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**Dr Paquita McMichael in interview with Dr Max Blythe
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MB Dr Paquita McMichael, we are here today to talk essentially about your distinguished father, Lord Howard Florey, but perhaps before we start we could talk about you. You are also a scientist: you are also a person who has conducted a fair amount of research. Can we talk about your life? You were born in 1929?

PM Yes. I was not, and can't consider myself, a scientist. At least, certainly my father would not have considered psychology, as he knew it, as such, and I think you can practise psychology or do psychological research work in a scientific sense or you can do it rather more loosely. However, to go back to my life, after moving from Cambridge, where I was born, to Sheffield, as a small child we went to Australia, just for a short period, then we came back.

MB You went to Australia when you were six, that was your first contact with Australia?

PM Yes, and that was because my father's mother was ill with breast cancer and was not expected to live very long, so we went back there.

MB It was rather a sad journey, in fact?

PM Well, to a six year old it has no meaning.

MB No, but to the family.

PM To the family, or probably particularly to my father, but not necessarily particularly to my mother because she had not had, as I understand it, a great deal of friendship with my father's mother because they were away. I mean, it was a long time before they went back. I believe it was something like eight years that my father had been in Europe. So I can remember considering this grandmother's illness, that I was left one time to look after her. I was supposed to have my rest and she sat, a rather dumpy figure, in an armchair by the fire. I just remember it being by a fire, whether the fire was on I don't know, and I crouched down on the sofa absolutely terrified that she would die while I was there. I just waited for them to come back praying that it would be soon. So that was my recollection of her.

MB That was a recollection of that time, that trip, your first link with Australia. In those early days you were eventually to go to America when the war arose, but is there anything you want to put into that early story of life, of going to school in England? We're talking about your story for now.

PM I can't remember anything much except playing in the sandpit which was in the garden in Sheffield, and then also deciding to run away, but I've no idea why I decided to run away. I think it was possibly related to the fact that my brother came along and he wasn't very well. He suffered from pyloric stenosis and was being held together by constant care from my mother.

MB So you felt neglected?

PM Well, neglected is too strong because, in fact, there was a nursemaid whom I became extremely fond of, James Kent's wife, and she was brought into the household and looked after me. But I decided I'd run away, so I caught a tram; I must have been about five, and disappeared away into Sheffield, actually it was out into the country direction.

MB On the old Sheffield trams?

PM Exactly! So one way or the other, that's what I actually remember.

MB You was brought back, as they say.

PM I was brought back, but I don't remember the bringing back period. I just remember thinking this is quite an adventure to catch a tram on my own.

MB Any other early adventures of those first ten years. Did you get to know father in that time, before America?

PM Yes, I think at that time we must have gone on holidays in Cornwall and that is when we used to go out on walks around the cliff and that's when we used to play sandcastles and he was a great sandcastle builder.

MB Was he really?

PM Yes, he enjoyed doing that. I remember also we went for a day at Filey and I don't know if you know Filey.

MB Yes, I do, the brig and everything there.

PM I don't know anything about Filey except it has the coldest water, apart from the north-west Scottish coast, in the world, and my father wanted to encourage me into the water. So I have a picture of being held up in the air clinging to him because it was so absolutely terrifyingly cold. And here he was in one of those incredible sort of bathing suits that they used to wear going right down, not to his knees, but as though you were wearing a combination vest and shorts. He was holding me as I clung on to him so as not to actually touch this horribly cold water. So that's another memory.

MB We can't keep him out of the story actually.

PM Well, not in those years because he was with us quite a lot on holidays and so forth.

MB Despite the pressure of building a career, which he took very seriously, he did take time out to be with his family?

PM Yes. We had the holidays together.

MB You said you played games together? He was anxious sometimes to be competitive and to play games in the home?

PM Well, it's possible that we played games, but I don't actually remember that. I can remember later on playing tennis with him when I was seventeen or eighteen and he must have had a bit of time when he wasn't as busy as usual.

MB He didn't let you win very often?

PM He never let me win.

MB He was tough?

PM He was tough and I'm sure, given that he was thirty odd years older than I was, I was eighteen and on my school tennis team, that he couldn't let me get away with this and so he would serve to me always with a gigantic slice. I would stand right out to one side and I couldn't reach it, so I would be running to receive and if I did reach it, he would put it down near the tram-line. Also, when I was playing tennis during the rest of a rally, which would happen when I served, when he could easily return my serve, of course, and I didn't place it as well as he did, he was very good again at slicing and drop-shots, and I just ran about; the whole time I was running. And so I was at the end absolutely sweating and exhausted. He was quite fresh and he paced me.

MB I think he all but took a blue at Cambridge for tennis?

PM That's right.

MB But wasn't quite of the *esprit de corps* to actually be kept in the team?

PM This is what you find in the story as told by Bickel who wrote 'Rise up to Life'¹, but I don't know.

MB We're taking you on to be eighteen, to be in the school team and play tennis with father. Let's keep to those years leading up to going to America, or perhaps the time has come to actually talk about that departure for America, that unexpected loss of parents for five years virtually.

PM Yes, what I can actually recall of it was going in the train with both parents to Liverpool and then having to say goodbye, and my brother not quite realising that this

¹ Bickel, L (1972) *Rise Up To Life - A biography of Howard Walter Florey who made penicillin and gave it to the world*. London: Angus and Robertson.

was a fairly momentous occasion, and therefore I might support him as I think happened quite a lot when we were in America. He couldn't particularly support me because he was just a little boy and we cried obviously when we took off and waved as the ship pulled out.

MB Who was with you, were adults with you?

PM Yes, we went on the Oxford Expedition so to speak. It was a number of, not refugees, evacuees who were offered the opportunity by Yale and Swarthmore to go and stay with university families who were prepared to take on children.

MB This wasn't just the Florey children exiting Oxford.

PM Not at all.

MB It was an Oxford project in a way.

PM It was really a project that started in the United States and we were taken by Dr John Fulton, Professor Fulton, who was professor of physiology.

MB Whom your father had known well in college?

PM Yes, because they had both been Rhodes scholars, one from America and one from Australia, and they had met in Magdalen and as both of them were slight outsiders they had become good friends. The lists came before John Fulton, who had a big hand in organising this project, and he saw Florey attached to two children, cabled back to my parents to say are these yours, and my father agreed that we were.

MB And he was a professor at Yale by then?

PM Yes, I think he was, yes he was professor of physiology.

MB Paquita, I get a strong feeling that to be separated from parents as a ten year old with a five year old brother in tow, as it were, with you being a kind of temporary mum, that must have been a very strange experience and you must have felt bereft for a time.

PM Yes, I think inevitably that's the case because you are going into a strange environment with a different culture and you are suddenly clothed wrongly. My mother used to be a dressmaker in her spare time before she went fully back to being a doctor, but she used to dress-make and do it rather well. She'd put her clothes in for competitions and so she used to dress me in very pretty clothes, very delicate organdie with little bows on it; I can remember this, very charming.

MB I bet you looked nice and felt nice?

PM I felt very nice. And I got over there and this was unbelievably inappropriate and so all the clothes that I had just didn't fit the contemporary scene and gradually they were replaced. When I went to school at home I had a school uniform, it wasn't

very attractive, but I had a school uniform and I had a Panama hat, and I had to give these up and I felt, looking back on it, that this was a major loss of identity. I did terrible things, like for example, they had a gardener and every day the gardener took down the Stars and Stripes from the flagpole, and on one occasion when he was taking down the Stars and Stripes - it's never supposed to touch the ground - it just went near the ground and I stamped on it.

MB That was quite a protest.

PM Yes, and that remains in my memory as an expression of quite strong feeling and so time went on and I became integrated into America.

MB But the Fultons were good to you. They had no children?

PM Yes, they were very kind indeed.

MB But it wasn't home.

PM It wasn't home and neither of them were particularly child-orientated and not understanding of how children think. Mind you, nor was anybody else particularly at that time, in the sense that we were sent to America without parents having any realisation of what that actually might do to the children, never mind what it did to the parents. In fact, my mother was very, very disturbed by this and remained very sad until we returned so I learned from a friend of hers.

MB How did you keep in contact?

PM A weekly letter.

MB A weekly letter to mum and a weekly letter back?

PM That's right. It was very important, now as I look back, for my mother to receive my letters, but it was rather a chore for me to write letters to her, which is terribly sad.

MB Did you tell her how sad you were at any time?

PM I must have at the time. But one letter that I looked at, and I haven't gone through all the letters, and again perhaps one day I shall...

MB They have survived?

PM I've kept them all, yes. But one letter was very soon after I had gone and it said, 'How was it that you could send us away. What is it that I have done?'

MB There's a rejection feeling that you were asking about?

PM And that is a very standard response of children in divorce or of children who have lost a parent, they take the blame on themselves for having done something wrong. But to read it now as an adult is actually....

MB Quite painful, I would think?

PM Funnily enough not to me because I don't recall it, but it's just painful as you would see it with anybody, you'd want to weep with them for what they've suffered.

MB Your father had links with America by then. He had deeply established penicillin in the early years of the war and must have come over in those wartime years while you were in America. Did he manage to spend time with you? Did you have links with father in that period?

PM Yes, he came over on a number of occasions and was entertained by the Fultons, who were great entertainers and always had a number of people every weekend for meals. I saw him and we re-established contact but we didn't particularly know each other. I don't remember much more than seeing him.

MB So you were just brushing against this visitor in a way?

PM That's right.

MB How did the relationship with your brother Charles progress in that period because you were to some extent dependent upon each other? Did that throw you very close together?

PM Yes, insofar as I always felt very responsible for him. The example I can give of this is where we were having Christmas dinner and there were little objects in the Christmas pudding, dimes almost certainly, and my brother bit on one of these dimes and hurt himself and he cried at this, and the assembled guests and the Fultons laughed and I was outraged that anybody could laugh at a child crying and stamped out of the room taking him with me.

MB You were a good protester?

PM I don't know what that did to the people who were left there. They probably thought I was humourless. You have to think that nearly sixty years ago, which is when we are talking about, people were not tremendously sensitive to children's understanding of the world.

MB And that probably accounts for why it was possible for parents like yours to actually allow you to go off for so long to somewhere so far away?

PM I don't think they ever thought for one minute it would be so long. Because it was believed that the war would only be for a relatively short period, they sent us for what might have been several months as they saw it. They totally misunderstood the power of Hitler and the German might, and we were there for going on five years.

Other children came back earlier, particularly if they had been sent over with their mothers, but as my mother stayed to be a medical person in Britain, it was different.

MB We haven't said much about mum so let me balance the story a little if I can, Paquita, at this stage. You'd been very close to mum and obviously you missed her a lot during those years. She was working with father and they had a close research collaboration in those years?

PM So it is said. They discussed things when I was there, there was a lot of discussion, and if you read the biographies then it becomes obvious that there was collaboration and that they published things together and that my mother, as the clinician, had a part to play in publications to do with the therapeutic application of penicillin.

MB You came back at the end of the war, four and a half years having evaporated on the American side, with you growing up. You came back a young woman of about fifteen.

PM You might be a young woman now, but I'm not sure that you were a young woman then.

MB You were a girl then.

PM An aspiring young woman.

MB So you came back and had to re-discover a family.

PM Yes.

MB Mum who you had been very close to, but you had to re-discover...

PM The marginally interesting thing there is that one had the reversal of the clothing problem, but this time I had to give up bobby-socks and brown and white shoes that we used to wear and sorts of sloppy-Joe sweaters and so on, and turn into someone who wore uniform and somewhat different clothes over the weekend. I had been wearing a touch of make-up and my goodness how it changed.

MB You had to conform now?

PM Well, not that my parents ever said that. It was quite obvious that the people I mixed with were not going to be wearing make-up and they were not going to be wearing American clothes. I continued to wear them and people were rather envious of me, but it was a change again into a different regime. I had been at a school in America which was not unlike an English public school.

MB And you came back and went to a school in Oxford?

PM Yes, the Oxford High School.

MB Which is pretty powerful and has a great reputation for academic pressure?

PM Yes, that is true.

MB That's what you found?

PM No more than the school I'd been at. The school that I'd been at, I was taught French by a French woman and French women are not known to be lenient and after every class we had with her, one of us was crying. We had very small classes. No, I didn't find it in any way more lenient or more severe. They were both quite tight.

MB Did your parents, now you were back, take a strong interest in your education at this stage? Were they asking you questions about a career quite early on?

PM When I came back I had to drop a year because the curriculum that was used in the United States was inevitably different. For example, you might find that you did two years of what might be called arithmetic followed by two years of algebra followed by two years of geometry, whereas everything was carried forward together in Britain, and you would be doing American history rather than British history and so on.

MB So you needed a bit of catching up.

PM I did, and I came back just before I did what was then called School Certificate, so that they dropped me a year. So there was time for thinking and then came the moment of saying what do you want to do and my father saying, 'I can help you if you want to do medicine.'

MB Does that mean that he was enthusiastic about you going in that direction? Was that just a straight comment or was that loaded?

PM I don't remember it as being particularly loaded. I think he was very objective about these sorts of things, it was: 'But if you choose to do something else, then I can't offer you the help.' And that was true. So I did choose to do something else and went to specialise in the history of art at Edinburgh University, which is where there was an important element that you could choose as your special subject in art history.

MB I've got a feeling though from our earlier discussion that there was a thought about doing psychology quite early on.

PM Yes, I said to him that I would like to do psychology and he said, 'Well, the place to do psychology is the United States.' Those people who were making research steps forward were in the United States at that time largely, so I was due for leaving home again for what would be another three or four years and thought, I will choose a subject where I like the teacher, so I read history.

MB But later in your thirties, I believe, you did the psychology that you really wanted to do in the first place.

PM Yes, in the first instance. I did this in a rather curtailed way because you could do an MEd which could be of what was described a 'P' type where you merged with the psychology equivalent of a degree. So I did that, which was not like the full four years psychology degree that you would have done, but it was a very good way for me to get into the field I was interested in.

MB Paquita, by that time you were a young woman!

PM I was a mother! I had three children then, so I did that in the evenings and I had an au pair.

MB Perhaps we could put your husband and your children on the record at this point?

PM I was just trying to think when it was that I actually got married. I think it must have been 1955 or 1956, something like that. I never can remember the dates of birth of my children either!

MB Just tell me about the children and the order and that will be fine.

PM My husband's name was John and he was a physics master first of all at the Edinburgh Academy and was somewhere else before that. We then went to Nigeria, we came back, and he found a job back at this school which is an independent-based school in Edinburgh. He eventually became head of the science at that school, which was a very scientifically orientated school.

MB Whilst talking about Edinburgh, perhaps I should say that we are in Edinburgh today at the Royal College of Physicians in one of the delightful Adam rooms, and this is really your home town that we are talking in.

PM Now it has become my home town and I consider myself very Scottish except when I am in the company of English people, but I'm largely in the company of Scottish people. My three children are: Daniel, who is now working in Australia in Adelaide and he is a scientist; Roger, who is working in Scotland; and Helen, who is also working in Scotland.

MB It's interesting Daniel going to Adelaide and almost restoring the cycle of it all.

PM Yes.

MB He likes Adelaide.

PM He likes Adelaide and wishes to continue to live there.

MB He was one of the children who did develop a relationship with his grandfather as well?

PM Yes, because when my father died, which must have been in 1968, then he must have been I suppose five or six, so he was able to know my father and remember him.

MB Was Howard Florey an enthusiastic grandfather? Was he good at that?

PM Yes, I think by the time Daniel appeared on the scene, he was fairly mellow and he was having an interesting time as Provost of Queen's. One of the things he used to do was to take young Daniel around the garden pointing out the flowers and also looking at the facade of the Queen's Library which was dotted about with splendid busts. He would teach Daniel the names of the busts and then he would test Daniel on them.

MB He was great on testing, the testing bit.

PM He used to test me on spelling and the particular word I can remember him testing me on was 'rhododendron'.

MB That was on a Cornish holiday?

PM That's right. There was just the two of us and I think part of his method of conversing with youngsters was to point things out, label them and ask children afterwards if they remembered what was happening. Spelling was something that I was actually quite good at anyway, but 'rhododendron' flummoxed me.

MB So you lost out.

PM So I lost out on that one.

MB Paquita, I've got a feeling that, as a child, Howard Florey as a father wasn't the most forthcoming of parents and that there was a slight distance and he was short on conversation at times. He was a busy man and you may have had the kind of 'fag-end' of what was going in terms of conversation sometimes, and not a chance to know him all that well. Would that be right? As a child, before the American years?

PM Probably. One always has to ask was that unusual in any way, and I don't think it was because busy professional fathers are out of the house a great deal. But it was always a very amiable relationship except when I and my brother jumped on the beds and wake up in the morning - this must have been before we went to America.

MB You were forbidden to wake the family too early, weren't you?

PM Well, after jumping on the beds and waking everybody up at six, we didn't wake my mother because she was deaf, but we woke our father who was not deaf and he came in once or twice and said, 'You mustn't do that ever again!' So, of course, we did it again because it was so delightful an activity, trampolining is great, and we did it again. This was the only time he ever lifted his hand to us and he lifted it clothed in a red slipper. I don't remember how many times he bashed us, but I do remember it.

MB Did that stop the trampolining?

PM I think it did. It was a fairly frightening occasion because he was very cross indeed. But I don't remember him as a person ever being cross with me, apart from that.

MB I was going to take that period and then contrast it with the period following your American years when you came back as a teenager. Then, I think, perhaps more than ever before, you integrated into a family that was quite warm with a lot of family activity. I've got a feeling that those were probably the years that you had closest with mum and father?

PM Immediately after the war. Yes, I went to a school that was very near indeed, it was three minutes walk from school to entry into our garden the back way, so I used to come home for lunch which was very common in those days anyway. Then, my father would come home from work walking across the university parks.

MB These are the delightful university parks in Oxford to which his department backed in a way, and in which he would take a turn through on the way home to lunch.

PM Yes, but our house in Parks Road actually faced the university parks, so that he was able just to have a pleasant relaxing walk home. So he would come home not very relaxed, to be absolutely honest, because he was often infuriated through the battles that he was fighting over various developments that might be taking place, either in Oxford or further afield. He would come and tell us stories and he was a great storyteller.

MB He would tell you the politics of it?

PM Yes, the politics of it.

MB So he did come home and relay that?

PM Yes, day after day. I can remember hilarious lunches. It was great fun because you went back to school laughing away because, maddened though he might be by whatever was happening, he could tell it so well that we all ended up laughing.

MB So he was a good storyteller?

PM He was a good storyteller. He was always known for being witty. He also kept a joke book so that when he spoke in public in a formal sense, he prepared himself using the joke book and as he grew older he had so many interesting people he met that he was able to get their jokes, so to speak, and make use of them.

MB This was a period when he and your mother Ethel had still a very close life together because it wasn't always going to be so close, and we'll come to that less pleasant aspect of their marriage later.

PM Well, I expect it's quite likely they argued and became cross with each other, as I think they'd done that for a long period before that. But there was nevertheless the kind of closeness that came from both being Australian and the sense that Australians then, and I'm not sure that it would be true now, had of being a little bit agin establishments when they came back to Britain, where it seemed extraordinarily traditional, even though I'm sure that there were elements of establishment behaviour in Australia as well.

MB I think you told me that your father probably liked to act the maverick when he first came to Britain, that he liked the Australian card to play, that he was a bit different.

PM I don't know how much he played the Australian card, but he felt it and he was seen as a bush-ranger. People did tend to say here's this outspoken, aggressive individual.

MB Not the most comfortable guy around Oxford.

PM But, on the other hand, he got things done.

MB Yes, he could find money and he could do things very quickly sometimes.

PM So one reads, and the conversations over lunch were very often about getting funding for some project that he had in mind.

MB Paquita, I think you gave me a wonderful picture at one time when we'd been talking about the parks in Oxford, where cricket is played in a grand way, county cricket, and people sit around and wonderful summers evolve. On one occasion, was that when you were a girl that you walked there and he told you something of penicillin?

PM Yes, it's difficult to know what girl refers to, I mean, when do you stop being a girl? I think I was probably in my twenties. Anyway, we used to walk in the park and I'm quite sure that those walks in the park were something that didn't often happen for my brother because he was away at school and away at university and I was home a great deal. Once I was home, I was home a lot, so we could go for walks and I remember on one occasion we came to the chestnut tree which is in one corner of the parks near the lab, the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, and he then said, 'This is the tree under which we used to talk very often, Chain and myself,' - he always called everybody by their surnames - 'and under this tree we came to the decision that of the possibilities for pursuing research we would choose *Penicillium*, and so the decision was arrived at.'

MB That was a monumental moment in medical history.

PM It was a monumental moment.

MB And he told you about that great time.

PM But, of course, it was a monumental decision between the two of them. I think he was always stressing the fact that he was not alone in doing things, that Chain was absolutely essential to the development of penicillin and so were other members of the team, like Norman Heatley.

MB He talked about that team quite a lot, he gave them credit and you heard that all the time, so it was really a team.

PM Yes, [A G] Sanders and Edward Abraham, all of them were regarded as parts of a team, although he was never a familiar person with people because he always called them by their last names, even James Kent who was his technician.

MB Who was with him from being a boyhood technician to all the time he was there.

PM Yes, but he never called him Jim. It didn't mean that he wasn't concerned for him and with him and he did everything to make his life a satisfactory one. I think there was a mutual affection, though not demonstrative. My father was absolutely not demonstrative.

MB Although he could be; occasionally, he could really let himself go. You were telling me about occasions in his study when he played loud music, that he could really let his hair down on occasions and conduct Beethoven while half-reading and half-conducting. Is that right?

PM Yes, although I wouldn't call that emotional demonstrativeness, that was absorbing himself in the power of the music. What he used to do, he kept abreast as most scientists would do by reading the journals in the evening, and so he would sit in this curious chair that he had, it was a wooden chair slatted underneath with padding on the top, wooden arms and wooden back, again with a cushion on it, and you could let it back.

MB A bit like a deckchair effect?

PM A bit like a deckchair effect, and he would have the journals on his knees, he would read them, then he would put on one of his many records. I can remember that he was particularly fond of Beethoven, and then he would lie back there immersed in this splendid sound and conduct. He wasn't a great concert-goer, he went to the opera, but he loved sitting in his chair in the evenings conducting Beethoven in front of this absolutely pathetic, small electric fire, which is how we heated ourselves. There was some back central heating.

MB And he didn't hold back on the volume of the music?

PM Not at all. It echoed down into the hall, up the stairs, right to the top of the house. No question about it.

MB It might even have got through to mother whose hearing wasn't all that good.

PM It may well have. Well, she was working herself. I can remember her with this collapsible table sitting on the sofa beside this desperate fire, and she always switched off her hearing aid so she could think. Wonderful to be able to switch things off.

MB We haven't talked enough about mum. When you came back from America, you did get very close, I think.

PM Yes. We were able to talk about various things, whatever they might be, and I remember that I regularly came home from school with a fair load of homework and she would have an afternoon rest as she had a bad heart, diagnosed from early on. It was in 1940 that she said she had her first blackout, when she was forty, and so she was apt to have an afternoon rest, and I would come home from the school and get her a cup of tea, take it up to her bed, and then lie down on the bed beside her, a big double bed, and I would give her my German vocabulary and my verbs and she would test me on them. So she helped me with these things.

MB Did father also help with the work? Did he have time to help? I know he took you to the lab on occasions and pointed to things down microscopes and you didn't take to that?

PM No, I don't know whether it was just resistance against being told what to do by anybody at all, but when invited to enjoy what he might have to offer me, I actually was not interested in looking down microscopes, and I couldn't detect what it was he was pointing out to me that I should see on the slides. And I didn't know what the significance might be and I didn't want to do it. I didn't want to go and see animals in the animal-house because I felt that they might be in discomfort at the least and that upset me, so that I backed off. The thing that I do remember about going to the lab was, in fact, in his study there were two lighted buttons that he could indicate whether you could come in, which was green, or whether you had to go away which was red. And when I got inside the thing that I always used to go for, and I'm sure my brother did too with me, was this wonderful concealed bed which tucked away behind the panelling underneath the books, and so we liked to pull this out for, of course, trampolining. That would not have won favour.

MB So this was a very useful bed when overnight experiments and so forth were taking place. It must have been an ideal situation.

PM Yes, he could spend the night and keep a watch on things that needed to be watched.

MB But from all that I hear he enjoyed often having the red light on the door and making sure that he was very private.

PM I don't know.

MB But for you, on those occasions, quite often he was trying to show something of what he was doing, quite clearly by trying to open his world to you.

PM It's difficult to say that; more perhaps to say how interesting it is to look down a microscope rather than look what I am doing. Much more an introduction to scientific inquiry.

MB Paquita, this is a very difficult question, it's probably not answerable, but when you came back from America, and in those years before you went to university, those years when you were all very close, he was quite a distinguished figure internationally. I mean, his reputation had spread within just a few years and he'd already received many accolades. Did that register with the family? Did that change things?

PM I don't think it did because as far as I was concerned he was my father and any fame that he might have elsewhere was interesting and you could read about it in the paper and so forth, but it didn't have any effect on the relationship and so I never thought of him as anything but Dad. We called him Dad and as adults we called him Dad, and my brother and I would still refer to my parents as Dad and Ma. And sometimes we called my mother Lady, once she became Lady Florey, and my husband came into it and he didn't want to call her ma, so we all began to call her Lady.

MB Just again keeping to those years of you being at home before marriage, did you form a close relationship with Howard Florey ever in your life because he was a slightly distant and reserved person? Do you think you ever got really close? That is a difficult question.

PM It is a difficult question because most people are not asked to identify what signifies closeness unless it is through physical demonstrations, but I think probably there was a degree of closeness. He came up to see me after he had become Lord Florey of Marston and Adelaide and we were talking and I said, 'I hope you'll sit in the Lords.' And he said, 'I don't intend to do that.' And I said, 'Why not? You have something to offer.' And he said, 'There are other ways in which I can influence events rather than by appearing on the floor of the House of Lords.' So I think he was often quite frank with me about his motives. I would ask him questions, you see, and probably other people didn't because they were frightened and I wasn't so frightened. I said to him why, when he was getting quite a lot of angina, he didn't take or ask for a wheelchair when he came out of planes because in those days you walked a long way across the tarmac, and it was hard going for him to walk. So I said, 'How about a wheelchair?' And he said, 'No. If I allow people to see that I need a wheelchair, they'll realise that I am very unwell and unfit, and if they start to realise that, they'll protect me, and they won't invite me to do things which I enjoy doing.' This might be to sit on various committees and to take a part in the world of science and so he continued to walk, but extremely slowly, across the tarmac. So those sorts of ways in which he would tell me things I think are related to being close. The other episode that I remember, which was the most emotional thing I think he said to me, was when my mother had died and John and I went to stay with him in Queen's. Eventually the time came when we had to go, probably the beginning of term, and we packed up and I can remember him standing at the door of the Lodgings, which is the name given to the Provost's house at Queen's College, we were all packing into the car and I went upstairs to kiss him goodbye, and kissing was not habitual in our family...

MB Was it not too easy for him?

PM No, it just wasn't habitual. So I went up the steps to kiss him goodbye and he then said, 'I don't know what I would have done without you.' I've remembered that because it was one of the most emotional things he ever said to me and I'm sure that I didn't answer very satisfactorily probably, looking back on it.

MB It was a special moment.

PM Yes. I think I was probably so bowled over by it that I didn't respond to it.

MB It just went away. But it was an exchange of some magnitude.

PM It was, yes, and I think that it also indicated his overall distress about the break-up of a marriage. Although it had in many ways been broken off and on over many years, when someone dies you can't go back, and so I think that must have been also distressing for him.

MB You think he was registering some degree of regret?

PM Yes. And the other thing was that, and I think it was on this occasion particularly, he had nightly attacks of angina and we would sit with him, either John or I would sit with him and keep him company. He would take his pills but you have to wait for the angina to lessen, for the pain to lessen, and so we would sit with him.

MB You would be with him while it subsided.

PM Yes, that's right.

MB This angina had been there for quite a while, it was quite early in his life.

PM I don't know when it started because he, on the whole, concealed ill-health. I can remember his having some kind of 'gut trouble' as he said, and being jaundiced and that was the only particular notable illness that I remember until much later when I knew he was ill.

MB As you've touched upon it, and I know they were sad years when the family was slightly broken with that marriage slightly not comfortable any more, although staying together, which I think was by mutual agreement, that obviously was a difficult time for you as children of that family.

PM Yes, very difficult and I think I tried to act as a mediator between them and so if there was some source of disagreement, whatever it might be, I tended to understand both points of view and feel that both had justice and tried to explain one to the other. My father was more apt to be harsh than my mother and say extremely wounding things. And she came back, I can remember this, from having had a breakdown and he really needed to treat her more considerately and he couldn't bring himself to. He

really couldn't speak to her and so the path back for her to normality was made more difficult. So it was bitter and I was angry about that.

MB You felt a lot of that distance between them.

PM Yes. Indeed, you couldn't fail to.

MB I want to just take in the beginning of their marriage, which I think is worth putting on record at this point, because it was a curious way to start a marriage, wasn't it? It was where a marriage might not best have started from.

PM I would say the worst possible way to start a marriage. They had both been at Adelaide University and then my father got his Rhodes scholarship and came to Britain, to Oxford and from there he went to Cambridge and London, but I'm not quite sure about the sequence of those events. And it was only at this point that he felt secure enough to write to her - there had been an understanding between them - and invite her to come to Britain and they should get married. So she set off six years after they had last met.

MB Amazing, isn't it?

PM Yes, amazing.

MB And she'd had long hospitalisation in a sanatorium with tuberculosis in the interim.

PM I don't know about the sanatorium and I don't know how long the hospitalisation was for, but she certainly had TB, not lung TB, but TB had affected her hearing. So when he met her, and he went down to Southampton to meet the boat, he found someone who shocked him deeply - he told me this - because she couldn't hear what he was saying. He wasn't a person who spoke very clearly and they were probably in one of those carriages where people were jam-packed together, so everybody would hear everything that was said with a group of eight people close together. So he was not going to shout to make her hear, she had rather a soft voice, so they started off with a severe shock to him. I think there didn't need to be quite so severe a shock because she was an attractive woman. Being deaf was an enormous disadvantage and she became deafer as the years went by. On the way over she had had a number of young men who paid court to her, so to speak, and I think he was shocked also by the fact that she came off the boat, as I remember, and I wouldn't want necessarily to swear to its accuracy, I think he may have told me it, laughing with admirers. So here he was saying, 'I can't deal with someone who's deaf,' and yet a lot of other people could deal with someone who was deaf. I always managed to communicate with her because I spoke up and all you needed to do was to speak up, sometimes it was annoying, but mostly you needed to speak up and be clear. I think sometimes he got annoyed with her in later years if they were having a dinner party when she would miss the gist of the conversation. She always said, 'I can't hear when there is a lot of noise going on and I'm okay if there's just one single person talking to me.' So he got annoyed by what he saw as her *faux pas* when she picked up the wrong end of the stick.

MB So there was an irritation theme running through it from that re-meeting.

PM That's right.

MB In effect, he met a slightly different woman to the one that he'd gone out with as a young man.

PM He absolutely did. Here was someone who'd qualified as a doctor and, six years down, someone who has gone through severe illness, someone who is deaf and has to cope with a disability. As you say, a different woman.

MB But you said she was an attractive woman. It's quite nice that we can have a look at a picture of them. You've brought this beautiful photograph of the two of them together in their early years of marriage. She is a very attractive woman.

PM Yes, she had these lovely even features and she was a nice-looking woman. And the picture that I have here has him looking most astonished, as though he is caught suddenly unawares, and staring through his glasses, and she looks not dissimilar, but I think it does capture some of her charm at the time when they were being married.

MB Just a final point before we wind down and have a short break, she was an incredible reader. She would read all kinds of unusual things. You were saying that she would grab a book on something that was out of this world and become quite expert on it very quickly.

PM I think that's an exaggeration. She didn't grab books. What she did was she read *The Times* and she would pick books that had been reviewed that were interesting to her and then she would order them, but they were often quite demanding, heavyweight tomes. I think she quite liked reading archaeology, but more particularly anthropology, so I remember her having books on strange tribes from strange parts of the world and saying to her, 'Do you want to spend your declining years, so to speak, studying this kind of thing?' And I don't say that she necessarily remembered it and we never talked about it, but I think she had a very strong puritanical view of what she ought to be doing. So that's what she thought she ought to be doing, but she didn't read a lot of novels, for example.

MB That was mum. That was Lady. We'll wind down at that point, Paquita, and then we'll come back in a moment and talk about the themes that you've told me about.

MB Paquita, when we wound down, we'd just been talking about your recollections of life in the Florey family as a young person. We had a delightful photograph that you brought along of all of you together, you as a girl, Charles very young, and your parents and I think that is delightful to have on record.

PM This particular photograph is of the family arriving in Australia and so it's taken of a family by other members of the family, so that my father and mother are there with myself and my younger brother, who is five years younger than I am, so that you have everybody looking moderately amiable together.

MB It's pure treasure, isn't it? And you are very fortunate, as you say, to have quite a photographic collection.

PM Yes, I have a lot of photographs.

MB You are also fortunate to have a range of presents. I think we were talking about your father being a present-giver when he went on his many trips. We've got a necklace here which we should expose. This was a present from a trip?

PM Yes, it's a present from a trip, but I don't remember particularly what trip and I don't remember particularly therefore where it came from.

MB But nice polished stones, in this nice malachite green.

PM He would always bring back for my mother, as well as for myself, varieties of decorative things, whether they were something you might put on a table or whether it was rings, not on the whole rings, but bracelets, a lot of bracelets I've got, and other sorts of necklaces that he would bring, never earrings because in those days women didn't have pierced ears.

MB Was he a collector?

PM I think he brought back, as most people do who travel, small things that he'd collected on his travels.

MB But not a special theme of collecting?

PM No, not especially.

MB But he was a great photographer. He collected masses and masses of photographs wherever he went. Is that right?

PM He took photographs, but I think my brother will tell you about his interest in cinematography which he prided himself on, and I can remember his always coming back and showing these films which sometimes, of course, could be boring, but the one that I particularly remember, though he had them of everywhere that he went, was of Angkor Wat, and of course people didn't go there in those days. When I was in Vietnam not long ago on a job, I just wanted to get across there but nowadays it's all mined and you can't go so easily. You can go, but you have to follow the path.

MB I've had a few personal thoughts. We are now going to move to a little bit of the conversation that you direct more than I do, I have had more than my fair share of pushing you round corners about what was happening at various times. We're going to pick on various themes about your father's life that you've given some thought to,

but before we do that I'd like to tune in on one or two things that interest me. I just wondered, given his angina and the kind of heart problems that he had, was he a smoker? Had he been a long-life smoker?

PM Yes, he smoked forty a day at one time, but he decided to give it up when he sent my brother to Rugby School. He concluded that that was a very expensive thing to be doing and so he would give up smoking. I don't know whether one compensated for the other or not.

MB But he managed, he did cut it off.

PM Yes, he gave up. That was it. No more smoking.

MB Talking about money, that might be a little theme that we could push in at this point, because he never really was comfortable with money.

PM Well, he would have been comfortable if he had more I am sure, but I think he was always worried about funding his various projects, and we were always careful. He said to the Fultons, with whom we stayed in the United States, that they should not in any way spoil us because when we came back we should be going from a wealthy home into a home that was not in straightened circumstances but couldn't compete with what they could offer. So they didn't spoil us, although we had the splendour of having a French cook and a chauffeur and so forth. Later, I can remember one other financial shock to the system was when he heard from his accountant, who should have prevented this happening, that he had £1,000 owing to the Inland Revenue, and if you bear in mind that this was fifty years ago, it was a terrible shock. So after that we were conscious of being careful, and I was always very careful.

MB And the family itself, his own background had seen some financial difficulties while a young man.

PM Indeed, his father, who had owned and built up a shoe manufacturing business, he had owned a factory, through the bad behaviour of his colleague became effectively bankrupt and they had to move from a very substantial house outside Adelaide into a much simpler bungalow. He had then to put himself through the rest of his university career through applied scholarships and so forth and his father died not so long after this, so financing himself was an issue.

MB That hardship incubated quite a regard for the money care.

PM Yes, I think so.

MB Which is quite reasonable. Going on to another theme, one of your themes, you have said that here was a competitive man and we're going to talk about a bit about his competitiveness. We've already seen that a bit with the sport, but career-wise when he first started.

PM I don't think that I can talk about his competitiveness except in the context of my experience, so that my experience was, for example, the tennis just as an

illustration of it. I can't remember other aspects of competition except putting me up against tests, like spelling 'rhododendron'. So I don't have evidence of that, but I think he was competitive in that he won prizes at school and he won prizes thereafter. He continued throughout his life winning prizes, but there was an element of competitiveness early on in life.

MB And you said at lunchtime he would come home and like to have made what he wanted work in the department?

PM That's not necessarily competitive. That is dedication to a particular cause that you regard as extremely important. But earlier on he was competitive in sport and competitive in academic success.

MB Did he lament giving up sport later on and the angina? Was that a big loss to him?

PM I didn't hear him saying that.

MB He didn't complain. It just phased out?

PM Yes, I think most people as they get older gradually lose various things that they were able to do earlier. Although it's sad, you say, 'I'm getting older.'

MB Paquita, take me on to your next theme that you would like to tell me about.

PM I think perhaps we could take his painting. He enjoyed painting from when he was a young man and he was a water-colourist and so was my mother and it was obviously something that people used to do. If you think right back to earlier centuries when particularly women painted water-colours, but he did too. I haven't got any record or any of those paintings, but later on he used to go on holiday and he equipped himself with an easel, paints and instruction books because he never started on anything new without reading and so he was self-taught, so to speak, for working in oils. He had a number of books in his study which were about how to paint. So off he would go and he would paint these very often rather brilliant paintings which were done when he was having holidays around the Mediterranean.

MB You were saying he liked brilliant colour. He was for high colours.

PM He liked high colours.

MB Almost the colour of his Australian background, in a way, but that may be putting too much in that?

PM Yes, it's difficult to say, but he liked brilliant colours, though I have a painting that I like that I have on my wall at home, which is not brilliant.

MB And you've brought it for us to look at today.

PM And I've brought it for you to have a look at, yes.

MB Paquita, if we could have a word about that. You think this is probably Northern Italy?

PM I think it's probably Northern Italy, but it could be an island in the Mediterranean like Elba or Corsica. I have the feeling that it looks Italian to me. Those houses look Italian.

MB But by Howard Florey's standards, this is pretty muted.

PM I would say so, yes. He liked bright colours.

MB But it is a delight. Are there many pictures remaining in the family?

PM Well, I can remember with my brother going through a collection and we took it in turns in selecting ones that we each wanted, and I suppose there must have been twenty or twenty-five, many of which were not at all good, and we kept those that we thought we would like to display and that's one of them. My brother has others.

MB So that was a keen interest that lasted throughout his life.

PM Well, not throughout his life. He started this in his later years when he went on these Mediterranean holidays.

MB But I think you said that he was a water-colourist early on.

PM Yes, but he didn't paint in the intervening years.

MB Your brother Charles, when he talks to me later will tell me about the devotion to photography.

PM Exactly. So that, in a way, is how he expressed his interest in the scenery. He also painted a portrait of me which made me feel not very satisfied about how I looked, but I'm sure it was reasonably accurate, and now because I don't look like it at all, I can look at it and say that's quite a nice picture. But, at the time, I was offended.

MB He thought it looked like you.

PM I assume so, absolutely. Possibly other people did too.

MB Let's take in another of your themes.

PM Well, we'll go on from that one which is to do with colour to his enjoying very colourful gardening. I can remember when he was in Queen's, he decided he would create colourful herbaceous borders. There were herbaceous borders before, but he had a gardener and he, again, got books and he looked at those plants that would fit together and occur all the year round, so that it would always be highly colourful. I remember it as orange and yellow and red.

MB Not a lot of blue in there.

PM Well, a little bit of blue occasionally to heighten up the effects of the red and the yellow. I may be wrong, but that was my impression that it was always brilliant.

MB They were staggering gardens and you used to go and visit him in Queen's and see this great blaze of colour on occasions.

PM Yes, it was a great pleasure. It was very formal a garden in so far as there was a quadrangle and on one side was the Provost's Lodgings and on the other side was the Queen's College Library, and then there were walls on either side. So it was square, with a square patch of grass in the middle and the herbaceous borders around the outside with a path.

MB For people who don't know Oxford, we should just point out that Queen's is one of the colleges of the Oxford complex of colleges, a distinguished college to which your father was elected Provost in the late fifties or early sixties.

PM Yes, early sixties, I think.

MB I think a role he enjoyed enormously.

PM I think when he first went there, he used to come back as usual and tell us stories, though that was perhaps not come back, we came to him because we would then stay with him. And he would tell us stories about how when he wanted to introduce change, this was severely resisted and so he would get himself quite worked up about the incredible difficulty of introducing change. He was particularly keen there on introducing postgraduate accommodation because postgraduates come from all over the world and, at that point in time, didn't have reasonable accommodation for the short period they were going to be there. So he gave serious attention to developing that at Queen's. He undoubtedly did a whole lot of other things but I remember him talking about that.

MB That was one of his great concerns?

PM Yes.

MB To which he gave a lot of attention looking for money, I think.

PM Yes, but he was interested in setting up Florey scholarships so that people would be able to come and study medical issues and be funded by his particular scholarship fund.

MB Paquita, while we are on that particular theme, it would be nice to actually just re-trace a little bit to Australia and his links with the Australian National University because he did give that a lot of service in getting started. I mean, he did give a lot back to Australia.

PM Again, I don't know a lot about it. He would talk about it, but because I didn't know the people and because I didn't know Australia, having only been there when I was a little girl, it really didn't have any significance to me. I knew he was passionately concerned that Australia should build up its own worthwhile universities, not that they weren't there before, but that Australians should stay in Australia and not necessarily migrate always to the UK, to the United States or wherever it might be.

MB And, of course, that came to pass.

PM Well, Canberra, the Australian National University, yes.

MB Paquita, continuing on your themes...

PM I will have to look at my themes here. I think that we could say something about his view of giving advice. I mentioned something about his giving advice. I asked him on one occasion - as I said before I did ask him questions - this was quite well on in his life and I said, 'You might see this as moderately impertinent were I not your daughter, but why is it that people are so interested in having you as part of their advisory system? Why is it that you are sought after all the time?' And though he was always regarded as an extremely modest person, he answered me, I think, really very frankly and he said, 'Well, I seem to be able to look well ahead to see what is going to be necessary to do.' What we would call now today having a 'strategic vision', and he seemed to have an uncanny knack of making right decisions and after this has been demonstrated a number of times, then people say, 'Here is a person who will help us pursue,' for example in the case of the Royal Society, 'the way in which the Royal Society might develop and go forward in the future.' So, though he might be seen in some ways as quite abrasive, that abrasiveness could be used to good effect. And of course he also used it perhaps to win funding for various projects he had.

MB We should say that whilst he was at the Royal Society as President, he took it into new accommodation and they were exceptionally important years. Just as he transformed Queen's quite a lot and transformed education in Oxford, he had a profound effect on the Royal Society?

PM Yes.

MB So his track record was pretty impressive and that's essentially what he was saying.

PM And, of course, setting up the John Curtin Medical School was an important contribution as well, so that he did have a view of where Australia should go in medical academic terms, but he also had a view each time of where he thought a particular organisation might go, and that's fairly valuable.

MB On giving advice, all that I've ever heard about Howard Florey is that he gave absolutely crystal clear advice, simple straightforward models, nothing cluttered, no ifs or buts, and that was it. That was your one shot. He knew exactly what it should be.

PM Yes, and if you have this uncanny ability to be right, then of course you don't need to elaborate on the reasons because you accept that people will take what you say as important and valid.

MB Take me along your themes, Paquita.

PM I think one might talk a little bit about temperament. He was known as abrasive, but at the same time not known by everybody as abrasive so that he could be, and was, greatly respected, not just for academic brilliance and being right, but because he looked after people. And I think I mentioned already that he looked after James Kent and James felt great affection for him and it's conceivable that he felt an affection for James Kent and he wanted to look after him. The other thing that I was told by Kent, as we all used to call him, - my father's habit of calling everybody by their last name - was that he always acknowledged secretaries and technicians, the people who were not the academic staff of the lab, and so he would smile and ask after them and make sure that his passing was a matter of note for them. And I think many scientists and many abstracted academics walked past people as though they were furniture, and he didn't do that. So I think that the abrasive temperament could also be used for when he needed to make use of it, but at the same time, he could behave on many occasions with care and concern for people.

MB There was this balancing wasn't there? This very simple humanity and this very high pressure channelling down critical areas where he was not going to put up with a lot of nonsense.

PM Yes, absolutely. He certainly could be concerned about us and concerned about me, though his health was not good and he concealed it most of the time. I can remember saying that I was prone to stitches and we were on this occasion walking up the long slope with our rather heavy bicycles, as they were in those days, out of Tal-y-llyn(?) which is a valley in North Wales and I said, 'I've got an awful stitch and I often get stitches.' And he immediately started to say, 'Where is it? How much does it trouble you?' And I could see his laying the foundations of saying is she going to have heart trouble. So he was concerned in that sort of way, but I just happened to remember this long walk that we did together.

MB And, again, this close feeling between you that didn't happen all that often, but which made you all the closer?

PM Well, I think we used to spend time going for walks in the park together and had opportunities to talk and he would talk to me about personal difficulties and so would my mother. I suppose I was not seen as being particularly biased to one or the other.

MB I was going to enter a theme at this point of whether he had any particular passions about everyday living. Whether he liked to dress in a particular way, whether he was fastidious about dress or whether he liked a particular kind of food? I was just thinking about his everyday patterns of living.

PM Well, I can remember one everyday pattern of living which was obsessional, timekeeping. If we were going to catch a train or a bus or whatever it might be, we would be there well in advance. My mother was similarly addicted to keeping on time. I can remember going for a walk while my father was busy and I said, 'When shall I be back?' And so he said, 'Be back at ten past one.' So what I decided to do since it was ten past twelve was to go for a walk and so plan it that I arrived back at ten past one, which I duly did, and he said, 'How did you get back so very much on time?' And I said, 'Well, I looked at how long it took me on the way out and I took the same amount of time on the way back.' And he said, 'That's really unusual, I've never heard anybody do that before, except myself!' I think he had taught us well, so to speak, to be frightened of being late.

MB One of my concluding questions really is that we started with him coming from Australia, having a massive impact internationally on medicine, becoming very, very settled in Oxford and very happy there, I suspect, from all that I know and very settled in Britain. Was there a lot of Australian remaining in the soul of Howard Florey by the time he got towards the end of his career and the end of his life?

PM I think a great deal because he went so often. He was going back with respect to setting up the Australian National University and the John Curtin Medical School, so he was frequently in contact with Australians and he enjoyed Australians because there would be great hearty laughter. I can remember when we had meals and I happened to be present at Queen's and there would be a whole bunch of Australians round, probably discussing the developments of the Medical School or whatever it might be, there would be a lot of great Australian hearty laughter. They are good at it. I think he enjoyed this freedom that they had. He wasn't so free and likely to laugh heartily himself, but he really enjoyed this openness. My son, who has now moved to Australia, enjoys the laid-backness and the openness.

MB We're coming towards the end of this session, Paquita, which I have enjoyed enormously. Are there things that we've left out that really would sell Howard Florey short if we didn't comment on them further?

PM Well, I think I need to look at these points. No, I think we've covered all the points actually.

MB I think we've done remarkably well and we've come right round in a circle in a way because I'm delighted to be able to think of the final election of Howard Florey to the House of Lords which you've already referred to, Baron Florey of Adelaide and Marston. Australia remained important and so did England.

PM Absolutely. I said it the wrong way around. I said Marston and Adelaide, but it's Adelaide and Marston.

MB I thought you got it right. Paquita, we got so much from that conversation today.

PM Well, I enjoyed having to prepare myself and I enjoyed doing the reminiscences and it will start me off in keeping a collection of the photographs and

tying them into my reminiscences, so thank you very much for giving me the opportunity.

MB My thanks to you.