acquired through sealed bid the Library of Edmond Wilson, who to me is the greatest literary critic and thinker of our time. And when I went up to Wellfleet [MA], to his home, and viewed the library with the prospect of making a bid on it, I was fascinated with the way he had organized it. You could literally see the great intellectual projects that had interested him, whether it was the Hebrew language or the American Civil War or the Internal Revenue
Service or certain contemporary writers. It was just the fact that I was in his library, sitting at his desk, surrounded by his own personal concept of a functioning, working, intellectual library, and I was so taken with it that I did something that I doubt very many commercial merchants in the book world would do. I hired a professional photographer at Wellfleet to come in and photograph the entire library exactly as it sat to preserve it, including what was stuffed in the stair cases and in the bedroom and in the little corners and the nook and crannies of the house, because inevitably we would have to pack the library and destroy that sense of unity that it had. And those photographs later became invaluable. I sold the library to the University of Tulsa because it had come to my attention that they had bought Cyril Connolly's library, one of the great critics of England, and they were very proud of that and they had installed it in a beautiful room. And so I drew up a proposal to the University of Tulsa that they could create a center for the study of contemporary literary criticism by having Cyril Connolly's library at one end of the room and Edmond Wilson's at the other end, and this would be irresistible to scholars interested in that area. And the two, of course, had exchanged correspondence and had exchanged books, and so the two collections dovetailed beautifully. In spite of its considerable expense, the University of Tulsa succumbed to my proposal and bought the collection.

But, I've always had a kind of instinct to avoid the commercial aspect and enjoy the academic aspect, it's sort of self indulging. Every now and then, I've had to pay serious
notice to the upcoming taxes and the rent and the considerable lawyer's bill we have had over the last years fighting to save our building, but that has not been my primary focus. Sometimes that served me poorly too. If perhaps I had been more aggressive in a commercial sense, particularly in a city like New York where there are a lot of voracious book sellers, we might have succeeded more in the commercial sense. Certainly I'm committed to being a book seller merchant and I don't shy away from that, but I've managed with my own ingenuity to avoid a lot of the responsibilities of being a merchant. [Laughter] To my pleasure.

Question from the audience: What was your major in the years at San Diego State?

Andreas Brown: Well, I was pre-law. I was majoring in economics. I remember, still to this day, Professor John McClintic of the economics department. I was a pre-law major--economics, political science--and I minored in speech. I wanted to be a trial lawyer in the great tradition of Clarence Darrow as I mentioned earlier, so I focused a great deal on debate and public speaking which was the reason I really came to San Diego State. At Hoover High School, we had had an outstanding program on debate and public speaking and because of the high school speech tournament on this campus annually (I guess you still have it, I don't know), I became familiar with the outstanding program here under John Ackley who was preminent in America colleges and universities as a debate and public speaking coach. So, I came
here on a scholarship and trained to be a trial lawyer and that was my area of ambition. I wanted to feel prominent but, but it was a great experience for me.

Question from the audience: Have you contributed to Special Collections here?

Andreas Brown: Well, I haven’t recently, but I have contributed to them. I gave the collection of modern rare books and first’s editions about fifteen years ago in memory of my grandmother, the Pearl Brown Collection, and I gave a number of rare books two years later in honor of Dr. Paul Pfaff, former chairman of the speech department here who is a great bibliophile himself. Unfortunately, he is ill today and can’t be here, but we often would compete at some of the auctions. He would sit in the front row with his booming voice and outbid me. [Laughter] Any other questions--Dr. Kenney?

Question from the audience: I hate to be dominating the questions, but I have another one I want to ask you because of our interest in picture postcards which is kind of a side issue of the literati about which you’ve been talking about, but not on that level. But, nevertheless, you know we were given a postcard collection and I know that you are a long-time collector of postcards. Would you like to say something about your collection--when you started collecting this?
Andreas Brown: Well, whenever that subject is brought up I am almost apologetic because most people think of postcards as close to trivial, which was really the reason I started collecting them. In order to buy the Gotham Book Mart, I had to sell my library which was a very painful thing for me to do, but I had no alternative because I had no money, I had books. And the University of Texas was very anxious to acquire my collection and they paid me full value for it so I sold it and that allowed me to buy the Gotham Book Mart. And I determined at that time that I would not collect books again and compete with my costumers. And I think, psychologically, a book collector likes to be surrounded by books and when I bought the Gotham Book Mart I was certainly surrounded by books. I had five floors and the basement jammed with books and I was living right there in the building on the fifth floor, so I decided I really didn’t need to collect books again, but if you have a collector’s instinct it’s hard to shake it. We would often buy libraries, and libraries from the earlier part of the twentieth century would very often have the traditional family postcard album. What we call the golden age of the picture postcards was the first twenty years of this century and it was very popular to collect picture postcards, and on the parlor table in the home you would have the family bible, the family photograph album and the family postcard album. And I think in some strange way it sort of served in lieu of the television set, the illustrated magazine, the illustrated newspaper, the motion picture, the things that we enjoy and experience and take for granted visually in our day. In those
days, visual material was somewhat more limited, so everybody had the family postcard album. Often the motivation was a nouveau riche aunt or uncle who took the grand tour to Europe every summer and sent back all of these enticing postcards from Paris and Rome and London saying "Look where I am and you are not, wish you were here." And so it was kind of fun to show those to the neighbors and to the visiting relatives.

Anyway, I would buy libraries and these albums would inevitably appear, and I would go through the album and I would pull out the amusing and witty cards I thought might be fun to send to friends. I'd put them in a desk drawer and donate the remnants of the album to the thrift shop across the street. Every now and then I would dip into this drawer and I would mail an amusing card to a friend; eventually I found I would reach in and pull out five or ten cards and for each one I'd say "No I kind of like that one, I think I'll keep it." So consciously I found myself collecting postcards. I will eventually get to Dr. Adam's collection, but I want to put postcards in context because I am defensive about it. I would like to explain it in a way that will make you appreciate it and understand. The picture postcards, for the most part, were very trivial and unimportant, but 5 or 10 percent of them are extraordinary historical documents, visual documents. I became interested seriously about fifteen years ago, and I began to go to postcard clubs in New York City and some of the major shows, which are very similar to antique book shows and antique shows that you may attend from time to time. And in New York City they come from all over the
world—they fly in, and dealers set up their tables and sell tens of thousands of dollars worth of postcards to these peculiar people who collect them. I became instantly interested in what we call the real photo postcards, or the original photograph which is printed on postcard stock. Kodak invented the little two dollar Brownie camera in about 1902, and in order to entice people to buy the cameras and use them, they created a commercial photographic paper with the postcard back printed on it. And you could take your camera in and have your film developed of the photographs you took of your family, and they would return them not just as snapshots as we know today, but they would come back to you as postcards. You could mail them (which was very convenient if you took pictures of your children), you could mail them to your relatives. Well these are real photographs, printed on photographic stock. And I became fascinated with them. Nobody else cared about them at all—they were 10 to 20 and 30 cent postcards at the shows. And I built a huge collection of these cards. I bought vast quantities, selected out what I wanted and disposed of the rest. To give you some indication of the significance of this, I later wrote a book on the subject which I thought would be of little or no interest to anyone, and it turned out to be very well-received critically, and became sort of a best seller in the field of vintage photography books. When it came time to make payments on the building after we won our lawsuit a year ago, I was faced with a very considerable task of raising almost a million dollars within two years, and I had no prospects of being able to do that. I
had read that the Getty Museum in Santa Monica had just spent 15 million dollars acquiring seven or eight of the world’s greatest private collections of vintage photographs because they wanted to expand the base definition of fine arts. As you know, they have trouble spending their money, they have so much. So they moved into the area of vintage photography and went out and bought these six or seven great collections and instantly had one of the half dozen most important institutional collections in the world. So I wrote a letter to Melvin Edelstein who is one of the acquisitions directors there. He used to be a UCLA rare books man, and then he went to the National Gallery in Washington, and eventually ended up at the Getty. And I gave him a two-page description of my collection, sent him a copy of my book and another book I had done on vintage photographs published in Europe, and various critical reviews of the book, and asked "Would the Getty be interested?" Well he called me and said "I’m very interested based on the description. I’ll come to New York on my next trip and stop and see you." He examined the collection, asked me to ship it to the Getty Museum, which I did, and the staff reviewed it. They then asked me to make a specific proposal, and for 21 shoeboxes full of old photographic postcards they paid me a half a million dollars. So what started off as a totally whimsical hobby turned into a life-saving solution to the purchase of our building. So I had great fun pointing out to Frances that her often rather disparaging remarks about my interest in old picture postcards turned out to be very important to the survival of the Gotham Book Mart, and she was very amused.
Now, to get to Dr. Adams. He and his wife, as you well know, were extraordinary friends of not only of the university here but of the library, and donated their books. Dr. Kenney—we're often in contact about the library—mentioned to me that they had a very large collection of old postcards. Well, traditionally, when two elderly people have some old postcards and they want me to look at them, it's a very tedious and not terribly exciting task. But I said that on my next trip I certainly would come and take a look. So we went over to the very modest little home of Dr. Adams and his wife, and they led me into a back area of many, many, many boxes of postcards. And I was absolutely astonished at the quality of their collection. It was perhaps the finest private collection I had ever seen. I don't know how much of this is public knowledge, but I told Dr. Kenney "It's difficult in a few hours to evaluate a collection of this magnitude, but it's my opinion that the current fair market value of the collection is between a half a million and a million dollars." And quite saleable. Whether or not you could get full retail value for it, I don't know. I was particularly impressed with the local material that they had acquired of the greater San Diego area. I have what I think is probably the finest collection of local San Diego County vintage postcards views, about 10,000 cards, and that's not new cards, that's old cards, which I plan to donate to the San Diego Historical Society eventually. But there were many, many cards in the Adams collection which I had never seen. And that was an astonishing experience for me, as hard as I worked at building my own
collection. I, of course, encouraged the Library to retain those postcards in the collection. There are many cards in the Adams collection which clearly don't serve any significant research value to the University here, and it would probably be well advised to eventually dispose of them for as much money as you can possibly get, of course. But it's a big collection and it's going to take a long time for it to be carefully reviewed by staff and faculty to determine what should be retained and what has some legitimate value to the Library and to the University. But it's an extraordinary gift. I still haven't gotten over the quality of the collection. You're very fortunate [to have it].

Question from the audience: On behalf of those who [inaudible] have you become interested in the recent technology of books . . [inaudible]

Andreas Brown: We do not have a general book store. And we're very focused in literature and the arts, and by arts I mean film, theater, design, a great deal to do with television and graphics. We don't carry cookbooks, we don't carry children's books--(very limited section on children's books, mostly used)--we don't carry health and exercise books and that kind of thing; many of the books that make money in book stores we don't carry. We carry both in-print books and out of print books. It is almost unique not only in New York City but in America to go into a store and say "I'm interested in Virginia Wolf. I know half of her books are out of print, but what do you have?" And when you go to our
Virginia Wolf shelf you'll find a very generous selection of out of print books as well as in-print books, all together. Which gives us extraordinary depth in our areas of specialization. But we have not gotten into passettes [inaudible--sounds like: past sets or out of prints] and that kind of thing. There's a good deal of resistance by my staff to become too sophisticated or too modern.

If you ever venture to New York City and you come to my store your first reaction is "How do you find anything?" It has a very sort of Charles Dickens tumble-down quality about it. I had somewhat of a sense of order in my life and when I first bought the Gotham Book Mart, and I said, "The first thing we have to do is clean up this mess." And I proceeded to start doing that and enraged Frances Steloff--"You can't move that, that's been there for 30 years and everyone likes it there, just leave it alone." Also, the staff didn't like it, but most particularly the customers didn't. They like the element of serendipity of coming in and discovering things in a pile of books on the floor that you've just bought, that kind of thing, and they don't want it all orderly and systematic, and my staff doesn't want to deal in greeting cards and posters, and consequently the kind of thing that you're mentioning, which I think is very practical and very important, is just something that hasn't happened to us yet. It may, but it hasn't as yet.

END OF TALK