



**Julia Davis:
A Literary Biography**

William D. Theriault

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Cover: Julia Davis, age 19, in dress she wore when she was presented at the Court of St. James

Preface

This work first appeared in *Harvest: Collected Works of Julia Davis*. (Ed. William D. Theriault. Charles Town, WV: Arts & Humanities Alliance of Jefferson County, 1992.) I have modified it to include photographs supplied by Julia Davis and interviews conducted in the preparation of the original work.

This is the only authorized biography of Julia Davis, who read and corrected it before its initial printing.

William D. Theriault, Hagerstown, MD, 2009

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Julia Davis

[Author's note: Julia Davis died January 30, 1993, in Ranson, WV, approximately a year after the following work was published.]

Many writers with more than a score of books to their credit would be satisfied to rest on their laurels, particularly if they had just celebrated their ninety-second birthday. But Julia Davis isn't one of them.

For her, writing is like breathing, and she has been writing for a long, long time. Born and nurtured in West Virginia, she has traveled widely, rubbed elbows with princes and presidents, and spent much of her working life away from her native state. But wherever she has gone, Julia Davis has looked at the world through eyes sharpened by her West Virginia childhood. And whenever she has returned home for research or respite, she has looked at us with the fresh perspective of the traveller.

During her eighty-year career, Julia Davis has published just about every type of literature you can imagine. In the process, she has developed a reputation as a careful craftsman, a writer who can look at the past and the present with clarity and balance. Her subject matter has been equally diverse, ranging from the streets of Calcutta to the hills and farmlands of West Virginia.

Born July 23, 1900, to John W. Davis, a Clarksburg lawyer, and Julia Leavell McDonald, from Media Farm, Jefferson County, she was first named Anna Kennedy Davis in honor of her maternal grandmother. Had her mother lived, the girl named Anna might have trod a different path into the future. But her mother died three weeks after giving her life, and the baby girl was renamed Julia McDonald Davis.

The path taken by Julia Davis has been a long one with many twists and turns. From time to time it crossed that of her father, Ambassador to Great Britain, presidential candidate, renowned lawyer. For brief periods, father and daughter traveled together, but most of her journey has been spent in the company of three husbands (she married one of them twice), seven children, and a few close friends. With her help, I have retraced this journey. Here is her story.

Julia's father John W. Davis was not only a brilliant lawyer but also a painfully shy man (Figure 1). His courtship of Julia McDonald lasted almost five years. During that time and the brief marriage that followed, he shared with her much that he had never shared with anyone else. With the death of his wife, John W. Davis lost a part of him that he would never recover. Seeking refuge from the pain, he threw himself completely into his work and his work became his life.

He was to have many friends, many triumphs, a few defeats, and a new wife who saw to his comfort and career. But the loss of his first wife Julia never left him, and the face and name of his daughter were constant reminders of both his greatest love and his greatest loss. Recalling her childhood and her father's growing separation from her, Julia Davis notes, "He was always kindly, often abstracted, but I knew then, and I know still, that looking at me hurt his heart."

Unable to keep his daughter with him, John Davis placed her in the capable hands of her grandparents, relegating himself to the role of infrequent visitor, bringer of gifts, and absentee parent. Julia thrived under the attention of two sets of very different grandparents.

Educated at home in Clarksburg by her grandmother Davis until age nine, spending her summers at Media, the McDonald farm, Julia Davis characterizes her childhood as alternating between a group of "unrepentant individualists" and a family that quite properly called itself a "clan." Looking back over those early years, she reflects, "Certainly I was not unhappy with the Davises, where I received so much love and learned to love deeply in return. Certainly I do not quarrel with having been taught to use my mind. But I was solitary in that silent house."

She goes on to say, "For the child I was, Media meant joy and freedom, freedom from anxious supervision, from precocity, from loneliness, from all that in one way or another oppressed my spirit. Children were a commonplace on that farm. No one hung over me, no one seemed to care what I did. I expanded, running wild."

As Julia Davis undertook the journey from adolescence into adulthood, this dual existence continued. From the Davises and her life in Clarksburg, she learned how to write. And from her sojourns with the McDonalds of Jefferson County, she learned what to write about.

Julia Davis admits that her early education by Anna Kennedy Davis (Figure 2) covered only the basics, but the influence of this remarkable woman should not be minimized. This was the grandmother who knew Greek and Latin, who debated politics and philosophy with her lawyer husband, and who fought off the pleas of her doctor and the preliminary pains of childbirth until she had finished reading a chapter from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

From the tutelage of her grandmother, Julia Davis moved on to the private school taught by her cousin Virginia Kennedy in Clarksburg. It was while she was at this school that her first published work appeared, a poem printed in *St. Nicholas Magazine* that

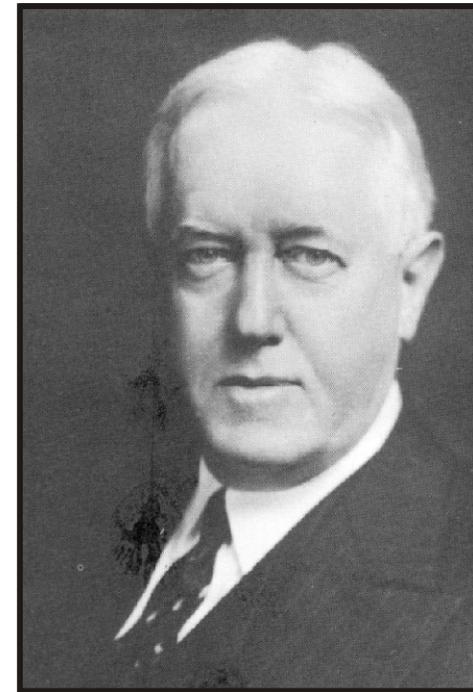


Figure 1. John W. Davis

earned the eleven-year-old writer a silver medal. By age fourteen, she had completed the course of study for graduation, but her grandparents decided to give her a couple of years at the Shipley School in Philadelphia before she went to college. And before she set off for college, Julia had spent more than sixteen summers at Media.

Summers spent with scores of kids and farm animals, with uncles like John Yates McDonald, a dirt farmer with four college degrees. Summers with her raspy-voiced grandfather, Major Edward A. H. McDonald, an officer in Stuart's cavalry who took a bullet in the throat shortly before the Confederate surrender at Appomattox Courthouse. He had kept himself from bleeding to death by sticking his finger in the wound and then endured six weeks of frequent hemorrhages and a fractured jaw before the bullet could be removed. This was a man who ran his farm with the discipline and precision he had shown in the service, except for his treatment of granddaughter Julia. He was incapable of punishing her. Rarely speaking of his military experiences, the Major summed up the years of sacrifice by noting that he did not regret fighting for the South and Virginia but also reminding Julia that "You must be glad we did not win." While Julia's life alternated between Clarksburg and Media, her father's political career had caught fire, first as representative from the 1st West Virginia district and then as Solicitor General for the United States. (See Figures 3 and 4.) He had moved to Washington, D.C., and when Julia was eleven, he married Nell Bassell from Clarksburg. Nell made sure that John W. Davis wore the right clothes, met the right people, and kept his appointments. She freed him from the responsibilities of daily life so that he could do what he did best, practice law and diplomacy. And in the process, Nell built a wall around her husband that daughter Julia could rarely penetrate.

Deprived of her mother's company by death, Julia was also denied frequent access to her father by Nell. Julia Davis notes that, wherever her father and stepmother lived, "My stepmother was happier when I was not around. In spite of her determined kindness I could see this, and it came as a shock to one who had been 'Raised a pet.'" She observed that Nell "readily subscribed to the theory that I should not be uprooted, but should stay with my two sets of grandparents as usual, and visit Washington only for short vacations."



Figure 2. Anna Kennedy Davis, Julia's maternal grandmother, ca. 1910.

If you ask Julia Davis about the effect this thirty-two-year separation had on her, she will shrug and tell you there was no lack of love in her life, in childhood or after. I believe her. But if you carefully examine the milestones on her journey through adulthood you will see that Julia Davis learned much from that separation from her natural parents.

As far back as she could remember, Julia Davis wanted to be a mother. When she found that she was unable to bear children of her own, she nurtured seven of them, and she shared her life with three husbands. She also wanted to be a writer, and when she took on the responsibility of raising children, she frequently struggled to balance the demands of her craft against those of the youngsters in her care. Her writing also reflects her separation from her natural parents, for the characters in her novels are frequently orphans, children separated from one or both parents by death or duty, and women who carry on alone while the menfolks are off to war or on other adventures.

Julia Davis began her freshman year at Wellesley College in Massachusetts in 1917, before her father was appointed ambassador to the Court of St. James. Finishing her second year at college, she and her friend Katy Watson joined J.W. Davis and Nell in England in the fall of 1920. Julia Davis has recounted the adventures of these two American girls in her memoir, *Legacy of Love* (1961). Julia's memories of this period, based on her letters to her aunts and Katy's letters to her father and mother, are to be published in 1992 by the University of West Virginia Press under the title *The Embassy Girls*. During her stay in England, she met Lieutenant William M. Adams, an American pilot and air force attache at the American embassy. She was later to marry him.

Returning to the United States, Julia resumed her classes at Wellesley in the fall of 1921. But the school now seemed smaller, "like a pair of shoes that had grown too tight." She finished out the year and transferred to Barnard, where she received her bachelor's degree in 1922. At the time, she wanted to be a playwright, and the play she wrote during her senior year was selected for production at the college. Unnamed and now lost, the play dealt with the struggles of West Virginia mountain folk as they were thrust into the twentieth century by World War I. Drawn from people the Davis family knew in Clarksburg, the main characters, a mother and her son Selby, had lived in the mountains all their lives and knew little of the world beyond. Upset to learn that Selby must leave home to fight, the mother

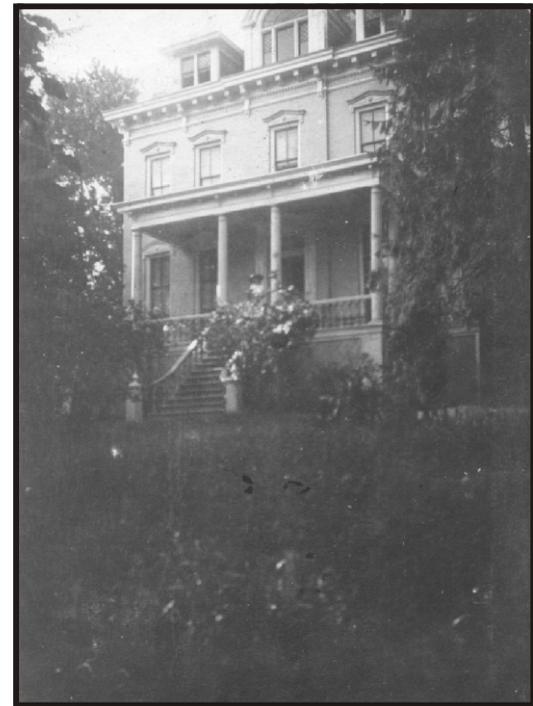


Figure 3. The Davis house in Clarksburg, WV



Figure 4. Media, the McDonald farm in Jefferson County, WV

naively asks, "Why don't we line up on this side of the river and shoot the Germans as they come out of the water?" Her son, excited by the prospect of becoming a soldier but ignorant of the dangers ahead, leans out of the train window as it departs and yells to his mother and friends, "I'm a-gonna get 'em!" "Who?" they ask. "The fellow they're sendin' me after!"

The themes from the lost play reverberate through much of Julia Davis' later work, including her short stories "Two for One" and "White Justice," which depict American Indians forced to live in the white man's world and the problems of Indian mothers separated from their children.

In 1923, Julia Davis married William Adams and the couple moved to Copenhagen, where he managed the Scandinavian branch of the American Rubber Company. Julia and her husband spent two and one half years in Scandinavia, and it was there that she collected the materials that would become her first two books. That first one got its start when the couple visited one of Bill's friends, who had recently completed a series of watercolors illustrating the work of Saxo Grammaticus, the compiler of the first history of the Danes. She was looking for someone to translate the original work and create a narrative to accompany the illustrations. "Julia can do it," said Bill. "She loves to write." And she did.

During her years in Copenhagen, Julia Davis translated the original work into English from Old Danish and retold the stories. When the Adamses returned to the United States to live in 1926, she set out to find a publisher for her book. Looking for a more immediate source of income, she also landed a job as a reporter for the Associated Press. Both experiences helped her hone the tools of her craft.

Recalling that first attempt to get her book published, she says, "I brought it back and went around with this portfolio of big pictures. I didn't know that wasn't how you sold a book. Well, I went around with these pictures from door to door of the publishers. And sometimes I'd have to walk twice around the block before I could kick myself in to say 'Here I am and here's this possibility.'" She continues, "Eventually I saw the head of Dutton's junior department. And she thought it could be made into stories for young adults, that is teenagers."

Julia Davis signed a contract, but the book needed a lot of work before it could be published. She figured that she could finish it while she worked at some other job that would pay the bills. She became a reporter for the Associated Press in New York City.

Recalling those first days as an Associated Press reporter, Julia Davis said, "I was the second woman they'd ever hired. I was doing special features, and they paid me a quarter of a cent a word, which they told me quite frankly was the lowest they'd ever offered anybody. But I was glad to get the job and I thoroughly enjoyed it." Remembering the Special Features editor she worked for, she noted, "He was very nice to work with. And he told me in the beginning, 'You're writing for a newspaper. Take the first chapter of Genesis as your model. Put the whole story in the first sentence. Then develop the story.'" Illustrating her point, Julia Davis went on,

"In the beginning the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is.' That's the story. Then you go ahead and fill in the details."

Writing special features was supposed to be tamer than covering fires or some of the other local news, but it had its own dangers. Returning to the office one day to type up her story, she was knocked down and nearly run over by a cab. The driver pulled her away from the vehicle's front wheels, which had come so close to crushing her that they left tread marks on her coat. Brushing the dirt from her clothes, Julia Davis crossed the street to the Associated Press offices, reached her desk, and sat down at her typewriter. When her hands stopped shaking, she typed her story, filed it, and met deadline. Major McDonald would have been proud of her.

Despite her love of reporting and the raise she received for her efforts, meeting deadlines at the newspaper didn't help her meet the publishing deadline for her book. She quit her job in the summer of 1927 and returned to the Davis home in Clarksburg for a few weeks. Melville Davisson Post, a friend of the Davises, lived nearby, and this West Virginia master of the detective story gave Julia a crash course in novel writing.

Remembering that summer, Julia Davis said, "He taught me more in six weeks than I had learned in all the English courses that I had taken at all the colleges. He really knew what he was doing. He would tell me, 'You need a little more dialogue here. You've got to build this up. You've got to build that up.'" She continued, "Your dialogue was always either to advance the story or to enlighten people about the characters. It must always have a purpose. It must always move the story. I really learned how much cloth it takes to make a pair of pants with him in those six weeks."



Figure 5. Julia Davis and husband William Adams in wedding dress, at Mattapan, J.W. Davis' house on Long Island, ca. 1923

During that period, *Swords of the Vikings* began to take shape. Published in 1928, the book was one of the five nominated that year for the Newberry Medal. It stayed in print for forty years. And so Julia Davis, with one book under her belt, set out on her lifelong career as a novelist.

The challenges facing Julia Davis in 1928 were the same ones confronting many women her age who had recently entered the workforce. Heir to the victories won by their mothers and grandmothers for women's suffrage, her generation was the first in which women had real choices to make among marriage, career, and children. Could women compete with men in the workplace? Would women, like many men, sacrifice time with their children or spouse to provide their family with the necessities (or luxuries) of life? More than sixty years later, Julia Davis would have her own answers to these questions.

Her writing career took off in an unexpected direction when the contract for that first book led her down a path that she didn't want to follow. Remembering her first contract, she said, "I was so thrilled that somebody was going to publish a book that I had written that I would have signed anything. I realized afterwards that I had signed a contract to write children's books. I had to write six of them before I could get out of it."

What's wrong with writing children's books? Well, people just didn't take writers of juvenile fiction very seriously in those days. Smiling at her predicament, Julia Davis said, "I realized that I had to get out of children's books because I would go to writers' parties, and they would say 'What do you write?' As soon as I'd say 'I write books for young adults,' they'd spot someone across the room they just had to talk to and move off."

Five more children's novels followed *Swords of the Vikings* in quick succession. *Vaino, a Boy of New Finland* (1928), interweaves sagas about Vaino, a hero of early Finland, with the adventures of a modern boy of the same name who fights on the side of the White forces in Finland's 1918 revolution. *Mountains are Free*, which appeared the following year, recounts the exploits of William Tell in Switzerland's fight for independence.

Her assignment to write *Stonewall* (1931) sent her off in a new direction. Recalling the assignment, Julia Davis said, "that got me back to America, and I realized that my real interest was American history, particularly in the history of this area. Jackson, of course, was from Clarksburg and went through the Shenandoah Valley and Jefferson County a good many times. I became very interested in that."

She continued the Civil War theme in *Remember and Forget* (1931). Using the McDonald family home outside of Winchester, Virginia, as the setting and family letters and memoirs as a source, Julia Davis created a story of a family divided by conflicting

allegiances to their state and their country. *Peter Hale* (1932), which ended her obligation to Dutton, recounts the adventures of an orphan during the colonial period.

If you read Julia Davis' first six "children's" novels, you will probably be surprised at the quality of the effort. Each is well written and aimed at a reading level that today would be classified as adult. Only today's vulgarity and explicit sex are missing. She didn't write her books "down" to children, and while these works often deal with fairly complex issues, they do so in a straightforward way. She summarizes the causes of the Civil War in *Stonewall*, for example, without glorifying the struggle or romanticizing the combatants on either side.

The effort to complete six books under contract allowed Julia Davis to focus on American history and to select the genre that she would favor in the future. Although she would devour hundreds of academic histories and primary sources during her career, she chose not to write scholarly works because she wished to write for the general reader. On the other hand, historical romance was too far removed from reality to satisfy her own desire to write about real people and real events. She selected the historical novel as her niche, and her creations have combined careful historical research into source materials with a narrative style that eliminates the seams and wrinkles found in the fabric of more scholarly history.

During the four years in which Julia Davis wrote five novels, writing served as a source of renewal as well as income. She was an invalid during much of that time, first due to complications from a miscarriage and then from a fractured vertebra incurred in a fall from a horse (Figure 6). Finally, she was out of her contract. But four years of sickness, plus disagreements with her husband, had taken their toll. The couple was divorced in 1932.

Julia Davis' stay in Reno, Nevada, while she waited for her divorce yielded material for the short stories "White Justice" (1933) and "Two for One" (1939), both published in *Atlantic Monthly*. Set in Nevada and based on actual court cases, the stories explore the different concepts of white and Indian justice. Written in a colorful, straightforward expository style, the stories are reminiscent of the works of O. Henry and Melville Davisson Post.

Back in New York City, Julia Davis' life took a new direction. She met and married Paul West, an assistant to Henry Luce at Time and Life, and she took a job as an adoption agent at the State Charities Aid Association. Like her job at Associated Press, Julia Davis West's new job was low paying and difficult. She was given the children hardest to place, and she made a success of it. Her short story "Return" (1940), deals with the struggle of an immigrant mother to keep and care for her son. It is based on Julia Davis' own experiences with adopted children and their natural and adoptive parents. By the time she left the job five years later, she had a case load of one hundred children. A boy and girl from the agency remained hers for life.

Julia Davis' next book did not come as quickly as her last six. The demands of her job, her children, and her marriage pulled her in many different directions. Three years in the making, *No Other White Men* (1938) is the story of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Like her other historical works, the narrative makes extensive use of first hand accounts and shows an attention to setting and detail. The book was in print for more than fifty years and is as readable today as when it was first printed.

Thus far, Julia Davis had drawn upon her personal and family experiences to add realism and depth to the stories she had created, but she had never based a whole novel upon an incident taken from her own life. Unexpected events during the next two years gave her the material for a new novel and forged bonds of love and friendship that have lasted a lifetime.

The Spanish Civil War had just ended, and a correspondent who had covered the war told her that two refugee children needed a temporary home. Their mother had been shot by Franco's sympathizers and their father, a promising Spanish novelist and supporter of the losing communist cause, needed someone to look after the children for just six weeks while he got settled in Mexico. Julia Davis recalls, "I took them in for six weeks and they stayed forever." The story of how Julia Davis came to be their "mother" and how they began their journey back from the horrors of war is movingly told in *The Sun Climbs Slow* (1940), a quietly powerful novel that is probably her greatest work.

Asked by Stephen Vincent Benet to write *The Shenandoah* (1944) for The Rivers of America Series, Julia Davis set to work on what has been her longest research project. More than five years in the making, *The Shenandoah* was written amidst great personal turmoil, including the death of her stepmother Nell and her aunt Emma, who had been like a mother to her since the death of grandmother Davis. The Wests were forced to sell their New York home when Paul entered the service, and the burden for earning a living and supporting their three children fell mainly on Julia. Moving back to the Davis house in Clarksburg, she used it as her base of operations as she wrote and traveled throughout the Shenandoah Valley gathering material for her book. The most popular of Julia Davis' works, *The Shenandoah* is still in print. *A Valley and a Song* (1963) provided younger readers with their own view of the valley.

Her marriage was one of the casualties of the war, and the Wests were divorced in 1949. The end of her marriage and the end of the war sent Julia Davis off in new directions. The death of her stepmother in 1943 had



Figure 6. Julia Davis in riding attire, ca. 1935

removed the barrier that had stood between father and daughter for more than thirty years. Moving back to New York, Julia Davis grew closer to her father. Now they were two grownups with their own professions who shared the same past, not a little girl and a far away father.

By the time Julia Davis' journey had taken her midway through the century, her reputation as a writer of popular histories was rising. The tales of adventure and heroism spun in *No Other White Men* and *The Shenandoah* had overshadowed the quieter, more complex themes found in her short stories and the novel about her Spanish wards. In the novels she would write during the next decade, she would attempt to combine the adventures of men intent on exploration or conquest with the struggles of women to nurture and protect their families.

Her interest in local history continued in *Cloud on the Land* (1950), where she used Media Farm in Jefferson County West Virginia as background for an historical novel about Western settlement and slavery. Set early in the 19th century, the book begins the saga of the McLeod family of Virginia, including Angus McLeod, a plantation owner forced to confront the economic problems of slavery and manumission, and his wife Lucy, who loves her husband but finds slavery abhorrent. Anecdotes from the McDonald family's past and present are woven into the narrative and give the work interest and realism.

The world presented in *Cloud on the Land* is one in which both men and women shape the world around them. Taking up residence at a remote trading post, Angus and Lucy struggle to make a living in a land where the law is only as strong as the character of the people who enforce it. While her husband is away for months trading with the Indians, Lucy is left to run the business, maintain order among rough frontiersmen and Indians, bear her children, and care for her family.

Julia Davis's story outgrew this book, and it was continued in *Bridle the Wind* (1951), which is set in Jefferson County, Virginia in the 1830's. Unlike the frontier society of *Cloud on the Land*, the Southern culture depicted in the second



Figure 7. Julia Davis and her second husband, Paul West

novel has firmly established roles for its members. Within this atmosphere, Lucy settles into more traditional roles as wife and mother and confronts slavery first hand. The slavery depicted here is so closely intertwined with Southern society and economy that it envelopes blacks and whites alike. Like barbed wire that fuses with a growing tree, it cannot be eliminated without destroying the living fabric that surrounds it. Unable to eradicate slavery even on her own plantation, Lucy flees north with a fugitive slave, leaving her family behind. She eventually returns home alone to face prosecution. Her love for Angus and the children is even stronger than her abhorrence of slavery.

Eagle on the Sun (1956) continues the family saga during the Mexican War. The novel focuses on the adventures of Angus and his son during Doniphan's expedition to Mexico, an event that she would explore again in her history *Ride with the Eagle* (1962). The Lucy depicted here is a minor character, a wife and a mother in the South of the 1840's who runs the plantation and raises the younger children while the men are off to war.

During the same period that Julia Davis tackled the slavery issue in the McLeod trilogy, John W. Davis was addressing the issue of integration in the U.S. Supreme Court (1954). (See Figure 8.) Although his daughter and friends advised J.W. Davis against arguing South Carolina's case opposing the integration of public schools, he took the case anyway. South Carolina's governor was a close friend, and Davis believed he had the law and precedent on his side. Looking back on that period, Julia Davis noted that her father, as usual, decided to take the case on his own and didn't share his ideas with her. Likewise, Julia developed her exploration of slavery independently of her father, discussing this and other works with him only after publication.

While she was working on *Cloud on the Land*, Julia Davis' life and career both took new directions. In 1951, she married Charles P. Healy, a lawyer at Columbia University, and the couple's children from their previous marriages came to live with them. Her writing took a detour into the realm of mysteries under the pseudonym of F. Draco. Accompanying her father to England when he received an honorary doctorate in 1950, she saw a "church" that had been built early in the nineteenth century for devil worship. She used the building and its history when she wrote *The Devil's Church* (1951). Another mystery, *Cruise with Death* (1952), was published under that same name, and several short stories followed.

If you ask Julia Davis for details about F. Draco, you will quickly find that he is not just a pseudonym but also a character in his own right. Julia Davis notes, "He was mostly rushing around adventuring, and he just wrote occasionally. All three of my husbands were in the OSS, so F. Draco participated a little bit in those experiences. F. Draco would write things that Julia Davis wouldn't write. And she didn't want to be mixed up with him, because she was a much more serious writer."

F. Draco's novels and short stories received a fair amount of attention during the 1950's and 1960's. Some of the shorter pieces were published in popular magazines such as *Redbook* and *Cosmopolitan*. The mystery "man" F. Draco was selected as one of the short

story writers to be featured in a publication project undertaken by the National Endowment for the Arts. He was asked to join an association of mystery writers and received numerous offers to submit his work for publication. Offers never made to his creator, Julia Davis. F. Draco's notoriety both angered and amused Julia Davis. Recalling the membership in the mystery writers' association that was offered to F. Draco, she said, "I was furious because Julia Davis had been writing for a long time and she'd never been chosen. And here came F. Draco and immediately was nominated. That made me really angry because he didn't know one thing that I hadn't taught him. Not one thing. I'm not a feminist, but you can understand that I was angry."

F. Draco represents an interesting excursion on Julia Davis' journey as a writer. Initially bound by contract to write children's fiction, she eventually distanced herself from a genre that was then populated largely by women writers. Establishing herself in the field of popular histories and historical novels, Julia Davis achieved recognition for her tales of adventure, exploration, and war, rather than for her stories of mothers and children. She had successfully competed with male authors, although her works dealing with men fared better than those that focused on women. By developing the persona of F. Draco, Julia Davis created a male author who wrote successfully for a primarily female audience.

Is Julia Davis' creation of F. Draco an attempt to compete with male authors by trying to be like them? She notes, "I've never thought I was the least bit like a man, never wanted to be like them. I never wanted to compete with men. I wanted to manage men, and I did. You never have to compete with somebody you can manage." Some time during the 1950's, F. Draco went off on a new adventure and never returned.

The death of Julia Davis' father in 1955 and husband in 1956 marked a hiatus in her career, and the loss of several members of the McDonald clan placed an additional burden on her to settle family affairs. During this period, she reflected that "Sometimes there comes a pause in life when the familiar forward motion no longer serves, when new direction must be sought." She was now the custodian of large amounts of materials documenting the history of the Davis and McDonald families.

Reading through this wealth of information, she recalls, brought her back to her roots. "The older generations came again to life, this time in the round, not merely as seen by the young. Reading, I recalled my family in every sense of that good word, and found my signposts for the future." Much of her subsequent writing has focused on making the history of both families available to the public.

Julia Davis donated many of her father's papers to Yale University in 1961, and she placed other materials written by her father in the keeping of West Virginia University. (The diaries kept by J.W. Davis as Ambassador to England are scheduled to be published by West Virginia University some time in 1992.) She captured the essence of the relatives who raised her in *Legacy of Love* (1961), a series of anecdotes that focus on her life in Clarksburg, Media, and London. *Mount Up* (1967), based on the diary of her grandfather Edward A. McDonald, recounts his exploits during the Civil War. *Never Say Die* (1980) tells the story of Angus McDonald's flight to

America after the Battle of Culloden and the growth of his branch of the McDonald clan on this continent. Much of this material deals with early life in Virginia, Ohio, and the area that would later become West Virginia.

While keeping her commitment to record the achievements of her family, Julia Davis has continued to deal with broader issues in American history. Her play *The Anvil* (1961), written for the Civil War centennial in Charles Town, West Virginia, was produced off Broadway in 1962. Dealing with the trial of John Brown after the abolitionist's raid on Harpers Ferry, the play looks at Brown as a catalyst for the violent events that followed. Brown, as the play's title suggests, is an anvil on which God beats out His purposes. He is also a mirror, reflecting the prejudices the audience brings to the play. Savior? Terrorist? Religious fanatic? In her attempt to portray Brown accurately, Julia Davis refuses to give us easy answers. Her refusal to bend her facts to fit the plot has drawn criticism from some reviewers, while others have praised her efforts to capture the complexity of her subject.

Two other plays were created some time during this period. One of them, portraying three women at three periods in their lives, was optioned but never produced. It has been lost. Explaining why it was not produced at the time, Julia Davis remarked, "They asked me 'Who would want to see a play about middle-aged women talking about their lives?'"

The other play, *Possession*, is published here [in *Harvest*] for the first time. It deals with a mother's efforts to protect and educate her sons despite an alcoholic first husband, a rich manipulative second husband, and a politically savvy third husband. Based on real people and events, *Possession* explores the prices people pay to obtain wealth, power, security, or the love of others.

Using the format found in her novel of the Lewis and Clark expedition, Julia Davis wrote *Ride with the Eagle* (1962), which draws upon the diaries of six soldiers to recreate the adventures of Colonel William Doniphan's First Missouri volunteers in the war with Mexico. The role of women in politics and law was another topic that caught her attention. Her articles published in the *Smithsonian*

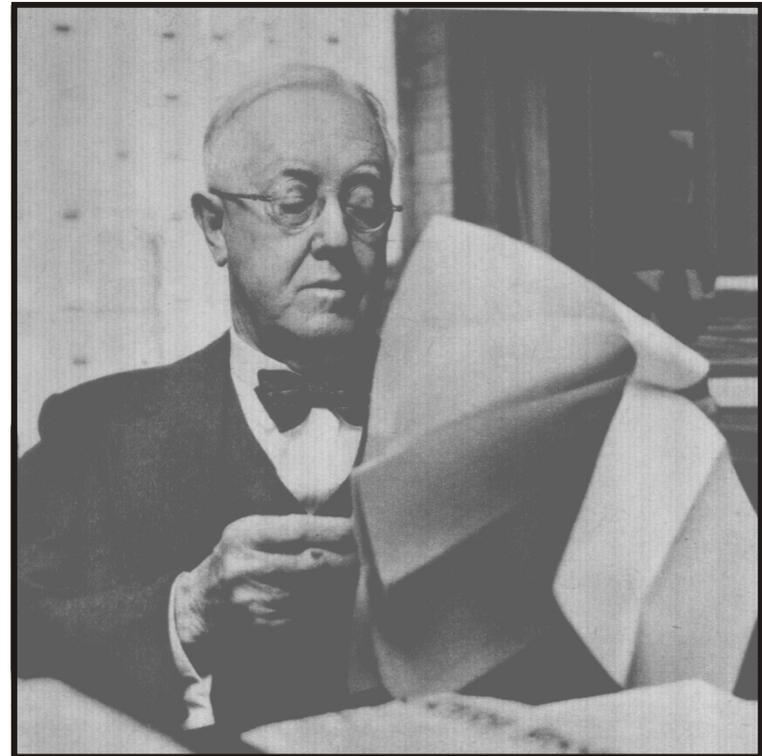


Figure 8. J.W. Davis

Magazine (October 1977 and March 1981) contrast the careers of the first two woman candidates for president of the United States. Victoria Woodhull is portrayed as using men and her feminine charms to get what she wanted, while Belva Lockwood is seen as struggling to advance her legal and political career by her intellect and pure grit.

Her short story "I AM" was written for Jimmy Carter's daughter Amy, who had to cope with her new role as the daughter of the President. The story of a little girl who tries to lock out the rest of the world so that she can spend time with her busy father is written with the insight of someone who had lived through the experience herself.

In 1974, Julia Davis remarried William Adams, and the couple lived at his home in Cannan, New York until his death in 1986. Her short story "Full Circle" recounts the reunion of Jean Moffat, the main character in *The Sun Climbs Slow*, with her first husband. Summing up the reunion of both Jean Moffat and Julia Davis with their first husbands, the author concludes the story by saying

The issues that once had divided them so fiercely now appeared like toys that children drop and forget to put away. There would be details to work out, adjustments to make, but nothing that reasonable adults could not adapt to. The broken vows could be repeated, never to be broken again, for this time they would be conscious promises such as the young cannot make, for they do not know what lies ahead.

When her husband died, she decided to make her return to West Virginia permanent. Settled in Charles Town since 1986, she has continued to write and lead an active life despite the toll that ninety two years of living has taken. Last year, she wrote the narrative for the Jefferson County Historical Society's book on historic homes, *Between the Shenandoah and the Potomac*.

Although Julia Davis has written poetry since she was a teenager, little has been published. Most of the verse that has survived has been written since 1970 and is included in this volume [*Harvest*]. The Julia Davis revealed in these occasional pieces is mainly a wife, mother, and friend rather than the more familiar novelist or historian. The "Song of an Oversusceptible Young Man" and "His Mother's Reply" represent a dialogue between Julia Davis' Spanish son Ramon and herself. "To My Husband At Christmas" captures the feeling of closeness to departed loved ones during the holidays. These and similar works compliment her other creations that focus on relationships among husbands, wives, and their children. Poems such as "Elegy for Three" and "Old Age is Not For Sissies" deal with the loss of the loved ones whom she has survived. Others such as "Lament" and "To My Doctor" are lighthearted accounts of the struggles of her active mind and spirit to survive in a fragile, aging body.

Looking back over her life, Julia Davis reflects, "I always wanted to write novels and raise children, and I've done both." She acknowledges that she is a minor writer when compared with contemporaries such as Edna Ferber, Willa Cather, and Eudora Welty. She chalks up her fate to lack of talent, but the careful craftsmanship of her work argues against that explanation. After tracing her journey as a writer, daughter, wife, mother, and friend, I think there is a more complex reason.

Recalling her struggles to balance the demands of her career, children, and husbands, Julia Davis notes that her father once told her, "You have a good mind, but your heart is mush." Then she adds, "I wish he were alive today, because I would say `Father, the heart paid off better than the head.'" Applying this philosophy to her own writing, she continues, "The head might have paid better.... Maybe I could have written better if I had no other interests, but I could not have lived better. I couldn't have been happier."

Two major themes run through the works of Julia Davis — the history, heroism, and adventure found in such works as *No Other White Men* or *The Shenandoah*; and the subtler tales of domestic relationships found in her short stories, *The Sun Climbs Slow*, *Legacy of Love*, *Possession*, and her poems. Thus far her reputation as a writer has been based primarily on the former theme, on works that show Julia Davis writing with her head. Yet the power of her other creations, the ones she wrote with her heart, should no longer be ignored. Perhaps the works collected in the present volume [*Harvest*] will help future writers, critics, and historians to arrive at a more balanced assessment of her career.

A few artists, like Shakespeare and Mozart, possessed genius so powerful that they could create master works under almost any circumstances. But most of us, like Julia Davis, have had to weigh the sacrifices demanded by our art against the needs of our spouses, children, and friends. Throughout her work, Julia Davis' female characters have had to choose between the head and the heart, and most have selected the latter. On her own journey through life she has generally made the same choice, although there have been many excursions along the way. The path she has trod may not be the one we would choose, but we must acknowledge that her life and her writing have been true to each other.

It is now the summer of 1992 and another novel is in the works. After that, who knows? If I had my way, I'd finish this story of Julia Davis' career with the phrase "... and she wrote happily ever after." But you, and I, and Julia Davis know that such endings are reserved for fairy tales, not biographies. Perhaps one of her recently completed poems best sums up what she sees ahead:

91
Is no fun.
92
What to do?
93
Wait and see.
94
Shut the door.
95
Don't stay alive.

For the young, or even the middle aged, her poem may seem like a grim way to end this tale. But then most of us have a long journey ahead of us before we can see life from her perspective. Meanwhile, I hope that she will let me walk along with her for a few more miles.



Julia Davis, age 92

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A poem beginning with the line "Midnight in May ..." is said to have been published by Julia Davis in *St. Nicholas Magazine* sometime between 1911 and 1914. Efforts to locate it have not been successful. A few other poems were probably published in magazines during the 1940's and 1950's.

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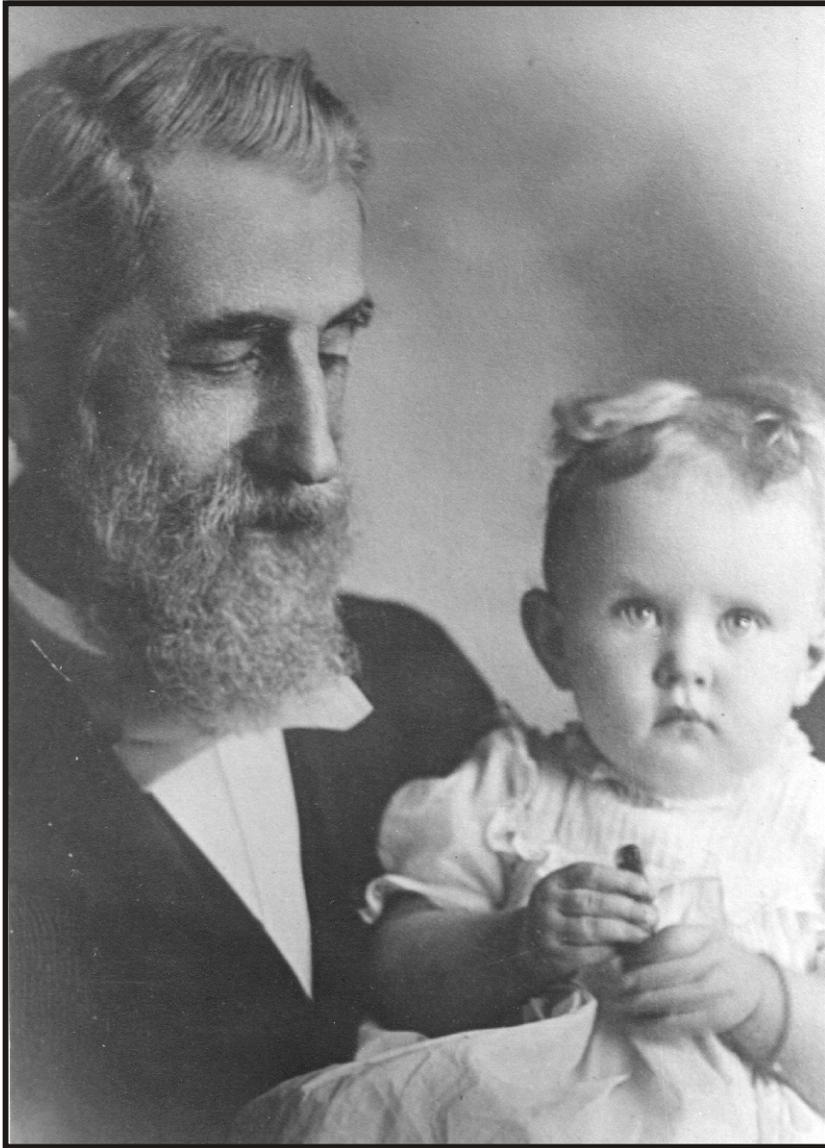
Appendix A.
Additional Photographs



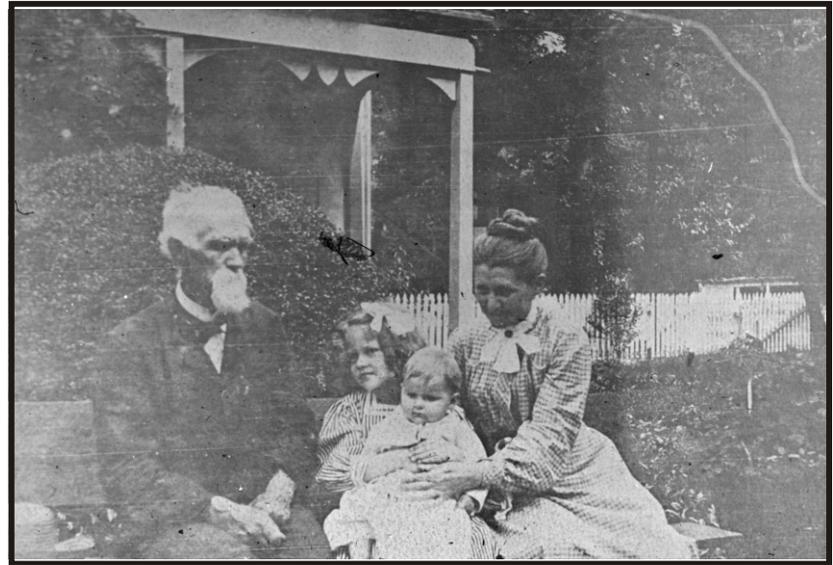
Julia McDonald, Julia Davis' mother, late 1890's



Clarksburg, WV. ca 1900. Anna Kennedy Davis with Aunt Nan Davis and black cook.



John H. Davis (paternal grandfather) and Julia Davis, ca. 1902



Jefferson County, WV. Media. ca. 1905. Major Edward H. McDonald (left), Julia Davis, Edward McDonald in her lap), and Julia Leavell McDonald (grandmother of Julia Davis).



Julia Davis (center) in parade (Clarksburg?) ca. 1910



Julia Davis, ca. ca. 1914



Julia Davis, ca. 1916



The McDonald family at Media, Jefferson County, WV, ca. 1912. Julia Davis is seated on the ground in the front row, center. Her maternal grandparents are sitting behind her to the left and right. Her father is standing in the back row (second man from the left).



Julia Davis, ca. 1918



Jefferson County, WV. Media. 1916. John McDonald, head of farm (left), Carlotta (center), head farmerette, Uncle Will McDonald (right); farmerettes from University of Wisconsin. Courtesy of Julia Davis Adams. Jefferson County, WV. 1917. Julia Davis, Dorothy (later Mrs. John McDonald), Will McDonald, standing with watermelon.



From left Katy Watson's father (?), John W. Davis, Katy Watson's brother, Katy Watson's mother (?), Julia Davis, Katy Watson's husband; below: Katy Watson's son, Katy Watson, ca. 1922.



Julia Davis and Aunt Emma Davis at Atlantic City, ca. 1930



Julia Davis, ca. 1924



E.P. Dutton authors, ca. 1950. Julia Davis, 4th from left



Julia Davis, ca. 1950



Julia Davis, ca. 1960

Appendix B.
Interviews with Julia Davis

Davis, Julia. Interview. February 4, 1992

William Theriault: You were born July 23, 1900.

Julia Adams: Yes, in Clarksburg, West Virginia.

WT: And your mother died approximately three weeks after that.

JA: That's right.

WT: Your father was practicing law ...

JA: In West Virginia, in Clarksburg

WT: In partnership ...

JA: With his father.

WT: Was he living with the Davises at that time?

JA: They had bought a piece of land and they were going to build a house, but it had not been built yet.

WT: Your mother and your father had bought the land?

JA: Yes, and they were going to build a house, and it had been started but not completed so, temporarily (this was the first year of their marriage) they were living with his parents.

WT: After your mother died, and your father continued practice, was he living with the Davis family?

JA: Yes, because he gave up on the house and sold the plot.

WT: And during that time you mentioned that you were educated until you were nine years old ...

JA: By his mother, Anna Kennedy Davis.

WT: And that was your original name, is that correct?

JA: That's what my mother expected to name me, because when she died I was Julia McDonald. I've written about that. I don't remember it, naturally.

WT: About how old were you when you started to spend your summers with the McDonalds?

JA: Oh, about a year old. My father loved very much my mother's family. He had been a tutor there as a young man when he first graduated from college. And he loved the whole family and he thought that they had something to offer that I should have and I think he was quite right about that. So I was always taken down there. In the beginning I would be taken down there by my aunt or my grandmother. And by the time I was five, I'd be put on the train in the care of the porter or conductor and get off at five o'clock at Shenandoah Junction where I'd be met with Uncle Will and the buckboard and brought over and spent the summer out at Media.

WT: So the train rides and the trips from Shenandoah Junction to Media that you describe in your books were train rides and trips you actually took yourself.

JA: Oh yes.

WT: When you were nine years old, you mentioned you then started school in seventh grade?

JA: Yes.

WT: Where did you go to school then?

JA: Grandmother disapproved of the public schools in Clarksburg, probably with some reason. I tried them out on my Spanish Children many years later and I disapproved of them too. And she'd also taught my father and her three daughters until they were around that age. Then a cousin came, Miss Kennedy, Miss Virginia Kennedy, and started a small private school and I was sent to that.

WT: And that was in Clarksburg?

JA: Yes.

WT: How long did you continue there?

JA: Well I graduated from high school, I mean from courses that corresponded to high school at the age of fifteen, no fourteen I guess. Anyway, I failed some college examinations, fortunately. If I had been sent to Wellesley at fourteen I don't know what would have become of me, and I went to Miss Shipley's School in Philadelphia for two years, and repeated my last two years of high school there.

WT: When you were going to Philadelphia, you were staying there for the school year and coming back to Clarksburg?

JA: Yes, for short vacations, I used to go to ... my father was then living in Washington ... like Easter or Thanksgiving. But the long vacations I went back to Clarksburg. And then for the summer I came back here.

WT: Is the Shipley School still running?

JA: Oh yes, very much so. I had never had a regulated life like that where you had to get up by the bell. I didn't like it much. I went through it. I graduated.

WT: Which subjects when you took your exams did you need more work in?

JA: I failed geometry. I don't know what else I failed. Latin maybe? They were my first college exams and I can't remember. I failed three to my grandmother's horror.

WT: Were those things that you got a lot of instruction on from your grandmother?

JA: She didn't teach me higher mathematics, like algebra or geometry. Of, course by that time I was in school. She just taught me reading, writing, and arithmetic. I never got on to arithmetic. I've no memory of learning to read. She just showed me a word on a page, so that's the way that word looked.

WT: You mentioned in *Legacy of Love*, instances of you laying on the floor with a bottle reading a book, so it seems you were quite young.

JA: Well I could read by the time I was four. My aunt Mary down here tells the story of me coming in one summer afternoon to the parlor where everyone was resting and picking a book out and (I was about four) and she said "What is that?" I looked at the title and said "It's the Mazes and Phases of Love." She said, "Oh, Julia, you don't want that. What do you want it for?" I said, "To squash a bug with."

WT: When you were with the McDonalds during the summer, it was more of a vacation ...

JA: Oh, it was wonderful.

WT: You were not getting any formal education ...

JA: There.

WT: You were getting something else ...

JA: I was getting a great deal. I was learning how to get on in a big family that had a jolly good time all the time. That was something to learn, too. I loved it. I hate to think how trying, even more trying than now, I would have been if I'd had only the very, very quiet household to remember.

WT: It must have been a big change being an only child as well, going into a big family ...

JA: Oh, there were endless children on the McDonald farm. Of course, I loved that too. And nobody pestered me to learn anything. And I was more or less turned loose. I was expected to turn up for meals. If you didn't turn up, you didn't get the meal. If you didn't eat what was there, you didn't eat. Because they figured you'd eat the next meal. No big deal. I was the twelfth child that my grandmother McDonald had coped with, so she was not getting into a fit about me. By this time she knew that they came, and they lived, and they grew up.

WT: Some of the information I have comes out of the biography of your father. There have been at least two biographies, one in 1924 ...

JA: That was a very poorly written campaign biography. It was written when he was campaigning and it wasn't all that tremendously and beautifully accurate. I haven't read it for years, but I remember reading it and not liking it.

WT: It seemed to contain a collection of speeches plus a brief biographical sketch at the beginning. The biographical sketch didn't seem to mention much about your father's family.

JA: My grandfather had also been in congress and had gotten very tired of the goings on in politics. And when my father was first being approached to run for congress, when I was about six or seven, I think. And then he moved to Washington and never lived in the house with me again until I lived in his house in London. He remarried when I was about eleven.

WT: In Harbaugh's biography on your father he said he started thinking about getting remarried about the time you were eight or nine?

JA: Probably, I really wasn't privy to his thoughts on the subject, so I wouldn't know.

WT: In April 1911 he had set a date to become engaged and apparently your grandmother Davis did not approve.

JA: The family were not very approving, but as a matter of fact she made him an excellent wife. He never would have gone as far afterwards as he did because his attitude toward a new job was always that he was afraid he couldn't handle it. And very retiring in a way. Basically very shy. He got over it, but she brought him out.

WT: So you feel she gave him some of that confidence.

JA: Yes. She was a very great factor in his career.

WT: When your father remarried and moved to Washington ...

JA: Well, he'd already moved to Washington. He remarried about, well he had finished with the Congress. He had been elected for two terms in Congress and then he was appointed to Solicitor General. It was after that that he remarried. He had been living in Washington most of the time during those two terms in Congress. And for the first term he was nominated, his father sent a telegram to the Democratic Committee that was about to nominate him, sent to him saying "Say no, John." And some friend put it in his pocket and kept it until after the nomination had occurred. And you know in his campaign for Congress he never spent a penny. Everybody is spending millions now. We can't get away from it.

WT: After your father remarried and they moved from wherever he was in Washington then into a new home ...

JA: It was an apartment, but a very comfortable apartment on 16th Street.

WT: And you continued to live with the Davises and McDonalds.

JA: That's right. It was a great delight to my stepmother, who had no wish to take me on whatever.

WT: That's something that you mention several times. Can you try to explain the reasoning behind that to me?

JA: Well, I think she liked to have him to herself.

WT: How about your father and his feelings toward that?

JA: I don't think he was fully aware of it.

WT: How did you feel about it?

JA: I was very happy with my grandparents. It was no disaster being left with them. I was happy both places.

WT: And that arrangement continued until you went to college.

JA: To London. That's the first time I really lived, I was there for short vacations. I was never cut off from my father. He came to see me at school and I went to see him for short vacations. I could take a friend. One time your father [Ann Davis ...'s father] she is my cousin on the Davis side, and we had a very good time and everything was fine, but it was simply a visit. It wasn't a live in thing.

WT: You started Wellesley when you were ...

JA: I graduated from Wellesley [Barnard?] in '21. Eighteen was the senior year, I started in '17.

WT: So you started at Wellesley and then went to London when your father became ambassador.

JA: I had two years at Wellesley, freshman and sophomore, and then I took the next winter in London. and then I came back and went back to Wellesley and my class graduated. And then I took ... he came back to this country ... and I took my last year living

with him on Long Island and in New York and going to Barnard where I eventually got my degree. I got my degree in '22 instead of in '21.

WT: During that last year you were living with your father and stepmother in New York.

JA: Or Long Island, whichever he happened to be on.

WT: You mentioned that when your father had been appointed ambassador, while you were still at Wellesley, somebody did a rather nasty interview on you. Can you tell me about it?

JA: Oh yes. I don't remember it too well, you know. It was such a long time ago, like 70 years ago. They called me the "Blue-eyed daughter of the dignified diplomat," and "Eyes are the windows of the soul." Well, you can imagine what my classmates at Wellesley made of that. "How's your soul today, dear?" They teased me unmercifully about it. "How's the dainty daughter of the dignified diplomat?" You can see how that would go at college, can't you?

WT: What do you think was the motivation behind that?

JA: I think he was just writing for the press. You know, trying to make it sound more interesting than it was. I don't think it was vicious, no.

WT: It just wasn't very thoughtful.

JA: It didn't go over very well at Wellesley, let's put it that way. I took unmerciful teasing about it from my closest friends.

WT: I was wondering if that had any influence when you became a reporter yourself, if that was something you had stored away as experience.

JA: I didn't take it that seriously.

WT: Your father was ambassador through 1921 and during that period you had come to London twice?

JA: No, I came to London once. I came in ... I didn't go with him when he when. I was still at Wellesley in my ... and I finished my sophomore year. And I came down to see him off and committed the atrocity of developing mumps. And he couldn't even speak to

me except through a closed door because he had never them. He was sailing with Woodrow Wilson on the George Washington when Wilson went over to the conference in Versailles. And I didn't go there. And he started his ambassadorship. And I finished my year and then went in June next year which was then 1919. I was still 18. I had my birthday after I got over there.

WT: And you stayed there for ...

JA: About a year and three months.

WT: Until your father was ready to come home?

JA: No he came back and then was persuaded once again to finish out ... Wilson meanwhile had had his stroke and he never saw Wilson that time he came home. This is all in a book of his diary, which has very little mention of me in it because it was all about what he was encountering, and which is going to be published by the University of West Virginia but seems to have fallen into somebody's pocket. It was supposed to come out for Christmas this year. It's not out yet. It will be out. I have a signed contract. And my book is there and is ready for the printer. My girlish recollections of time with him in London which is based on letters which I wrote back to the aunts who brought me up over here. My grandmothers had died by then, so I wrote to my aunts.

WT: When you came back to the United States in 1921, you transferred to Barnard, finished your degree, and graduated when you were 21?

JA: No, I graduated when I was 22. I went back, and my English professors always liked me and my mathematics professors couldn't get rid of me fast enough. You had to take obligatory math at Wellesley then the first year. Trigonometry and higher algebra, geometry. I met my first English professor, who had remained a very good friend and who had visited with us in London when she came over. And she said "How is it to be back?" And I said, "Just fine, Miss Perkins, it's wonderful." And she said, "I mean, how is it really?" And I said "It's like putting on a pair of shoes that are too tight." So when my class left I didn't see any further reason to ... I still wanted a degree which I did come down and get, but I got it as a day pupil commuting from wherever my father happened to be living, Long Island in the fall when I started and then New York in the winter and then Long Island in the Spring and then I was still going to college and I was still going to college and I did get my degree.

WT: What did you get your degree in?

JA: Well, it was just a B.A., but I majored in English.

WT: Your grandmother McDonald died shortly before your father came home.

JA: That's right.

WT: And I believe both of your Davis grandparents died ...

JA: They had died before I even left.

WT: Before you went to Wellesley?

JA: No I was still in boarding school.

WT: When your father came back he went into a firm as a partner that eventually became Davis-Polk.

JA: It became Davis-Polk as soon as he went into it. It had been Stetson, Jennings, and Russell. But two of them were dead and one was retired, so it was very easy to take over the firm and give it a new name. And he went in with his great friend Frank Polk who had been an assistant Secretary of State and who he had gotten to know very well while he was ambassador, and they went in together and it became Davis-Polk.

WT: The summer of 1921 you went back to England ...

JA: On a visit to my great friend over there.

WT: Can you tell me about that. You went to India after that.

JA: Yes, I had a wonderful time. The British, some of them whom I didn't know very well, they had accepted me. And the measure of that was that they say "You've been away for a while, haven't you?" And then I was invited by the son of Lord Reading, who was a great friend of my father's, in fact his closest friend when he was in England, to go to India with him to visit Lord Reading who was then the Viceroy. Well I couldn't miss that, of course, so I extended my stay by six weeks. And then he wanted, Lord Reading invited me to come with him to Calcutta. His wife was there. She was quite an invalid but I saw a great deal of her for the Christmas, and I wired for permission to do that, and my father wrote back "Come home as scheduled." So I did come back. That was the year I went to Barnard and finally got my degree.

WT: Can you tell me some of the things you were doing in England or India that summer?

JA: I was doing an awful lot. I don't know. It was ... I've put that in a lot of books. I can't capsule that. I thought it was the most distressed country I've ever seen. I was appalled at the glaring poverty that you saw over there.

WT: When you mention about putting it in a lot of your books, I'm not making a connection there. Are you talking about the condition of poverty?

JA: I didn't write about it in those terms exactly, but it's in the other book that the University of West Virginia is sitting on. The book of my own reminiscences. There's quite a lot in that, and unless you're a terribly fast writer it will be out long before you get this in shape. I mean it will be out, I hope, before you get this in shape.

WT: I believe you said that your father was concerned when you were in India that you might become engaged.

JA: Oh well, yes. That was Mrs. Lee, mother of my friend that I had been visiting. And there was a British general who was kind enough to want to marry me. But I wasn't going to marry him. But I cried when I told him no, and she wrote my father letters and sort of agitated him. And he didn't want me to marry an Englishman. And I didn't want to marry an Englishman because I felt even then, how could I bring up my children to be British when I want to bring them up to be American? So there was no real danger that I was going to marry. I liked him. He was a nice man. I was sorry to hurt his feelings by saying no, but he recovered of course, as they do.

WT: Where and when did you meet your first husband?

JA: When I first went to England, he was the first air attache' at the embassy that they'd ever had, of course, because we'd never had an air force before. And he had been in our air force, and he had grown up in England because his father was an American from Boston, Adams, a descendant I think of Samuel, not John and John Quincy. And I remember when we came back, he wasn't quite sure, I mean after I had married him and we'd lived in Copenhagen and come back to this country, he wasn't quite sure whether he wanted to live in Boston or to live in New York, so we went up to Boston. And we met a lot of cold roast Boston, if you know what I mean? And one of them said to me, "Why don't you come? A lot of foreigners like it here." I said, "Foreigners? In my state, we thought we made the nation." So I'm very glad he decided on New York, which he did.

WT: So you met him ...

JA: He was at the embassy.

WT: You met him around 1919.

JA: Yes, but he was trying to marry then an English girl. She wouldn't have him. And then we came back to this country to go into business. Did go into business. And then when I married him again, he was running a Scandinavian branch for the U.S. Rubber Company. Denmark. [End of side one.]

WT: Your father bought his house on Long Island in 1923. It was before you were engaged, right? You were married in your father's house? You were married in October of 1923 and then went to Copenhagen. And you were there for ...

JA: About two years. I came home for the campaign, for my father's presidential campaign. Not for the whole thing but for the last two or three months of it. It convinced me of one thing, that I never ever wanted to go into politics.

WT: You mention in your book that your father pretty much said what was appropriate for you and other family members to do during the campaign.

JA: Yes, and he never took anybody around with him as they do now. None of that. But of course I got pounced on by smaller organizations to come do this and do that. I remember a dreadful night in Washington. I went to the home of this old lady who wanted to give a reception. I'd been told nothing about the size of it or anything. Just go to this reception, so I went. She seized me and whisked me through a door. I found myself on a stage in a ballroom. (It was a big house in Washington) in front of an audience of about a hundred people in little gold chairs. And she rushed from the platform and said (we were on the platform at the end of the ballroom where the orchestra sits if it's a ball) "Everybody stand up. This is the daughter of John W. Davis, who has come all the way across the sea to make you a little speech." It was one of the most horrible moments of my entire life until then. In the first place, I'd been told to make no speeches by my father. He didn't want me saying something that would badly affect what he was saying. So I thanked them for the applause, which I knew was not intended for me. If I had had a gun, I would have shot her dead, but I'd come unarmed. And sat down. So I lived through it. But I still remember it as one of the really ghastly moments.

WT: You came home with your husband from Copenhagen ...

JA: Well, he couldn't get leave except to come for the last two weeks. He still had quite a business responsibility there running the Scandinavian thing for United Rubber.

WT: And you moved back to the United States about 1926?

JA: We both came back in 1926 or 1927. The campaign was well behind.

WT: When you were over there in Copenhagen, you were collecting materials for your first book?

JA: Well I did collect material for the first book, and the way I collected it was to go down and ... we went down to visit a friend of his. He'd been there for two years before I'd married and went there, so he had a great many Danish friends. And he'd been in the American embassy in London which gave him a little bit of an entrance, you know, and she was the daughter of some friends in Copenhagen. And she had done the pictures for this book. The first written Danish history was what it was. (I suggested you describe it a little differently in your list.) My husband spoke up and said, "Why don't you have Julia do it? She likes to write." So I brought it back, and I went around with this big portfolio of big pictures. (I can show you one of them. I've only got one left.) And I didn't know that wasn't how you sold a book. Well I went around with these pictures from door to door of the publishers. And sometimes I'd have to walk twice around the block before I could kick myself in to say here I am and here's this possibility. And I saw Dutton, the head of their junior department. And she thought it could be made into stories for what they then called young adults, which was teenagers. I mean, it wasn't a children's story, but it wasn't ... So I tried to put it into that. But it did stay in print for forty years, in fact it's only just gone out of print.

WT: Were these tales translated, or did you translate them and then work them into ...

JA: Well, I translated them in the beginning from the old Danish, which I found easier than the new Danish because it was more like English. But I was already speaking the new Danish, so that wasn't too much of a problem. I also changed the wording, naturally. I mean I told them rather than simply writing them down. But first I translated them so I knew what they were saying. And one of them was about the Danish Hamlet. He wasn't in the least like Shakespeare's Hamlet. He lived at Elsinor and his uncle did poison his father and his uncle did marry his mother. But his thought, being a Viking, was how to get even. And he pretended to be mad and he sat in the ashes of the big fire at the end of the great hall sharpening hooks. And they said "Poor Hamlet, he's gone. He's not with it any more." So all the Danes, including his uncle came back and got very drunk, which was a cherished custom of the Danes. (You don't know what drink is until you try to drink with a Dane. They can put any American under the table.) Well anyway, they all got drunk and fell on the floor drunk, which was normal. And he pulled down the nets he had made and hung up on the wall and fastened them with his hooks, set the hall on fire, and came out laughing. He was delighted. He'd done what he wanted to do. He had gotten rid of all of those people. No "To be or not to be" or any inner conflict. He did feign madness, yes, but he felt he had it to do.

And another one was about the mother of King Knute. She was Queen of Sweden and she was approached by the King of Denmark and the King of Norway and the King of this and the King of that and she would have their ships come together. Old Viking ships, you know, with the rowers, and a board put across. And if it was somebody she didn't want to see, she'd have the board knocked down while they were crossing the board to get into her ship. They didn't press their suit after that. The Danes were very outright people, I mean the Vikings....

WT: Do you recall the name of the woman at Dutton whom you dealt with?

JA: I've gotten it written down. It's in my back attic. She has died since, but she published it and then I had a contract for six more books for young adults which I worked off.

WT: How did you get into that?

JA: That's what Mr. McRea, the head of Dutton asked me to sign. And I was so thrilled that somebody was going to publish a book that I had written (I took the stories but I did write the presentation). I was so thrilled I would have signed anything. And I realized afterwards, after I got to know the publishing business a little better, that I had signed a ridiculous contract. But I signed it and I had six books to write before I could get out of it.

WT: So, Dutton in that contract was what launched you into a career as a writer of children's books.

JA: Definitely. Then I realized that I had to get out of children's books because I would go to writers' parties, and they would say "What do you write," and I'd say "I write books for young adults" and they'd say "How interesting ... Oh, Hello Josie."

WT: What would you have written when you were 28 or 29 if you had not been committed ...

JA: I was younger than that. I was ... it was published in '26. I was about 25. And green as grass.

WT: What would you have written at that time if you had not been committed to doing that?

JA: Well, I was interested in writing novels and so forth, but I don't know what I'd have written. I've always been a person who had to keep up running as fast as I could to keep up with what was happening to me. I've never been able to look far ahead and say "I am miserable here but I want to get out of it by doing this." I did know that I wanted to write, yes I knew that. And I did know I

wanted to bring up children, and of course it never occurred to me that I wouldn't have a large family of my own but I didn't. But I overcame both of those difficulties.

WT: Your next two novels also deal with non-American subject matter.

JA: Well, my next one I did was a Finnish story. And then he asked me to do William Tell so I did that and he asked me to do Stonewall Jackson and I did that and out of that got back to America and realized that my real interest was American history and so I knew about that. And I think that in your list if you put all of those books together. And I have suggested, I don't know how you feel about this, that you put the articles and the other publications in one list and the books in another so that anybody can follow the development of the books if they want to.

WT: I was going to ask you about subject matter because there did seem to be a break as soon as you started working with Stonewall Jackson. From then on ...

JA: Then I knew where I wanted to be. I wanted to be in American history and particularly in the history of this area. Jackson, of course, was Clarksburg and went through here a good many times, but I became very interested in that.

WT: Did your publisher suggest the topics for *Remember and Forget*?

JA: No, that was material that I had left over from having written Stonewall Jackson, and I made it into another. And then the *Peter Hale* book was things that I researched myself. And that was the last one I wrote for that contract. And then I wrote one other book for that publisher, which was a novel based on my taking of the Spanish children. And then about that time I had an invitation from Stephen Benet, which I could show you because I've kept the letter, asking me to do *The Shenandoah* for the Rivers of America series. Which of course I wanted to do very much. It was right down the direction in which I felt I was going, where I felt I was happy and that was what I really wanted to do. And so I signed that and then I had to leave Dutton because the contract was with another publisher who was publishing the Rivers of America series. And then the juvenile version of *The Shenandoah* was because of the publishers who were that time Rinehart, and there'd been a big publishing divorce. It had been Rinehart and ... Well anyway, my friend was the other one and they severed and I had to stay with Rinehart because that's where I had signed and they were also publishing The Rivers of America and I wanted to be in that. And then they asked Carl Karger to do the Hudson. He's done the Hudson and he did the young people's Hudson and then they asked me to do the Shenandoah. And I did the Shenandoah. So that's how that came about. And then I wrote three novels for them. And they should be together and I've marked them as to which they are. They should come along as they did come along. And then I wrote a book of memoirs, which was *Legacy of Love* and Rinehart didn't want it. And my agent, who had faith in me had a hard time selling it. But she

finally sold it to Harcourt, Brace. And that's how I finally dealt with them. Because I never again signed an option on another book because I'd had had that. And I would just explain to any other publisher, "No I don't sign options." I have done that.

WT: You were divorced in 1932 from your first husband.

JA: Yes.

WT: Can you tell me anything about that?

JA: We were both very young and both very silly.

WT: You went to work shortly after that for the ...

JA: While I was still married to Bill I was still working for the Associated Press and that went fine. I loved it. But I had resigned to get this book out. The first book had to be out by the fall. And of course I was thrilled that somebody would take my book. And so I gave up the newspaper job, although I had enjoyed it. When I took the newspaper job with the Associated Press, I was the second woman they'd ever hired. And they were frank with me. They said "We're paying you less ... They were paying me by the word. I was doing special features. Not regular reporting. That was considered too tough a job for a woman. Going around watching fires in the middle of the night and, who knows what? So I was doing special features, and they would pay me a quarter of a cent a word, which they told me quite frankly was the lowest they'd ever offered anybody. So I was glad to get the job and I was glad to do the job, and I thoroughly enjoyed the job. It was very interesting. I was glad I had that experience. And I had a very nice editor to work with. And he told me in the beginning, he said, "You're writing for a newspaper. Take the first chapter of Genesis as your model. Put the whole story in the first sentence. Then develop the story. "In the beginning the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them lives." That's the story. Well then, you go ahead and fill in the details. And he was a very good instructor.

WT: What's his name?

JA: He was the editor of the Associated Press, one of the editors, the editor of the feature department. And the office was the whole floor in a building on Madison Avenue. The editors had little tiny cubicles, just big enough for a desk at the end. There were three of them. There was a head editor and then there was a feature editor, which was the one I worked with, and another editor. The printing ... you sat down and everybody had a typewriter and a desk and there were about thirty of us. And you sat down and did your story on your typewriter. You put it in a little thing. You put it up in the machine. The machine carried to

whichever editor it was directed toward. So overhead all the machines were click clacking all the time. And all the typewriters were going. And then the press was over in the corner and that was thumping away, thumping away. So it was a very ... If you couldn't concentrate, better get out.

WT: Can you tell me some of the topics you wrote features on?

JA: Well, I did a lot of interviews. I wrote a story on a man who had been a great runner and was now an old man in bed. I wrote a story on what jewelry you could buy in New York, what extraordinary jewels were for sale. I wrote a story on the history of Columbia. I don't know. It was just all kinds of topics.

WT: And from the Associated Press they could be appearing just about anywhere?

JA: Oh yes, they went all over.

WT: I'm trying to find some way to locate those. Or at least some of those.

JA: Well I don't know. They weren't preservable. I think they were very ... they went with the newspaper and went out with the newspaper. Usually it was in the Sunday edition, but I couldn't identify a newspaper for any of them. I never saw them in print.

WT: OK, but papers like the *Times* and the *Herald* would be the kinds of papers that would have carried your ...

JA: Well, I didn't have a byline either in those days, so they just appeared and went. I remember once I had interviewed the daughter of President Butler of Columbia and I was coming back with my story and I started to cross the street on Madison Avenue. There were streetcars then. And I passed a streetcar and a taxi came on the other side and knocked me down. And I remember seeing the taxi fenders coming over me. And I thought, "Well this is it." And I gave a small scream and I thought "That's a hell of a last word." Not very good. He stopped. So I crawled out from under the cab and said "You didn't hurt me," and I went on in because I was late getting the story in and I had to get it in by a certain time as newspaper work goes. And so I went up and I sat down at my typewriter to write the story. And my hands were shaking so that I couldn't hit the keys. I remember that very well. I was just shaking from head to foot. It was a very close brush with being really run over because the one wheel stopped here and one wheel stopped there.

WT: But you weren't injured. You were shaken up.

JA: I wasn't injured. I had on a heavy coat and I fell on the coat and got upstairs, but when I sat down to my typewriter I couldn't hit any key. But I finally did and got the story and went home.

WT: Can you tell me about some of your work at the State Charities Aid Association?

JA: I didn't get to that until considerably later because by then I ... Well I stopped to get out the first book. I don't know whether you have encountered that in any of my reminiscences but I went down to Clarksburg to finish putting it together. My aunt was living there in the old house. My grandparents had died. And Melville Davisson Post, who was a good friend of the family was there. And he took me on and taught me more in six weeks than I had learned in all the English courses that I had taken at all the colleges. Because he really knew what he was doing. He had the, you know, you need a little more dialog here, you've got to build this up, you've got to build that up. Your dialog was always either to advance the story or to enlighten people about the characters. It must always have a purpose. It must always move the story. I really learned how much cloth it takes to make a pair of pants with him in those six weeks.

WT: So you think that's where, as far as your dialog in your novels, some of that skill comes from?

JA: Oh it all comes from that. I mean I really learned a lot of things I didn't know. I learned what kind of descriptions to have. How much description to have. I just learned the whole technique.

WT: You must have had a pretty good ear for dialog anyway.

JA: Well, I was capable of learning.

WT: The dialog on your books seems to me to be pretty realistic.

JA: It was meant to be.

WT: The black dialog in your books seems to be pretty realistic.

JA: I listened to people and you try to reproduce the way they talk.

WT: Some people can do that and some people can't. You're somebody who can. Can you tell me what you were doing at the State Charities Aid Association?

JA: Well that again ... this sounds like a digression but it isn't. I once saw a fortune teller when I was young and she told me that friends would be the most important thing in my life. And they were. The first job I got through a friend who had worked there, a college friend. And they'd thought they'd overworked her, but they hadn't at all. She sort of went to pieces and left, and it was because she decided not to marry a man she was in love with. Six weeks later she did marry him. And she's still married to him and still alive, so that was her story. And then she recommended me and I went down and they said "Well, all right" you know, "We'll give her a couple to do at a price that won't hurt us. If she can do it, that's good." Then I had the chance to publish the book so I quit, but I liked newspaper work. I could have gone on in that very happily. But I liked better staying home writing books, so that's what I did. And my divorce came in then and I came back and I went to work at the adoption agency because again another friend had worked there and recommended me. And so I started there at the gorgeous salary of \$35 a week. And they gave me to begin with the most difficult child they had. Because, you know, "She's going to be no good, let her break her teeth, get out, and it won't bother us too much." And that same girl is coming down here on the 11th of February to pay me a visit. And she was difficult. She decided (now she tells me, she didn't tell me then) that she wasn't going to be adopted. She was the oldest child of a big upstate family. And her father died and her mother had to be taken to an asylum. And it was a family of six and she was the oldest child at nine. Who's going to adopt a family of six? And they didn't have much child care in upper New York State at that time. And so they were sent down here, and of course they were broken up because, who's going to adopt a child of six? And she fought her way out of every adoption home. And I mean fought her way out. I'd be called in the middle of the night. "Come get Mary. She's terrible." I'd get Mary. I'd say "What did you do this time, Mary?" Here we are, she'd tell me. Here we are, she calls me "Ma." She sends me orchids. She's made it. She's found every one of her brothers and sisters and she's made a very good thing of her life. And I went on then. Then they gave me others. And at the end I had most of the disturbed adolescents. And I also had then, they gave me a negro family. And that they gave with some foreboding because I was from the south. What would happen? And I got along with them. Then I had all the negro families. Now we're half negro. The same agency. So are the workers. So are the supervisors. Half and half because New York is full of them. But then it wasn't recognized and it was very hard to find adoptive homes for negro children and there was quite a lot of difficulty.

WT: That wasn't a job you fell into. You deliberately sought out.

JA: I applied for it. I applied for the press too. I wanted a job and was told "Why don't you take the job I had." And this was another friend who had gone there and she's broken down because of tuberculosis. I mean she had it. And she said "Try for it. You like working with children," so I did and got it and that was that.

WT: And you were with that ...

JA: About five years. I started sort of part time and you know "See if she can do it." And in the end I was working full time at this big salary of \$35 a week. And during that period I got my divorce, which if either one of us had had a bit of sense we wouldn't have done it. But we didn't so we did. And then I married Paul West. And he was back from Panama, where he had been running something ...

End of side two

Julia Davis Adams Interview, February 15, 1992

William Theriault: When you were working for Associated Press, you said you did an article on the daughter of President Butler of Columbia. The title of this is "Many drys object to her as NYS Republican Vice Chairman because of wet views of father." Does that sound like something you wrote?

Julia Adams: I have no idea because I didn't have a byline in those days. I never had a byline.

WT: This one didn't. I just wondered if you remembered it.

JA: Well, I did interview her.

WT: From our last interview, I just wanted to make sure I got my dates straight. I appears that was copyrighted in 1928. You mentioned that you came back from Copenhagen in 1926 or 1927. What I'm trying to do is pin down when you went back to Clarksburg and you worked part of the summer with Melville Davisson Post on *Swords of the Vikings*. And that was the summer before it went into publication. [JA: Yes]. You mentioned that it had to be in press by fall.

JA: I think it was, it was two years and a half. I married in '23 and that's ... I think it was '26.

WT: It's copyrighted in 1928. Did the book appear shortly after that summer?

JA: Yes.

WT: So if it was copyrighted and published the same year, in 1928, then you probably spent the summer of 1927 at Clarksburg.

JA: Yes. I didn't spend the whole summer. I was there for six weeks, but I was there.

WT: And that probably means that you spent from sometime in 1926 until 1927 as a reporter. You were working for the paper about a year. So you came back about 1926. Stayed there about a year. Then left and came back to Clarksburg at least part of the time.

JA: Yes. I think it was the summer of '27 when I left the Associated Press, came back to Clarksburg in order to get ... because this book had been accepted. And it had been given me by a friend in Denmark. She had done the very lovely illustrations. I've only one

of them left now. I have to hang it around the corner because it tends to fade in light. It's a watercolor. That's the Viking ship. But I had good fun doing it and it stayed in print for 40 years. It was nominated for a Newberry Medal but didn't get it.

WT: Last time we were talking about when you were working for the adoption agency, between 1933 and 1938. You were telling me about Mary that you had ...

JA: She was just down visiting me two days ago. And she'd made a great success of her life. I mean, not a great success but a very good success.

WT: Can you tell me about any of the other children you worked with?

JA: At the end when I was working there, and I worked there 5 years, I had 105. Do you want to hear about them all?

WT: No. At what point did you ...

JA: When I left there, Mary and Bill (my oldest son) had not been adopted. And therefore I was still interested in seeing that they got along. And yes, my oldest son was also one of the ones I had had from my adoption agency. And I'd say he was a good pick because you couldn't have a better son than he is. He too came from an upstate farming family and his mother died and his father died. And he was discovered to have childhood tuberculosis. And he spent three years in a tuberculosis home and then he was sent down because ... I'm not going to tell you all of his background because that's his business. I don't think he'd like me to discuss it or be in a biography.

WT: Tell me about your Spanish children.

JA: Well, their father was sort of the Ernest Hemingway of Spain. Very, very good younger writer in Spain. As Hemingway did, he used the language in a new way and so forth. And he married and had first one child who was 18 months old and then he had another child. And then came the Civil War. And he was on the side of the Republic and he went into the army. He had them in a ... the facts in the book about the children are absolutely true. The invention about our love affair and so forth is an added business. But that did happen to all of them. He left his wife in this resort near where she had grown up and went into the army. And she was trying to get a passport to go to France, get the children out, and my son wrote a book about it too. You might want to read that. My Spanish son. They put her in prison. They left the baby, or the boy, who was by then 2 years old, and an old servant of the house took him in. And the baby went with the mother to jail. She was 7 months. And there came a night when they said "You're a Red. You don't deserve to have a child." They took the baby and gave her to a convent to be taken care of and took the mother out and

shot her. And when the war was over and the Republic didn't win, he escaped to France and he took the two children with him and then he brought them on from France to this country. And I took them for six weeks. Well, I've had them now for fifty-something years. Of course, at the end of six weeks I was completely in love with them. He went to Mexico to establish a home for them. Never did. And then married an American woman. Didn't even put them on his passport so I had to take them to Canada in the middle of World War II by day coach from West Virginia, Clarksburg, where I was living, to Montreal. Get them readmitted. Dangerous citizens. They were by then 6 and 7. And now they are established American citizens.

WT: They were with you for ...

JA: For forever, until they grew up and on their own.

WT: I remember you had mentioned that you tried putting them in the public schools at Clarksburg. Were you living there then?

JA: Yes. In the middle of World War II I was with my husband Paul West. I can remember the day when they bombed Hawaii. We were out at our place in the country at Bedford, New York. I had two children. His son was by then with us. He [Paul] wanted to go into something because he just missed being able to be active in World War I. He always felt very sad that he missed it. He was an adventurous type. So he wanted to go into this and to make that possible we sold our house there and he went off. And I moved in with the three children into New York. And that was extremely tight and difficult. Then my aunt died and we moved back to the family home in Clarksburg. And I spent about a year there. That was during World War II. That's how I came to be back there.

WT: Did you write *The Shenandoah* from Clarksburg?

JA: A good deal of it, yes. It took me a long time to write that book because there was so much happening in my personal life and so many upheavals. It took me about four years to write it. One thing I didn't tell you, about my first marriage. You asked me why we broke up and I said it was because neither of us had any sense, which was basically true. But there were two important things that had a great injurious effect on me but which have been useful to me later in life. I had two very serious illnesses. One was a miscarriage that was badly treated and went into peritonitis, and that was a two-year illness by the time we got through with it. And the other one, I fell off a horse and broke a vertebra later. And that was a two-year [illness] because the break wasn't discovered for about six weeks and I was put in a cast for three months and then I was put in a brace for three months. And then it was two years before I got out of that. So I think both of those had a great, bad effect on the marriage. But I think, to me, they were very learning experiences because I've been pretty tough ever since. And I can live with pain because I learned how to.

WT: You told me before, that when you were in Copenhagen, when you were first married, it was pretty stormy at times too.

JA: Well, my husband had, what he was very proud of then, called the Adams temper. Terrific temper tantrums. He used to thoroughly enjoy it. He said afterwards he was just like a glass of champagne. Well it wasn't a glass of champagne for people surrounding him. And I got tired of them. And the first year I was appalled and overwhelmed, and the second year I was bored, and then the third, and fourth, and fifth year I fought back. That didn't help either. You can put me down, but I don't stay down.

WT: Did he change by the second time around?

JA: Oh, he absolutely learned. He told me that I had taught him something and that he had never done that again. And on the second time around, only once did he go into one of his tantrums. You never knew what they were about. Or you couldn't remember later. They were about such infinitesimal things. The first one I remember was because he had brought over at great expense from London his father's wardrobes for us to use in Copenhagen. And I said I couldn't use them because they were a man's wardrobe, and they would only hang things that were the length of a man's suit. Well, eventually I used the packing boxes they came in. But he would go on and on, and then he would want to shoot himself in the middle of the night because he had married such a desperately awful woman. This upset me for a while, and then it bored me and then I fought back, and then it finally bored me too much. That was a contributing factor and my illnesses were a contributing factor.

WT: I think that I mentioned before that I read two of your short stories, "White Justice" and "Two For One." I think you'd mentioned that you got material for that when you were in Nevada?

JA: I had a friend out there, or made a friend out there who had been a judge. He wasn't a judge in my case, but he'd been a judge and worked a great deal with the Indians in Nevada. And a lot of those stories were what he told me about his reminiscences of Indian cases.

WT: Are the descriptions, background, landscape, are those from your own observations?

JA: Oh, yes.

WT: When I learned where you got those, and remembered the lawyer in *Cloud on the Land*, and then your association with Melville Davisson Post, I was beginning to see where some of your background was going.

JA: Yes.

WT: Would it be fair to say that at least some of the ways your were looking at material were something you may have learned from him?

JA: Yes. Well, I've always tried to learn.

WT: I also did a little bit more reading on Melville Davisson Post this week and didn't realize that he wrote several articles on your father when he was a presidential candidate, supporting your father.

JA: I'd forgotten that. Have you read the Harbaugh biography of my father?

WT: I have read portions of it. Most of what I was trying to find was references to you in there, and there are some but not very many.

JA: I wasn't a great factor in my father's career. Except as the movie said. The movie made me twenty years younger than I was at the time. And I wish they'd come around and make me that much younger now. They don't seem to want to do that.

WT: Which movie are you talking about?

JA: I'm talking about the movie they did about my father's segregation case in South Carolina. I did advise him not to take it, but of course he wasn't going to listen. He was going to take what he wanted to take in the form of a case, and the governor of South Carolina had been his great friend since congress days, and begged him to take it. And said he had six million dollars to improve the colored schools and he thought it was too early. Well, it hasn't worked out too well, but on the other hand, had I been a Negro I'd have certainly been on the side of pushing it through right away.

WT: How long did it take him to prepare for that case?

JA: Oh, how do I know.

WT: You were living near him.

JA: I know, but I didn't stand over him every minute and say "What case were you working on?" He worked until one o'clock in the morning on many cases.

WT: I was just wondering if that had taken ...

JA: Years? Oh no.

WT: ... many months of preparation.

JA: Months, I suppose. I've no idea.

WT: The reason I'm asking is, and I don't know if this is coincidence, it appears that he was preparing for that case while you were working on your trilogy.

JA: Possibly.

WT: One of the themes, at least, in that, is slavery. And the effect of ...

JA: Yes, I had strong feelings about that.

WT: I was wondering if there had been any dialogue during that time between you and your father.

JA: Not a bit. Not on that subject. No, he worked and I worked. I certainly didn't time how long he worked on what.

WT: I knew that at a certain point, he was reading your manuscripts, you were talking them over.

JA: I don't think he ever read my manuscripts. He always read my published books. I didn't try to help him with his work because I was totally ignorant of it. I remember once I went to a meeting with a woman who had become a judge and then I went to hear him argue a case. And I was already grown and married. I had already married Bill. And I came and said "That was a great chess game. Maybe I should have been a lawyer." Well, he said "My dear, you could have taken the degree and been admitted to the bar, but you'd never had made a lawyer." I think, in a way, he was right about that because I wouldn't have enjoyed the controversy of... Well, let's face it. What I wanted was to write books and raise children, and I've done both of them. I've nothing to complain about. I did things I wanted to do.

WT: Did you marry Paul West before you left the adoption agency?

JA: No, I married him ... In order to be able to marry him I got the job at the adoption [agency]. I had a salary of \$35 a week in the adoption agency and he had a salary of \$50 a week with Time and Life. And on this immense income we decided we'd get married. And we did.

WT: How did you meet him?

JA: Well, I met him through a friend who had known him, I mean his parents and her bringers uppers had been friends. And she was a great friend. She introduced me to Paul West and he asked me for lunch. The lunch lasted until one o'clock in the morning. I don't mean anything carnal happened at that particular point, but a great interest was suddenly developed. I'd already gotten my divorce and came back from Reno. He had nothing to do with that.

WT: And what year did you get married?

JA: '38 I think it was. No ... we got married in '33.

WT: And how long were you married to him?

JA: Sixteen years. It took World War II to break us up. And that did break us up.

WT: That was until '49?

JA: You're always trying to point me down to years! Do your own adding. You should get to be 91! They all go past so fast.

WT: Can you tell me about why you broke up?

JA: No. I told you I'd tell you everything except my secrets.... World War II broke us up in a number of ways.

WT: You talk a lot in *Legacy of Love* about your Aunt Emma.

JA: Some day, I'm going to do a book, or a very long article just about her.

WT: She seemed to be a very special person.

JA: Oh, she was, after my grandmother died, she was my mother. And also, she was the first woman ever to get into prison work. I mean really penitentiary work. Once she and another aunt at our little Presbyterian church had a mission Sunday school on Sunday afternoon. Because there were a lot of people who would come down from the mountains and were living in Clarksburg and were not adapting very well to Clarksburg. And they sent their children to Sunday school. This little one used to come in and say "Mith Emma, I quit cuthin'." And my aunt Emma would say "That's good, Mary. Little girls shouldn't cuss. When did you quit?" "Yethderday." And there was a boy of that family that she knew. And he got in trouble and got in jail, so she took him soup down to the jail, or whatever. And then he was sent to the penitentiary, so she went out to the penitentiary to visit him. And then (Selby was his name) he said "Miss Emma, I got some friends here I'd like you to meet." In the penitentiary. So she met one and then another and another and in the end she had ... At one time she was living in, my grandfather had died by now or he wouldn't have permitted it, she was living with three murderers in the house. When I say living with I mean ... they were in the house and they adored her. They were paroled in her care, but she was a very unusual woman.

WT: You also mentioned in that book that you and she were in a very serious automobile accident. Can you tell me where and what happened there?

JA: Well, that's one of the bad experiences in my life that is extremely hard to talk about. I was doing the research, must have been *The Shenandoah*, well anyway it was some book. I was up in a wild part of West Virginia and in front of us on a winding country road a logging truck pulled over with no signal at all, just beeped to a friend that was in a gas station. And I tried to pass it. I tried to get around this [right] side because there was no way to get around that [left] side and my back fender caught on this kind of thing, you know [rear bumper]. It pulled the car over, and the car rolled over, down a mountainside. I'll make this brief, and don't ask me to talk about it again. I was holding onto the wheel, so I wasn't hurt. She said "My arm is gone." And it was gone. So I put a tourniquet on her. Luckily I had a little kit in the map compartment. And by the time I'd done that somebody had come, because we were right across from the station. So somebody came and they got us out and took her to the hospital. And for days after that I stayed up there with her, and for days after that I had to cross six tracks to get to the hospital and I used to wish that a train would hit me. Just for me. I had all that pain. Don't ever ask me again. Now you've heard, don't ever mention it again.

WT: She led a very active life after that.

JA: She said, she felt she had to do it for my sake. It was her right arm, and she had it out the window.

WT: Let me ask you a general question that comes up in your novels, from two different sides? What does it mean to you, or does it mean to your characters, when a child calls you "mother" for the first time?

END OF TAPE

Notes on rest of discussion.

It doesn't have much significance because, but then you'd already really been their "mother" for quite a long time.

Julia Davis called Nell "mother" but it was only to please her father, John W. Davis. She never really liked Nell, and Nell didn't like her, but Julia tried to keep the relationship cordial for her father's sake.

I said that I had a hard time understanding why her father didn't fight like hell to have Julia with him in Washington, despite Nell's opposition. She said that, at first, they didn't know if they were going to stay there very long, so they didn't want to disrupt her life. And then later she was in college, so it didn't really matter. She noted that she never played a major part in her father's career.

When I noted that Belva Lockwood and Victoria Woodhull were types of women that Julia probably had encountered in her own life, and that Nell (her stepmother) might have been a good example of the Woodhull type, Julia noted this difference: Victoria Woodhull used men who were already rich and famous to get what she wanted. Nell took someone (Julia's father) who had potential and brought him along.

Her Spanish son has also written a book about the same experiences she dealt with in *The Sun Climbs Slow*.

She described the trip to Canada to have the Spanish children readmitted. She was examined by a panel, including people from the military and the FBI. The FBI gave her an especially hard time, wanting to know why she was keeping the children of a Communist supporter. She said "because I love them." She noted that her family had been Americans for more than six generations. By the time she left the interview, the panel was on her side.

She published her first work (a poem) in *St. Nicholas Magazine* in 1911.

Julia Davis Adams Interview, February 26, 1992

Her first published work was a poem that appeared in *St. Nicholas Magazine* in 1911 or 1912, for which she received a silver medal. It starts with the line "Midnight in May ..."

Her two stories set in Nevada ("White Justice" and "Two for One") were both written about the same time (about 1933), although one of them did not appear in print for several years.

Her two articles published in the *Smithsonian* for Victoria Woodhull and Belva Lockwood were originally a single article that showed the contracts between the two women. She may have the original in her files.

Her "children" include Bill ... and Mary ... from the adoption agency. Bill joined the army during WW II and Mary got married and moved to Florida. They were not with her when her "Spanish children" came to her. Paul West, Jr. lived with her during the war, when his father was in the army. (He is not alive.) Erin and Tim Healey are step children from her marriage to Charles P. Healey. Julia said that Erin didn't get along with her mother, but that she never prevented the two of them from seeing one another.

When they sold their house in Bedford Village, NY, after husband Paul when into the army in 1942, she moved back to her house in New York City on East 86th St.

Farmerettes during 1917. During the war there were few men available to do the farming. Julia's Uncle John Yates McDonald had four degrees. Marshall McDonald had run the farm until he went into the war. John had been an agricultural agent in Preston county. Women who were getting degrees in agriculture from the University of Wisconsin were brought to the farm that summer to learn farming. John Y. McDonald's wife Dorothy was one of those farmerettes. Julia, who also worked with them, can remember the girls working all day in the field and having John say that two men could have done a better job.

Julia was set on a horse as soon as she could walk. At Media it was an old horse with her grandfather's cavalry saddle. At Clarksburg it was a nasty little shetland pony who threw her more than once.

The fat man in her trilogy who sees himself as a real beau was based on Julia's cousin John Aglionby, who weighed about 300 pounds. He was a glutton, who would grab a whole pan full of biscuits with one hand. He would bring flowers to the house to romance a young lady, the family would put him up for the night, and he and the flowers would be gone the next morning, on to another family and young woman.

Cousin Nettie Aglionby was equally obnoxious. She would arrive unannounced at Media and stay for a month.

The movie depicting the supreme court trial and Julia is called "Separate But Equal". Julia says it showed her twenty years younger.

She said her father had absolutely no influence on her writing. He never edited or commented, or even read Julia's works before they were published.

She had to go to Canada with her Spanish children Nina and Ramon to have them readmitted to the U.S. as citizens. It was during the McCarthy era, and they were the children of a writer who had fought on the communist side in the Spanish Civil war. After the mother was killed and the war lost, he brought them to the U.S. and went to Mexico to try to start his writing career again. He rarely visited or wrote to them and sent Julia only \$100 for their support, which he later borrowed back. He always told the children that they couldn't come to live with him because he was building a big house for them. Ramon, who was very perceptive, finally told Julia that the house his father was building must be as big as a cathedral.

When she took the children to Canada, she was interviewed by a civilian and military board, the worst of which was an FBI representative. They asked her why she wanted to keep the children of a communist and she said "Because I love them. And for that I cannot provide documentation."

Ramon later asked her why they were all against her when she went in and all for her when she walked out.

Julia had first learned about them from a friend who had been a newspaperman in Spain.

She said that children can forgive parents who are drunk or have other faults. They cannot forgive parents who push them away and ignore them.

Her husband Paul West, when he worked for Time and Life, was first an adman and later became assistant to the assistant to Henry Luce.

Her husband Charles Healey suffered from manic depression, which they treated. He died a painful death from cancer. Julia said that they wouldn't let him die and that the experience was so horrible that she refused to marry again for 16 years.

Julia says she did become much closer to her father after Nell's death, although they were both independent adults by then with their own jobs.

Nell did not support Julia in getting her first divorce.

When she remarried William Adams, she went to live at his house in New York. She said that the place was not really very comfortable. She did not move back to Jefferson County until 1986.

She said that the episode of the rape of Laura Knode was the subject of a book by John Bishop called *Dark Vengeance*. Julia said that the characters did not greatly resemble the originals and that the book made him a very unpopular person in this area. [The book is not based on the rape of Laura Knode, who was attacked by a black vagrant.]

The book published by Julia Davis' Spanish son, Ramon Sender y Barrara, is called *Death in Zomorra*, from the University of New Mexico Press, published about 2 years ago.

Julia Davis Adams Interiew, March 4, 1992

JD: I found a lot of short pieces. You said you wanted to see some.

WT: Are these short stories?

JD: Well, no, they're this, that, and the other. And this a play that I wrote. I never did anything with it, really. I thought you might like to see that.

WT: Yes, what's the name of it?

JD: "Possession."

WT: Regarding John Peal Bishop...

JD: He was born here and raised here. But that was before my time, so I wouldn't have known him as a young man. By the time I'd come along, he'd published that book [*Dark Vengeance*] and was thought very ill of and he didn't come back. He married very successfully in the North, somebody from a very well known family. And I have read a lot of biographical information on him. I'm trying to think where I have it.

WT: Where did you get your material for *Vaino*?

JD: Well, I made a lot of trips to Finland. That was when my husband was in charge of U.S. Rubber for Scandinavia, so we went to Norway, and Sweden, and Denmark. And he made about two trips a year, and I quite often went with him. And I became interested in Finland and the Finnish people and read some of their history, and that's where I got it.

WT: Were you consciously collecting that the way you consciously translated the Danish material?

JD: Not to write, no. I was consciously collecting it because I was interested.

WT: How about the contemporary side of that story that you intermixed with the folk tales? How did that come about?

JD: Well, that had just happened in Finland. They had just gotten away from Russia, and they had done it by finally ... I've forgotten who their general was, but it's in the book. This is historical. They put a thousand Reds or those who had been working with the communists in their largest arena, the size of a football field, and shot them. The Finns are not people to trifle with. They're very absolute in their attitude. You're good from their point of view or you're bad. And if you're bad ... bang.

WT: Was the contemporary part of the story ... the boy and his mother, his brother and his sister and the Russian officer ...

JD: That was made up.

WT: OK. That was just based on the background you had absorbed.

JD: The historical part of it is not made up. I don't remember the book too much. I haven't read it since it got into print. I can't remember whether I used the incident of having all the communists shot, but that was a fact.

WT: You mentioned it.... So when you came back and had *Swords of the Vikings* published, that material was sort of naturally sitting there and was the next logical thing to do?

JD: I had signed a contract for six books and so I had this material and I put that together.

WT: As far as the Finnish folk materials, was that material that you had to translate as well?

JD: That's available in translation. Our poet Longfellow based his poem "Hiawatha" on the "Kalavala," the Finnish folk tale that I used. He even copied the meter, so he must have had access to it too. It's been around for a long time.

WT: You told me before about how you came to write *Swords of the Vikings* and the illustrations and your husband saying, introducing you to the artist and saying "Julia likes to write." And that got me thinking about what you may have written up to that time, 1923 or 1924.

JD: Well I didn't have anything published. Well I did have a few, just the occasional little thing.

WT: You said you had a poem published when you were 11 in *St. Nicholas Magazine*. Did you have other things published between then and when you went to Copenhagen?

JD: I don't think so.

WT: But you were writing?

JD: Oh yes. I majored in writing in college.

WT: What were your writing interests during that period?

JD: Well, I wrote one play that was put on. When I graduated from Barnard I took a course in play writing and my play was chosen to be given. And it was given at Barnard by girls taking on all the parts. And these were New York Jewish girls acting the parts of West Virginia mountaineers. And I sat in a back seat and laughed my head off. It was the greatest travesty of a production that you'd ever seen in your life.

WT: What was the name of the play?

JD: Oh I don't remember the name of the play, but it was very successful. It was chosen as the best one written that year.

WT: Do you still have a copy of that around somewhere?

JD: Oh, if I can ever get up to the attic.

WT: From what I've seen, it looks like you published four or five short stories. And we already talked about, what I think were your two earliest ones, "White Justice" and "Two for One." What did you choose not to go further in that medium and go into the novel?

JD: I don't know. I just wrote what came into my head at that time. I signed this first contract, which was ridiculous ... They signed me up for six more books with a very low royalty and they had provision for sales out of the country and they did sell those books in England, and I didn't get much out of that. I was just a ridiculous contract, and I had to work it off. I had to write six books for young adults before I was free.

WT: Perhaps there was a decline in the popularity of the short story, perhaps in the '30's and '40's?

JD: I don't think so, because Hemingway came along and his short stories were tremendously popular. I think the novel appealed to me more because usually what I feel about people is a long term development. I'm interested in that. And most of my books have historical subjects because I'm very interested in history too. I could bring history to life by making a story out of it.

WT: There seem to be a lot of options you can explore when you go into writing books about history. One is historical romance, which is sort of way out there, very slightly attached to the real world. At the other extreme is the scholarly publication with dozens of footnotes on every page. What you're writing is in the middle of things. What put you in that direction and not another?

JD: Well, neither of the two that you characterize, and I think correctly, appeal to me. I was trying to make my histories as accurate as possible but still available for general readers, the general public. I said that about my father's diaries. I've just had a letter from the Dean at Morgantown. Her name's Jackson, who is the dean of libraries and is also in charge of getting these books published and has done nothing about it. She just sent it out to a printer. They've had it for over a year. If a professional publisher acted that way he'd lose all of his authors. So she's had some pressure put on her, not through me, but now she says it will be out in May. Well, when I originally gave them two of them, and that was over a year ago, they were going to be out in November, just in time for the Christmas sales. But they've just been sent to the printer.

WT: That sounds kind of ambitious for something that has to be typeset and proofed and all the other things you have to go through. That's not very far off, is it?

JD: No, I don't think she knows what it means to publish a book.

WT: And with diaries and letters, there needs to be a great deal of attention to detail. You just can't send it to the printer and walk away.

JD: Well I had an editor assigned to me by the university, somebody that they knew, and she has been doing all that. And they asked her index it and they hadn't offered to pay her extra to do that. And they didn't want to mention her among the people who worked on the book. She's a professional and her feelings were hurt. But she's the one who wanted to put back a lot of things that I thought were extraneous to the main impact of the story. Which was that he was closely connected to all sorts of people who were making the big decisions about the world, and they talked to him very frankly about it behind the scenes and he wrote it down in his diary. But she wanted to put down everybody that had ever visited his office in the morning and the lists of people he met at dinners, whether he met them again or not. And I said "I'm trying to make it available for the general public." She said "The general public? Who are they?" Which is the academic point of view, but it's not one I'm very sympathetic with.... My discipline

in getting books published has been just the opposite. I've done a lot of research. I read over 400 books and memoirs and letters and so forth for *The Shenandoah*. But then I condensed it into what I thought was the most interesting part of the story.

WT: After your stepmother died, you and your father became closer. Can you characterize what that meant? From 1943 until 1956, there was a 13-year period where, whatever that barrier meant was no longer there. But the two of you were different people than when your father married Nell when you were eleven years old.

JD: Yes, well my character was not clearly developed. Who's is?

WT: How would you characterize that 13-year period?

JD: I think we both enjoyed it very much.

WT: And how did you interact?

JD: Well, he said on his death bed that I'd been a very good daughter. And I said "It's easy to be good when you love." That's how we interacted.

WT: For some of that period you were living quite close together. You were both living in New York.

JD: We were both living in New York. I wasn't in his house.

WT: You were seeing each other quite frequently?

JD: Oh yes. My husband then was working at Columbia, and after he'd had his breakfast and took his bus I'd walk over to my father's apartment. He was older then, of course, '80's which are about what the 90's are now, and I'd sit with him while he had his breakfast. And then I'd go down to his office and I'd go on home. I practically saw him every morning unless there was something that called me out of town or that had to be attended to.

WT: So a lot of that was visits and social, a family way rather than deep intellectual discussions about the issues of the day.

JD: Well, we did a little of that but not much. And somebody said in something I've read that he'd edited all my books. He never did. I don't think he ever saw one of my books until they were in print.

WT: There is an anecdote in his biography about your father, by the time that your were seeing him in the early '50's, he was very relaxed among young children. Handling that very easily. Very much in contrast to the way ... he didn't appear to be very relaxed with you when you were the same age.

JD: He was always a very shy man, but of course by that time I came along with my children, he was always very fond of children. He was very shy and didn't know just what to do with them. He met a great many people during his life and he learned some skill at handling people.

WT: It appeared also from the biography that he had a great deal of interest and discussion, particularly in terms of literature, with Ramon.

JD: Yes.

WT: And so it seemed to me that there was a very strong relationship built up there. Another thing. After Nell died, he was thinking of selling Mattapan but decided not to in the hopes that you would spend more time there?

JD: I don't think he had that hope, but I think he just felt it was more trouble than he could go to.

WT: Did you spend much time there?

JD: Well, for a while we would go there for fairly long visits in the summer, like several weeks. But I didn't spend a great deal of time there. No.

WT: Did you take your children back to Media the way you went back to Media?

JD: Not every summer, no. Because my grandmother died after I went back to college when I came back from London. Then the farm was divided among the children. I got the share that would have been my mother's share and my aunt Ann moved to Charles Town. My uncle Marshall married. It was Marshall, Ann, and I that got the main house. And Ann moved to Charles Town, Marshall stayed there with his new wife, and he bought me out. And then he fell upon what they call "evil days" and I bought him out with the understanding that he would live there as long as he lived and that I would leave it to his daughter, which I'm doing.

WT: So your children at least had some of the time.

JD: Oh, they came back for vacations. It was never a regular thing. It was not a long visit. It was not with a warm and loving family such as I had.

WT: You married Charles Healy in 1951, and you were married in your father's apartment in New York City. How did the two of you meet?

JD: Well, he was a good friend of my second husband, and they were both in the CIA during the war, or what became the CIA. It was the OSS. But he stayed in Washington and my husband went abroad. I wasn't in Washington when he was. When I was there I was there with my husband and I was never in Washington alone. I didn't get to know him there. But then when my husband came back we visited back and forth as couples. Then our respective marriages broke up and we found that we liked each other very well so we got married.

WT: And he was working at Columbia?

JD: At that time, yes.

WT: What was he doing there?

JD: He was a lawyer and he was in charge of wills and bequests.

WT: How did you decide to write the first book in your trilogy, *Cloud on the Land*?

JD: Well, I just wanted to write this book and it stretched out. I was going to write a sort of history of this part of the valley through the family and it turned out to be three books. And the characters more or less ran away with it.

WT: It starts around after the War of 1812...

JD: Which my great grandfather was in. And it was his son who went to West Point and then went out as a fur trader and then came back. He was going to be sort of a Sam Houston for Texas with other adventurous young men but met a young lady when he came down to Romney that he fell desperately in love with. And he stayed there and married and studied law. Practiced law in Romney and had nine children and she died. And eventually met another young lady and had nine more children. Can you imagine 18 children?

WT: Is Lucy based on anybody in particular?

JD: No.

WT: She's a very interesting character, but she's not a very simple character either. How about her father? Is her father modeled on anybody?

JD: Well more or less on somebody who never had any children who was no connection.

WT: I was thinking of your uncle, the one that got hit by the automobile and went to court...

JD: He was the one.

WT: When you said that the characters ran away with one another, I can see how all three books make a unit and how the third one sort of closes the circle on several things, particularly Edward. But in some ways the first two books seem to be much closer together in theme than the third one. Is that true?

JD: I think so, and oddly enough, England wouldn't take the second book. England took the first book. The first book was relatively successful. It was taken out by a historical book club and it was published in England. It was also published in arabic but I never got the arabic. That was about the time that they were burning English books in Egypt. It was published in Egypt. And I thought I would have it here and put it in my guest room and say "Have you read my latest book?" But I never got to see a copy of that. Not that I could have read a word of it. And I believe that when you start a story it sort of takes its own course.

WT: Why didn't they want to publish the second volume?

JD: Well that's the one where Lucy goes to New York and they thought it was too feminist or ... I don't know. It was out of the mood. They did publish the third book.

WT: To me the second book is the more controversial in terms of topic and it's probably not what a lot of people expected, particularly the treatment of the slavery issue. It seems as though it would be very tempting to make Lucy into someone who clearly saw the right and sacrificed everything for it, but that would be oversimplifying the situation and who Lucy is. Tell me some of your feelings about Lucy.

JD: Well I don't think I would have ever gone away from my own children to save a slave. I think I probably would have done what my great great grandmother did because that thing of having a very favorite member of the household sold during the Civil War, that actually happened. That's in Cornelia McDonald's book of memoirs. And she felt terrible about it but she couldn't reach her husband. She didn't have \$500 in cash unless she reached her husband. And she just let her go.

WT: One of the things that makes Lucy unusual and makes the book unusual is that there appears to be not only the struggle of, should she make that initial commitment to save the slave and risk her family, but once she comes back, how she acts from then on. It appears to me that when she returns, she has made a decision to support her family and somewhat suppress her ...

JD: She did, yes.

WT: And it's almost as though, for a brief moment, she rises up and does this act of defiance or makes this statement and sort of sinks back in to, suppressed by the Southern...

JD: Well, I think she suffered enough leaving her own children and she said "I'll never go through that again."

WT: The other added dimension that makes it even more interesting is the fact that in the first book, when she's on the frontier, she's running everything. Very independent when her husband was off. Taking care of the children. Running things. And in that atmosphere where there was very little law and very little society to tell her what she can and can not do. She seems to be a very different woman than in the Southern society which seems to be much more stifling. But it's the same woman. I'm not sure why she's not more popular than she is.

JD: I guess because she went back and forth between two points of view.

WT: Yes, but isn't that the way things really happen?

JD: Yes.

WT: She seems to be a realistic character in dealing with that issue.

JD: I didn't make her run away with that slave girl, she did that [laughs]. I wasn't that I sat up and said "Now you do that." [laughs] She said "I'm going to do it. I don't care what it does to your book." [laughs]

WT: Now her sister who goes to New York is a feminist and seems to go off into the vein that you later explore, such as Belva Lockwood. Were you consciously thinking at that point, with Lucy's sister, of someone like Belva.

JD: I didn't know a thing about Belva Lockwood. I don't think I had ever heard her name, but I did know some very feminist women.

WT: I think she died about 1910 or 1915. It appeared to be, and from what you're saying it didn't happen, that it would not have been unusual had she shown up for supper at your grandmother Davis' table.

JD: Oh no, she would have been welcome. And that sister was more or less based on a very feminist cousin that I had.

WT: And what's her name?

JD: Kennedy. She never married. She was a school teacher. I think this woman was a practicing lawyer, but by the way, my granddaughter is getting her law degree in Hong Kong, where she has been living with her husband who has a job over there. She gets it this spring.

WT: How many women in your family have decided to take that route?

JD: She's the only one. I said to my father... I never heard him argue a case until I was well grown and married... and I said to him after I heard him argue a case, "That's the greatest chess game I ever saw played. Maybe I should have been a lawyer." Well, he said "You could have certainly gone to law school and been admitted to the bar but you'd have never made a lawyer." I think he was right. I think it would have bored me terribly. I think I did what I was meant to do.

WT: It does seem that when you were growing up and going to school, the most obvious career would have been teaching.

JD: I don't have the aptitude for that because I don't like to tell people what to do 45 times.

WT: Traditionally that would have been where most women who were getting education would have gone. Or perhaps nursing or other things like that.

JD: Well my grandmother had a family of nieces who had to do for themselves because their father died when the family was relatively young. And one was a teacher and one was a nurse. Three were teachers. Neither of those [professions] ever appealed to me. My grandmother, I remember, I was reading the *Saturday Evening Post*, and she said "Reading that trash again?" and I said

"Yes." And she said "Well, I hope you marry a poor man because you'll never amount to anything if you don't." Well, I satisfied her. I married three poor men.

WT: I would imagine that trying to make a living writing is much more precarious than trying to make a living teaching or nursing.

JD: I think it is, but I did. I didn't make all of it, but I did make enough to educate the children. I mean I didn't pay every bill.

WT: I know for your first six books you were pretty much told what you were going to do. How far ahead have you normally planned your next book. Or do they sort of just pop into your head and you say "I'm going to start."

JD: You finish one and wake up one morning and say "That's what I'm going to do."

WT: But some of your books took four or five years to write.

JD: Well, they were usually tremendously interrupted by, well World War II for instance. I was awfully slow getting out *The Shenandoah* but that was because of World War II. And I left Dutton to write *The Shenandoah* because I was asked to write it for the Rivers of America series, which was a quite well known series at that time. I showed you that letter I had from Stephen Benet, didn't I?

WT: No. I've read only two books in the Rivers of America Series. I've read yours and I've read *The Potomac*. And from what I know of some of the other books, such as *The Hudson*, it appears that, in a lot of ways, you probably had a more difficult task cut out for you for *The Shenandoah* than the author of *The Potomac* did.

JD: I don't remember *The Potomac* very well. I think I have a copy of it here. I remember *The Hudson* because *The Hudson* writer and I had to go together on one of those tours that authors take. And we got very friendly in the course of that and had good and bad experiences along the way. I don't remember who did *The Potomac* right now.

WT: Frederick Gutheim.

JD: And I don't remember knowing him very well, and I don't remember the book very well. Did you find it interesting?

WT: I did as background for some of the research I've done. The main difference that I found was that there were a lot more, what I would think, readily accessible information about the Potomac and its relationship to culture than there probably was specifically about the Shenandoah River.

JD: I relied very heavily in writing the Shenandoah on family memoirs.

WT: *The Potomac*, for example, spends a great deal of time talking about canals, and water transportation, the highway to the west, and all of the business and industry that went ...

JD: That's why George Washington, when he got land down here to settle his nephews on said that the Potomac should be made navigable this far.

WT: That's why, to me, there seemed to be a lot more readily available material on the Potomac and that you had the more difficult job getting it together. Did you in the process of the book travel the entire valley?

JD: Oh yes, several times and had contact with people in towns on the way up and down. I talked to people in each town about the history of that town and what they had available on the subject, and I think I read practically everything that was ever published about the Shenandoah at that time because I'm really a digger when it comes to getting my facts in order. And I like it. A new fact that I think I can use effectively is just like a nut to a squirrel for me. People said to me at the time, "Oh, what a lot of research I must have plowed through!" Well it wasn't. I was just delighted with it. And I left Dutton's to write that book because I'd already written an adult book for them about the Spanish children. And that was taken first in England, actually.

WT: It was quite a while. *A Valley and a Song* is a juvenile ...

JD: Well that is after I published the other Shenandoah.

WT: By quite a few years though ...

JD: Yes. They asked me to do a juvenile version and I did, but then they decided not to go on with the series. It was too much history or too little. You know one set of characters that children like to read about.

WT: In the middle of writing your trilogy, after you'd written the first two volumes, before you wrote the last one, your two mystery novels suddenly appear there. I don't remember reading anything that you wrote before that prepared me for seeing those two works sitting there in your literary career.

JD: Well, the first one, I was in London with my father where he was getting a degree at Oxford and I went through this village and there was a church on the top of the hill. It had been built in the early 1800's I think that's when they had this rise of devil worship to worship the devil. And it sort of went into my mind as an interesting concept and then I thought as it turned out in the novel a gang had taken it over because nobody would go near it because it had this bad reputation. The people in the village were afraid of it. It was haunted by unfriendly ghosts and therefore it made a good hideout. So that's how that came about. And then the other was because my sister-in-law had this idea, and that was quite a success. It was republished in Italy. I have the Italian version there. They had to have Draco Davis because they said F. Draco sounded too Italian. And the vogue in Italy then was mystery stories written by English people.

WT: I think you mentioned before that you started getting correspondence and invitations to your pseudonym.

JD: Well, you know the authors' guild offered him a membership. I was pretty annoyed because he hadn't done a thing. They hadn't suggested to Julia Davis about that. But they wanted men members. There was a great deal of "You had to be a man to do something." When I worked on the Associated Press I was the second woman they ever hired. I think I told you this.

WT: You told me about your salary.

JD: A quarter of a cent a word. You don't get rich on that.

WT: Was the authors' guild surprised to find out that the author was a woman?

JD: It was the Mystery Writers' Guild. Yes, but now they write to me as Julia Davis. Nobody remembers F. Draco. He wrote a few short stories which you probably haven't read.

WT: No. Were those separately published?

JD: Yes he published his short stories. I can't remember the names of them. It was in magazines. He wrote quite a few. There was one really bloody one. This man was going to recivilize a tribe on an island. I've forgotten exactly where in the Caribbean. And he

was having a special thing for them. I think in the end they killed him. And there was nothing left on the beach but the dead and rotting body of the steer he'd planned to feed them. F. Draco had a rather sinister imagination.

WT: So that's how you happened on the name?

JD: Yes. It was the mystery writers that invited him to join. They had not paid the slightest attention to me. Or maybe it was the author's guild. I know I was very offended by whichever one it was.

WT: I had looked in the mystery writers' guild for something about you in there and don't remember seeing anything.

JD: I still hear from them.

WT: Why didn't you do more of them?

JD: Well, because other things came along and found a market. There was one awful winter in my life when the two Spanish children were small and I had them both in private schools. I needed to get up the money for them and, schools weren't as expensive then as they are now, but they were pretty bad. When you consider the general level of what a dollar was worth then. And I wrote everything they wanted me to write. And out of that whole year I sold one poem to a magazine that sometimes published poems. I think I got \$12. So that taught me a lesson. I have to write what I happen to want to write, and it may be one thing, it may be another. I don't particularly control that. But to write just because some editor says "Write this," I do it but it never sells.

WT: In *Legacy of Love*, your introduction which is dated 1960 from Media, this is what you wrote: "Sometimes there comes a pause in life when the familiar forward motion no longer serves. When new direction must be sought. In such a pause I came into possession of chests and boxes of old papers, letters, scrapbooks, diaries. By the open fire at Media I read them. I went back to my roots. The older generations came again to life, this time in the round, not merely as seen by the young. Reading I recalled my family in every sense of that good word and found my signposts for the future."

If I were going to be dividing your biography into chapters, that would seem to be the beginning of a chapter.

JD: I had an awful time selling that book. I had an agent who was very devoted and had great faith in me at that time and she kept on trying and trying until she sold it. And that's why I left Reinhart who before had published whatever I'd done. It stayed in print, so it must have had some value.

WT: Why did you write that book at that time?

JD: Who knows? I can never answer that.

WT: But you do say that ...

JD: Maybe because of just what I said in that introduction.

WT: You do say it helped you find your signposts for the future. What direction from that time on did you set off in?

JD: I was more family oriented. Before, my life was so full of external circumstances. Things happened to me and I had to cope with what had happened. I didn't have time to set a pattern of what I wanted to make out of it.

WT: What I'm trying to do is put together what you were saying here with where you were in your life. Your husband Charles had died 3 or 4 years before. Your father had died 4 or 5 years before. You were an established writer. Your children that you spent a lot of time taking care of were probably out on their own so that you had a lot of time to think about where you wanted to go. Is that fair?

JD: Yes.

WT: Tell me about the chests and boxes and things coming into your possession. How did that happen? What was going on?

JD: Well, everybody died in both of the old houses that I had been brought up in. And the houses had to be emptied and these things were in the attic. You don't just pick them up and throw them out.

WT: So it sounds as though what you were being confronted with there is a lot of tangible reminders of your past. Your personal past, the Davis' past, the McDonald past. And you were making some kind of decision on how to incorporate that into your creative work from then on.

JD: Yes.

WT: Certainly your McDonald family history seems to be a reflection of going in that direction. What other things did you come across? Things that you haven't had an opportunity to follow up on?

JD: Well, I wrote a novel that I wasn't able to sell, about, not exactly family, but along that line. And I'm now doing a revision of it. Or at least I'm going to get back to it now that I'm feeling a little better, Taking it from a slightly different point of view. But it will be in this area, and it will be a family story and will start just before our revolution with a little boy being sent over and brought up to be heir to his uncle. Which actually happened in my grandmother McDonald's family. And of course he was terribly homesick and his uncle had an awful time with him. Sent him to Princeton, and he was fired from Princeton for playing cards for money. Well, if you didn't play cards for money in Virginia in those days you were a wimp. And I think he was playing for a penny a game or something. The very Presbyterian head of Princeton had given him a warning. He came back and found him doing the same thing and sent him home. Then he was sent to William and Mary. He was fired from there for duelling. And then he married instead of a daughter of a landowner, you know, so that they could put two properties together in the proper way, he married the illegitimate daughter of a landowner who had no inheritance whatever and that really exasperated his uncle but she made him a wonderful wife and bore him six children and he cared for his family. He didn't do it the British way. He made sure every one of his children had a house and about 300 acres. Of course they started with about 6,000 acres. But you bought 6,000 acres at a time because who knew where they were? Less than 6,000 they were sneezing at. And I'm going to work on that, more or less, from the point of view of the boy who was sent over and start with his arrival. But I'm awfully good at putting it off, I find. I was quite ill this winter, you know. I think I was getting ill a good while before that, because I seem to just about get done what it takes to keep up life. Nothing more. And I've always before had a very strong prod. I needed to get another book out to get some money to come in. And I don't have that need now. It's very easy for me to get distracted and just attend to mundane affairs. But I'm beginning to feel a real need to do something.

WT: I really would like to see a book of your poetry come out.

JD: Did I show you some of my poems?

WT: Yes.

JD: And did I give you the last one that I wrote?

WT: "91 is no fun."

JD: No, I've written one since then. I'll give it to you tonight because I've just has it typed up.

WT: I think a book of your poetry, particularly that would allow people to read that in the context of your prose, would be interesting.

JD: It's more really me than my prose is.

WT: I suspected it would be.

JD: I've sold very little of it. I did sell one piece that year when I was trying to write for money for editors, and that's all I sold. There's not much of it downstairs, and I don't know when I'll get up.

WT: I think I'll have a draft of a biographical sketch ready for you to look at in about two weeks.

JD: I've had some perfectly ridiculous things published about me out of Morgantown. Because they've been sitting on these two books for a year. One came out and said I was one of my father's four children and it wound up by saying that the Davis house in Clarksburg was not open to the public. It had been torn down for twenty years. [laughs] It's NOT open to the public.

WT: Is this an attempt on their part to put together a biographical sketch for your books?

JD: No, I've written perfectly good biographical sketches. When I say I've written, I've set down facts. It hasn't got any warmth or any humor. It just says born, educated, died, married.

WT: But they're trying to derive this somehow from what?

JD: I don't know. [laughs] They're making it up as they go along.... I don't have any pictures of me at the adoption agency because that was all very hush hush.

WT: I wasn't aware of that.

JD: The adoptive family don't like to have people know that an agent from the adoption agency will come every now and then to make sure that they're treating the children right.... I wanted to do two things in life. I wanted to raise children and write books, and I've done both. So I've nothing to complain about.

WT: In *Legacy of Love*, you phrased it a little bit differently. When your grandmother asked you what you wanted to do, your response at that point wasn't ...

JD: No, I said to be a good wife and mother. She said "Is that all?" But I had two grandmothers who had both done that and they seemed to me to be very admirable women. Of course, I don't know what my grandmother Davis would have done if she'd grown up in the present era. She certainly would not have limited herself to being a good wife and mother. She'd have had an intellectual career of some sort, but I don't know just what it would have been.

WT: From my biographical notes, it appears that between 1962 and 1965 you were chairman of the Children's Aid Society?

JD: Yes, well I had worked for them for 5 years, and then I was on their, and that was one of the two paid, 9 to 5 jobs that I had in my life. The other was the newspaper job. And I worked as an agent. First it was State Charities Aid and then they gave up the active thing and transferred it to the State Children's Aid and I worked for them until my own children at home made it almost, and writing some books, made it almost impossible to go on with it, and when I gave up, two children stuck to me. My oldest son is one of them. He was down here last week. And I have a daughter from there who lives in New York and is very sweet and attentive. Heavens, he's going to be 70 on his next birthday. That shows you what a long time ago it was.

WT: The job from '62 to '65 where you were listed as chairman ...

JD: The head of it got me on the committee and I worked on the committee. And then I was elected chairman of the committee. But we had, happily enough by that time, written a new set of rules and you could only be chairman for three years. Because we'd had a chairman, who was Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson, who was lovely and delightful but stayed on too long and stayed on until she was quite an old lady and was very sentimental in her approach to everything. People suffered under it really, so they wanted to make sure that couldn't happen again. So I did my three years and then I was out of it.

WT: So during those three years, you were doing more management, planning, rather than case work...

JD: Yes. I didn't do any casework. I had to go to New York. I think we were living in Bedford then. I had to go to New York about three times a week to attend the meetings of the subcommittee. You know, just keep in touch with everything that was going on.

WT: The organization you worked for originally as a case worker. This was a state run organization?

JD: No. It was a private charity. It was called the State Charities Aid. Now it's called something else. They've kept the initials but they've put different words under it. And then they turned my part of it over to the Children's Aid, and it was the Children's Aid, I think, that I was the chairman.

WT: Was it affiliated with any church group?

JD: The Children's Aid is one of the six best. You know, the New York Times has their list? The Children's Aid gets their share of that particular go round. In my day it was rather rare to have blacks. I have some interesting stories from my work in the adoption agency, and I would like to write those up at some point. It's very good for me to talk to you because it gets my mind going again. I've been living in a perfectly comfortable haze.

WT: Have you been able to follow up over the years with other children that you found homes for.

JD: Quite a few of them. But when I tell you my oldest son is seventy, you'll know they're not babies any more. And my daughter, I would like to write her up as a separate story. She came down as the oldest child of a big upstate farming family. Her father had died and her mother was not capable of carrying on and, in fact had to go to a mental hospital. And five children were brought down. No one is going to take five children, with the oldest ten. So they had to be placed in different homes, and she had to see her family broken up, and she was placed to be the companion to a family who had a little daughter of her age and it went off very well until the daughter got polio. And the family said they could just cope with that. That was all they could manage and Mary decided then (now she tells me) that she would never be adopted again. So wherever she was placed I would get a call, sometimes in the middle of the night, "Come get Mary, she's terrible." I'd go out and get Mary. "What did you do this time, Mary?" then she'd tell me, but she never told me the motive behind it. And I had nothing to do with the placements. That was done by the placement bureau. I just had to go out and see how the child was doing. Make friends with the family. Make friends with the child. Take my little dog along. I had a car that I could do this in those days. Well now she's grown up and she married. And for a while I lost her because her marriage was unsuccessful. She married a man who was too much of a drinker and she eventually went to Florida and got a divorce. And I lent her \$500 to go to Florida. This was long after, there was no question that I was in charge. As you would help your daughter if she came to you and said "Dad I'm in trouble." You'd say "Take \$500 and get out of it." Well, she didn't come back until she paid that back. That took some years. And for a while I didn't hear from her at all. Then came this voice on the telephone and said "This is Mary." I said "Do you mean my Mary?" She said "Yes." She came and paid me the \$500. My first thought was to say "Oh no, keep it." And then I thought, no, it meant so much to her. So I said "Thank you," and "I'll get an electric typewriter." I hadn't been able to afford one. This was quite a way back. And I did. So she bought me my first electric typewriter, and since then we've been very close. Not closely living together but we've been close mentally. But when she grew up she found every one of those sisters and one brother.

WT: When you left the adoption agency, she came along with you?

JD: No, she was almost ready to graduate from high school, but she was still on my case list. I had a case list of about a hundred. And when I first went there, that's an interesting story too about what's happened in child adoption. I really know something about it. Because when I first left there we took older children from upstate. They didn't have any adoption facilities upstate. And we had a lot of these older children. We had very very few blacks, and knowing that I was a southerner, they finally cautiously gave me one black. Well I got on so well with that family, then I had all the blacks. Now the whole agency is half black. Supervisors black, well they should be too. And a lot of black agents. At least 50% of the children are black. And also now more than it was then, they went through a time, about when I left the agency, when the work was getting rather uninteresting because they would only place babies. People only wanted babies and the supply of blue eyed adoptable golden haired babies was just not very large. It wasn't then either and now it's out of style entirely, and so now they've gone back to the older children and the troubled children. And I collected a lot of those. I had a good caseload of troubled children.

WT: Did you see a general change in adoption policies or attitudes around World War II?

JD: Not so much World War II. We were never really in the orphanage business, you see. We always placed our children with families because, as we saw it, the children who had as much as five years in an orphanage, they never got over it. It's very traumatic for a child, at a tender age, to be in the care of people who are not really personally, deeply concerned, and a child knows the difference. Right away. From the time we were founded, which was back in the 1870's, we were anti-orphanage. Both of these agencies when I worked for them were strictly adoption agencies. And if you couldn't be adopted until you were too old to go there or anybody didn't want to adopt you, they would place as, what it meant was the girls were nursemaids and took care of the children and they finished high school. And the boys worked as errand boys in businesses. It was called a working home, but it was always with a family. And that was partly my business, to get around and rescue the ones that weren't doing good, or make sure what was happening to them.

WT: People pretty much accept divorce today as something that just happens. A lot of people are divorced. It's not really questioned. It was probably questioned a lot more ...

JD: Oh heavens, yes.

WT: ... when you were first divorced and when you were second divorced. How did the situation of being divorced affect your work?

JD: I don't think it affected my work. It certainly affected the way I was treated.

WT: The fact that Nell was divorced seems to have been one the reasons why the Davises did not approve of your father marrying her.

JD: She waited until after her divorced husband had died until she married my father. So it wasn't so much that. They thought she was a very worldly woman and they were not. She was a very worldly woman and she was a very good wife for him for that very reason. Because he never would have pushed himself. Because he had to be pushed a little bit. Not pushed in his work. As my grandmother said, he would work as hard as any man on earth. But to promote himself, he didn't have that at all. To make the right friends that would be helpful. It never occurred to him. He just made friends if he liked them.

WT: In *Legacy of Love*, when you talked about divorce, you were saying the McDonald family in times of crisis simply joined ranks around you or anyone else, whereas the Davis family would try to analyze the situation. Find out what happened and how you could change it.

JD: Why you did it.

WT: And in the 1920's, divorce was something that people were looking at very differently ...

JD: Oh very.

WT: ... than they would today. And it would have been for you and your family and everyone else a much ...

JD: Oh it was very traumatic.

WT: There was a social stigma attached?

JD: Yes. Not as bad as it had been but yes it was.

WT: And that probably meant all the more that it was important that you could go to your family.

JD: Well the McDonalds were that kind of family. No matter what you did, they'd back you up. Don't have to explain. Just count on us. Which is a wonderful feeling in a family.

WT: When I read about you talking about the McDonalds and read your family history of the McDonalds, the phrase that came to mind to me, the Robert Frost poem "Death of a Hired Man," where he says "Home is the place that when you go to they have to let you in."

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Interview with Julia Davis Adams, March 18, 1992

WT: Your book on William Tell, *Mountains Are Free*, was that a subject that was given to you by your publisher?

JD: Yes.

WT: So he basically said "Write this," and you wrote it. And your source materials for that were whatever was generally available?

JD: Yes. I can't claim any inside information on that one. [laughs]

WT: The name of the book, how did that come about? *Mountains Are Free*?

JD: Well, they are. And so are the Swiss mountains. And it's the motto of West Virginia.

WT: So that was deliberate.

JD: Sure. It worked well for me in Russia and Georgia, too. I told my guide down there, who of course was a communist guide (but the Georgians never liked the Russians. They didn't like communist Russia.) I said "Your state reminds me very much of my state. The motto of my state is 'Mountaineers are always free.'" Well, his eyes lit up, and from then on he took us everywhere. He took us over country roads where you had to ford streams hoping they weren't too deep. I mean there wasn't any other way to get across. And I saw how backward the countryside really was. Because in those days, they had improved the cities, and then you were never to go out of the cities. You just saw the cities and said "Isn't the country thriving!" And this was '57. So he became out great friend just on that basis.

WT: I read the play "Possession." The address you have on it is Princeton, New Jersey. Was your husband Charles alive?

JD: Chip was dead and Bill hadn't come back into the picture yet.

WT: So it was between 1956 and 1976. Can you tell me how you got started on that play?

JD: Well, it actually happened in West Virginia. That woman existed. Well, she actually did ... her sisters-in-law said she poisoned her first husband. I left that doubtful. He drank the poison she put in a whiskey jug and he was a drinker, but she hadn't left the whiskey out for him. She'd ... He got it out. I don't know if there was any intention. She was very much in love with him when she

married him. She ran away to marry him, and they had these two children, two boys. And he was a drunk, a real alcoholic. It wasn't understood in those days as something you could get help for. It was just "Why do you do that?" you know.

WT: Was this a local incident?

JD: Yes. The man she did, or did not poison, was my grandfather's cousin. And then she did marry the rich old senator who had wanted to marry her in the beginning. And then he died of natural causes, and she nursed him very faithfully but she did make him reconstruct his will and leave everything to her and not to his daughter. And then she married, when she was about to be brought to trial because his other children, or maybe grandchildren, objected to the will. And then she married the governor who had her pardon in his pocket in case the trial went against her. And whoever was charging her withdrew from the trial. It never came to trial. She was going to be tried for forging his will, or got him to sign something when he was on his deathbed and didn't know what he was signing. Anyway she did make changes in his will. And later, she lived quite a long time after that, and her son took care of her. I used to visit him. And at the end they had to have nurses for her. And as soon as the nurses got to know anybody in town, they'd bring them in from Pittsburgh and then change for another nurse so that too much talk wouldn't get around town. I think that she began to talk rather freely in her last years. And this is all true. That part's not in the play. And she was also heard to say later that she had married once for love, once for money, and once for position, and give her money every time.

WT: Can you give me any names?

JD: The first one she married was a Davis. So I knew her as Myra Davis. I knew her as Myra Horner. Of course I didn't know her by that name because I was very much younger. I think I saw her once or twice but just as a very very old lady. I knew her grandchildren well. The one that her sisters-in-law said she poisoned, but that was never brought to trial because there wasn't any evidence, was a first cousin of my grandfather's. A Davis also. I always had it in the back of my mind, but her grandson, who was a great friend of mine (and that's his picture up there) was always like a brother to me, said if I published it while he lived he would never speak to me again. So I never really tried to sell that play or have it produced.

WT: I noticed when I read through it that there were two first acts, one starting before they were married ...

JD: I decided that wasn't necessary in the very first scene, and of course they don't like very many changes of scenery. I never made any real effort to get that one on. She was quite a woman, obviously. And she brought her sons up well. That's when she was married to the senator. She had plenty of money to send them to the best colleges and gave them all the education they should have. One was very successful and the other contracted syphilis and with the mental trouble that came on with that (they didn't know how to treat that in those days).

WT: This is a West Virginia Senator?

JD: Yes.

WT: And what was his name?

JD: Davis.

WT: It was senator Davis.

JD: No, not that family. That family are not related to us at all. You can't claim all the Davises any more than you can claim all the Smiths. Now if your name is Theriault you can say it. If that's the name, it's probably a relation. Not if your name is Davis.

WT: One of the pieces in the package was about five or six pages from a story called "Ghosts of the Gods."

JD: I don't know what's happened to the rest of it. I thought it started out rather promising.

WT: Yes. Was that ever published?

JD: No. I have more of that stuff up in the attic and if we're going to make that attic trip, I'd like to make it some time in the daytime....

WT: I think you mentioned last time that you had several short stories published under the name F. Draco.

JD: Yes, F. Draco, I've forgotten what it was called. I remember the last sentence but ... The last sentence was "The beach was empty except for the dead and rotting body of a steer." He was killing a steer to give a party for natives on some remote island and I think the natives killed him instead. And the story ... I've forgotten. But it was published in, I don't think it was in *Story Magazine*, it was in *Adventure Magazine*. And then I had some stories in *Story* but I've forgotten them too. You know, life is so long and memory is not so good.

WT: I was wondering if any of them had appeared in an anthology.

JD: There was one. It was an anthology about children and it was when I was working in the adoption agency, so that must have been about '34 or '35. And I've forgotten what it was called, but I know the real mother claimed the child and took it back and it was so homesick for the adoptive family that she finally took it back to the adoptive family. The child being three years old, or something like that.

WT: Your novel *Bridle the Wind*, the second in the trilogy, to me is one of the most interesting ones.

JD: Yes, that's the one of that trilogy that did the worst too. I liked it myself, but it was unpopular. Too much feminism in it, I think, for the time in which it was published.

WT: I think published today it would be much more popular. I was very interested in your characterization of the hunchback lawyer. Can you tell me how you developed that? Was that based on a real person?

JD: It was sort of combination of people. There was a hunchback lawyer here, but he was not the one who's in the book. I put a lot of characteristics of other people into him.

WT: The courtroom scene and the method by which he got Lucy off. Which basically seems to be a technicality.

JD: It was.

WT: How did you arrive at that?

JD: Well, I just studied the laws of the day.

WT: In a way I felt a little bit let down there because I had followed her through the whole story and I was expecting a lot more to happen in the courtroom. Maybe it was more realistic the way you did it, but I guess I was used to courtroom drama.

JD: Well I'm sure I had legal... like any lawyer you look up and see what cases are like that. You say, well if it happened once it could happen again, and so you build your defense on that. I'm sure I found that case. I'm sure I did look up the lawyers of the time. I found it just the other day in my papers, some faxes of the Virginia laws about slaves in that time. They were perfectly awful. Thank God its over. I did tell you about my grandfather. The one who had fought right through the war from First Manassas to Appomattox. Except when he was a prisoner of war and then he escaped and went back to fight again. He told me when I was about eleven, he said "I would have to fight as I did because I couldn't fight against my own people." Which meant he couldn't fight against

Virginia. Because they were much more Virginians than they were United States. He said "I couldn't fight against my own people, but you must always be very glad we didn't win." That took it right off the back of my mind. I mean I never had to fight the Civil War at school or any of that nonsense, which many Southern girls did.

WT: I would have been very interested in your writing a fourth volume, or perhaps a fifth, dealing with the family after the Civil War during Reconstruction.

JD: Well I meant to, but by the time I did three books about the family, the second one as I say didn't go well. The other two did go well, but the second one didn't, and then I just got interested in doing something else.

WT: To me the second one dealt with not only feminism but also a lot of other issues that perhaps people didn't want to deal with.

JD: It didn't do well at all. In fact, it was amazing that they took the third one. It was about the Mexican War. That did well. The first one did the best. The first one was taken by a book club in this country and then, a historical book club, and then it was published in England and went very well over there. But there are fashions in reading just as there are in writing.

WT: One of my favorite parts in your book *Legacy of Love*, when you were very young was when you told about The Great Lie.

JD: Oh yes. I've never had such a conviction of guilt in my life. I was overwhelmed by my guilt.

WT: But wasn't that also you exercising the same kind of imagination ...

JD: Oh sure. It was surely imaginative. The dear Italian coal miners going up to the coal mine, all they'd done was wave a hand at me. They loved children. And I constructed a whole scene out of my head and went in and told the cook. She told grandmother and grandmother told aunt Emma. They both told my father and my grandfather. And I wasn't allowed to play on that side of the yard again that summer for fear they'd see me again. Poor dears. We'd had a lot of "black hand" around at that time. I don't suppose these men were involved in it in the least, because all they gave me was the most friendly grin and waved their hands.

WT: What I think you said in contrasting Clarksburg with Media was one of the things you did at Clarksburg a lot while you were growing up was dream.

JD: Yes. I didn't have many playmates. I was very much the only child in a big house of adults who were mostly devoted to intellectual activity. So the silence was just overwhelming.

WT: When you were a child, writing ...

JD: As soon as I could write I was writing stories.

WT: What kind of things were your writing?

JD: Well, princesses and princes. Very derivative stories. Then I wrote a Just So story about how the pig got his tail, which wasn't nearly as good as Kipling's but [laughs] I wrote it anyway. I think I was about eleven by that time. These other ones were really ... I have a notebook with some of them in it. I can show it to you.

WT: Was your grandmother reading that or your aunts?

JD: Well, I was reading to myself by the time I was four.

WT: Were you getting any kind of response from your family to your writing? Did they approve of you doing this?

JD: Well, they approved of me trying to write. Grandmother approved of anything that was trying to work with my mind. She didn't approve of much else. She did want me to develop what was here. I remember much later I was reading *The Saturday Evening Post*. I must have been eleven or twelve. And she said "Reading that trash again?" And she said "I hope that you'll marry a poor man because you'll never amount to anything if you don't." I satisfied her. I married three poor men. [laughs]

WT: You've said one of the things you wanted to do for a long time was write books. How did that fit into your family's feeling about ...

JD: Grandmother thought that was just right. Then she said "What do you want to be?" and I said "I want to be a good wife and mother." And she said "Is that all?" Well, that's what she'd been and my other grandmother had been. What else was I to imitate? But I did want to write books. There was no doubt about that. As soon as I could form the letters I began writing. And then I used to dramatize the books I read. I would have to play ... was particularly fond of the *Jungle Books*. I would be Mogli, of course. And my poor aunt would have to be whatever character I assigned her. [laughs] And then I'd tell her what to do, so that I could be what I was going to be. And I did a great deal of that. Always dramatizing my stories.

WT: Did you do any of that while your were at Media? Did that carry over?

JD: I was too busy. Too busy running round the farm and watching everything. Getting uncle Will to saddle a horse for me and racing with my colleagues who were happy to be out there. My grandfather would say "I told you not to run those horses in the front field." I couldn't go out on the road yet. I was too young, without an adult with me, on a horse. "I look at you riding around the front field like Comanches." And we were. They weren't very fast horses anyway, but we were getting the very last ounce of speed out of them.

WT: As you were growing up and even later when you were writing as a professional, what kind of writers were you reading, that you were interested in?

JD: Well in my early teens I went through practically all of Scott and I couldn't read Dickens. Now I can't read Scott and I love Dickens.

WT: How about into the '30's and '40's?

JD: By then I was reading just about everything and I still am trying, although I get defeated by many of the modern writers.

WT: What I don't see in your writing as they go into the 1930's and '40's, is definite influences from some of the writers like Hemingway, Faulkner. It seemed like your style had been pretty well formed.

JD: Well, I think Hemingway did introduce a new style. And I had read a lot of books before that which were, according to the new style, very wordy. And I followed Hemingway trying to make my style not very wordy. And I think you'll agree it isn't. I try to say the most in the fewest words.

WT: Your short stories, I think, are even more noticeably economical in words.

JD: You read those ones that were in the *Atlantic Monthly*.

WT: I know you're still working on one novel.

JD: Well, I've just gone back to it. And of course I'm finding that what I did back last winter before I got sick was absolutely unacceptable, so I'm doing it over from the beginning, and I haven't gotten very far. And I have a problem because I'm always trying to find a place, a hole, where I can dig in and write and be undisturbed. I don't have that here. The telephone rings, or whoever is working for me in the morning has to be instructed about something or I have to make sure there's enough food, or something. And

really, in all my years of writing I was able to leave home, like a man going to his office at nine o'clock after the children went to school, by the time they got to school age of course. And before that I'd have somebody come in and take care of them in the mornings, and go somewhere. It doesn't matter where. All I want ... I want a sofa because I write lying down a good deal of the time. And then I had a typewriter, but I can't type any more because of this hand. And so all I need now is a pad and a pencil and a sofa and a place I know I'm not going to be disturbed. I can close up about half past twelve and go home for lunch. And I don't know where I can find that. They said I could work in the room at the library, but I'd have to sit up there and look as if I was busy. And a lot of the time I might be just staring at the wall and not look as if I was busy.

WT: Very few people go in there.

JD: Well, even one person is deadly at that time. You're putting yourself into an entirely different world. You come out and it takes a good half hour to get back in. So an interruption is not just a few minutes. Or at least for me it isn't. My creative mind shuts up about five o'clock and then I want to have a drink and I want to talk to somebody or do something like that. People are always saying idiot things like "I've always wanted to write a book but I don't know where you find the time." Well you know you don't get the time to write a book. You make the time to write a book. No one is going to hand you the time to write a book. I feel as if I'm doing better. I feel as I write that I'm beginning to get it right. I'm glad I didn't make any effort to publish it or even send it to my agent. I have two or three, which I've lost. I had four chapters done. But they're no good anyway. But they would give me a body to go on with. And I know what's going to happen and all that.

WT: If you had as much time and energy as you needed, what would you do after that?

JD: Oh I just think I'll finish that book. I don't know what I will do after that. If I can finish that book I'll be doing well.

WT: Most of the books that you've written and didn't require a lot of external research take about a year. Is that right?

JD: Well, it took me a good deal more than a year to do the research on *The Shenandoah*. I read about 400 books and manuscripts and letters, and reminiscences.

WT: The one you're working on now is based on material you already have.

JD: I've already researched this one so I don't have to do any. I don't think I would ever have the physical energy to go ... for instance I used to go to the public library in New York or the Library of Congress with a hard boiled egg in my pocket and stay six and seven hours going through all kinds of stuff.

WT: Your trip to Russia in 1957, was that a pleasure trip?

JD: We went as representatives of the American Authors' Guild to the Russian Authors' Guild. But there was really no ... The party they gave to us, only two Russian authors dared to turn up. But it was a very interesting, instructive trip.

WT: Russia wasn't that friendly a place in 1957, was it?

JD: Oh no. And we had a little code that we wrote back saying if we said this it means "They've swept us away. See if you can get us. Tell the American embassy." [laughs]

WT: Were you American authors going over there with your books?

JD: No. It was another American author and myself, Grace Stone, and we were asked to go as representatives of the American Authors' League to the Russian Authors' League. But as I said, at the party they gave for us only two Russian authors turned up. Because they didn't want to be misassociated. And our guides were very strange, and the guide in Petrograd, no it was Leningrad, said "Do you like modern painting?" [whisper] "Yes I do." She took me up to the top floor of the Hermitage, the art museum. And there were the Picassos and the Monets and the Manets and the whole lot. Stacked on the floor so that you had to look at them this way [flat]. And then about ten years later, of course, the Russians realized that these were much valued. Stalin had said "Put them up there. They're terrible. They're disintegrating the people." They realized that they were much valued all over the world. And now they're very proud to show them off. They'd stolen most of them from old members of the aristocracy or the richocracy. Most of them really from a very rich Jewish gentleman who had made a point of collecting them. There they were just stacked like those records over there. And I wrote to all my guides after I got home because I'd made friends with all of them. Never had a word back.

WT: How long were you there?

JD: Six weeks, which makes me a Russian expert. It seemed long enough. And I went to Georgia. The Georgian guide made great ... Did I tell you about Montani Semper Liberatis? Oh he glowed at that. Old Georgia was the last stand-out, now that it's free. It always wanted to be free. He took us everywhere. He took us down to the basement and showed us what had been stolen from the aristocratic Georgian families. And he took us out in the country. Mostly you couldn't go out in the country because the roads weren't done. He took us over roads where there was no roads, where you forded the brook. And I said "Just like West Virginia," and my travelling companion Grace said to me "I didn't come all this way to be somewhere that's like West Virginia." [laughs] And I said "But you have. And it is." I had a good time with all my guides. I made real friends with all of them but never heard a word.

WT: Was that an experience that might be worth writing about someday? [Note: She did write of her trip to Russia, but it was never published. The typescript is located at the Charles Town Museum, in Charles Town, WV.]

JD: Yes. I just found a nice picture of me in Russia today.

WT: Did you travel the route of Lewis and Clark when you wrote *No Other White Men*?

JD: To some extent. I had gone out and met the tribe Sackagawea belonged to. I had gone out to Wyoming and met them. And I did know that country. I didn't go specifically for the book. I did go enough to see what the country was like.

WT: What got you started on that book?

JD: How could I remember everything I've done?

WT: Well, it was either something you had to write or something you wanted to write, I guess.

JD: I think it was something I wanted to write. I know when I first wrote *Swords of the Vikings*. I had the worst possible contract and I got that book out and I got out *Vaino, Boy of Finland*, into which I wove the thing Longfellow took Hiawatha from and then my editor suggested I write about William Tell. So I did. It was an interesting story. But how I got into the ... I don't think he suggested it. I think I suggested it.

WT: Were you interested in the Clarks?

JD: No. Clarksburg, who was named for his older brother. I really cannot tell you at this point. I don't think he suggested. I know it was one I took a great deal of joy in writing and loved doing it. And read their original diaries. And Clark couldn't spell, but he was a great extrovert and loved everybody and got on with everybody and took care of the little boy of Sakagawea, who was sick and the Indian guide. He saved their instruments from the canoe upset. And Lewis was just the opposite. He was much of a scholar. Wrote beautiful English. Liked being alone. Never happier than when he was alone and met a grizzly bear. A complete introvert. And yet they were very great friends. And I don't know how I got started on that. It was one of the books that I took a great deal of joy in writing. And I went up to the top floor in the New York Library. They have a history floor, where they have their original manuscripts. Not the manuscript but printed directly from their original manuscripts. And also those of Pat Gass and of the young boy George who was with them. He wrote to his family saying he was going off with them and "Your loving and obedient son." Giving them no chance to say yes or no. I think it's one of my best books. It stayed in print for forty years. That means something.

And it was translated into German. And it was also translated into arabic but I never got the arabic translation because about that time in Egypt they were burning all Western books.

WT: Your book *Ride with the Eagle*, the Mexican War book, seems to use similar sources.

JD: They weren't similar sources.

WT: I mean diaries.

JD: They were my grandfather's diaries. You're asking me to remember a lot more than I can remember.

WT: What I was trying to compare that with the effort for *No Other White Men*, since it was dealing with diary sources...

JD: I wrote *No Other White Men* long before I did the other. My feeling has always been to go to the source if you can get it. Of course the source of the William Tell story is not available. I did have a source for the *Swords of the Vikings*. I had the first written Danish history. I mean written in Danish. And my friend, who got me into the project said, because of her pictures she wanted the stories written up, said "You won't be able to read it because its gammeldansk, which means Old Danish." Well, it was much easier for me than New Danish because it was much more like English. They had an immense influence on our language, as you know.

WT: For *Ride with the Eagle*, were you able to go over any of the route or was it something you did mainly from written materials?

JD: Are you talking about *Ride with the Eagle* or *Eagle on the Sun*?

WT: *Ride with the Eagle*.

JD: My grandfather, I had his original diary. [She still seems to be confusing *Ride with the Eagle*, the tale of the Doniphan Expedition using diaries, with her novel about the expedition, *Eagle on the Sun*.]

WT: You didn't do any travelling for that, did you?

JD: Oh yes. I went up and down the valley as he did. [Still doesn't seem right.]

WT: Part of it went out to Missouri, didn't it. Doniphan's expedition to Mexico?

JD: Well, I did have an ancestor who went out to Missouri. And he would have been a Sam Houston. Because he just decided that he and his friends would go and liberate Mexico, I mean Texas. But then he came back home to say goodbye to his grandmother. He'd been to West Point and then he went out to Missouri and was a fur trader for a while. He really was a fur trader, and wrote letters back saying "Bring me some tobacco when you come. I'm out." And that kind of thing. He got on very well with the Indians and so forth and then came back to St. Louis and was going with his friends to liberate Texas but came home first to say goodbye to his grandmother and met Miss Lucy Naylor and fell in love and married her and studied law in his father-in-law's law office, became a lawyer and sired nine children by her and nine children by his next wife. She died of it, but the next wife went on and on and wrote a very good memoir. She was apparently a very strong woman.

WT: Now that I've read "The Return" can you tell me how you came about writing that?

JD: I worked for five years in a child adoption agency. That was one of the cases I really knew about. And I made it into a story.

WT: Was that one you were personally involved in?

JD: Not that I was involved in the sense of making them do anything, but I was involved in the sense that I could see what they were doing.

WT: How did you get to write *Cruise with Death*?

JD: It is no good. My sister-in-law had written it. She had the story and she was sick and I said "Well I'll help you get it printed." And I rewrote it. But it was a bad story and it wasn't a great success as a book either. There's very little of me in it. I was trying to help her out, and I didn't help either her or myself.

WT: Your unpublished play "Possession." I was trying to get people straight there. Was the senator in there Henry G. Davis?

JD: No, it was the other one.

WT: You said her name was Myra Davis ...

JD: It was Senator Camden.

WT: So when she was married to the doctor, his name was Davis?

JD: Yes. He was a cousin of my grandfather's. And his sisters always thought that he she had poisoned him and killed him but it's a mute point. Sure the lye was in the whiskey bottle, but she was using the whiskey bottle to make soap.

WT: And her maiden name was Horner?

JD: Myra Horner.

WT: Do you have any other plays that you remember...

JD: Yes, I had another play that I wrote a long time back. I wrote it when I was taking a course in play writing at Barnard, and it was chosen as the play to be done at the end of the year. It was a play about West Virginia Mountaineers and it was done by New York Jewesses. And you never saw anything funnier in your life. I sat in the back seat and just roared with laughter. But I've lost it, unless it's up in the attic. And then I wrote another play about this woman you were talking about. And I always wanted to be a playwright. In fact that one that you saw was optioned by Brecht Pemberton, but then he died and it never came out.

WT: You're talking about the one from Barnard?

JD: No, I'm talking about "Possession." I don't know which one I'm talking about, to tell you the truth. The one from Barnard was about three sisters. One was very intellectual. One was pretty and sweet. And one was very motherly. In the first act they were in their '20's, next act in their '40's, and last act in their '60's. And everybody said "Who wants to read about a lot of old women in their '60's?"

WT: Today they would.

JD: [laughs] Yes, today they would. It was tracing their developments.... I think it was this play about the three women that he had the option on. And I've forgotten what it was called. And my play about West Virginia mountaineers was very different and was chosen to be put on at the end of the play writing session, done by New York Jewesses. You just could have died laughing.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Interview with Julia Davis Adams, April 7, 1992

WT: In the materials you gave me last time, there was one short story, which I read, by F. Draco, called "Ghosts of the Gods," which takes place on an island off Crete. There was a letter along with that. It appears as though you were contacted by the National Endowment for the Arts about 1983. It was some kind of writers' project, and F. Draco as well as other writers around the country were asked to submit. You submitted that along with two other things I found very interesting. One was "Full Circle," which was about your remarriage to Bill. And then something titled "I AM." It was interesting that F. Draco was listed among the writers for this National Endowment for the Arts project ...

JD: I was furious because Julia Davis had been writing for a long time and she'd never been [chosen] and here came F. Draco and immediately was nominated, which made me really angry. Because he didn't know one thing that I hadn't taught him. [laughs] Not one thing.

WT: Since he seems to have a life and personality of his own ...

JD: Well, he was mostly off adventuring. He didn't write very much.

WT: Do you have a biographical sketch of F. Draco in your head?

JD: Well, he was mostly rushing around adventuring, and he just wrote occasionally. And then HE was recognized when Julia Davis had not been recognized and he didn't know one thing that I hadn't taught him! Not one thing! You can understand. I'm not a feminist, but you can understand that I was angry.

WT: I was trying to place, in 1983, particularly since they seemed to be interested in short stories, where they were coming from, because, from what I understand, most of the F. Draco stories were published in the 1950's.

JD: I don't remember. By the time you're 92 you can't discriminate very much between things that happened in the 30's, 40's, and 50's. Time sort of scrunches up.

WT: You described him in "Ghosts of the Gods" as a war correspondent.

JD: So what.

WT: I was trying to reconstruct some kind of alter ego.

JD: Well, all three of my husbands were in the OSS, so that's apparently the kind of man I like. So of course, F. Draco participated a little bit in those experiences.

WT: That particular story, "Ghosts of the Gods," ...

JD: I'm glad you found that because I always liked that story. I thought I'd lost it here.

WT: With this National Endowment for the Arts Project in 1983, apparently the materials you submitted were accepted for publication but were never published through that grant. Do you remember it ever being published?

JD: I don't remember it being printed. I remember that story, and there was another story that neither you nor I have ever found by F. Draco, and it was about a man down in the Caribbean. And he was trying to get on with the natives. It was in the early days of the Caribbean, before there were many tourists. The only thing I can remember about that story is. When he came there they were observing some kind of religious something, and in the course of it he was sacrificed. And I remember the way the story ended. "There was nothing to be found but the dead and rotting body of a steer." This was a steer that he'd brought to entertain them. And that was F. Draco, because he would write things that Julia Davis wouldn't write. And she didn't want to be mixed up with him, because he was always out travelling and he just wrote when he felt like writing and he didn't write very much either. [laughs]

WT: He's ... in the process of trying to track him down in this correspondence, there was something you sent into them as a biographical sketch. You had mentioned in 1983 recent stories in *Redbook* and *Cosmopolitan*. Those may be F. Draco stories?

JD: I think so, because I don't think Julia Davis ever published in either one [laughs].

WT: It's kind of frustrating because when you look in the indexes you normally look through to find short stories, they don't list *Cosmopolitan* or *Redbook*. They list *The Smithsonian*, *The Atlantic* ...

JD: Draco wrote for them! [*Cosmopolitan* and *Redbook*] [laughs] I don't know what you're going to make out of this, but that's your department. I'm not involved. [laughs]

WT: I think people might like to read a collection of your short stories. Frankly, I like your Julia Davis short stories better than your F. Draco short stories.

JD: Of course. F. Draco was sort of an aberration. And I used to wake up with a story in my mind. It didn't belong to F. Draco or Julia Davis. It just happened to be the choice of the morning. Oh, Julia Davis was a much more serious writer. F. Draco was not a serious writer. He just did that when he was home from his adventures.

WT: We talked before about you publishing a series of articles after your trip to Russia. Is it possible that those articles from *Redbook* and *Cosmopolitan* have some of that material in them?

JD: How do you expect me to remember? I went to Russia. I had a fine time in Russia. I came back and wrote a very few things about it. I tried to publish a long thing about it. It wasn't accepted because things were like that [she moves her hand up and down, meaning politically things were unsettled]. I can't remember every thing I wrote or move I made. I'm a professional writer. You know that. [laughs]

WT: I'm just trying to be a professional detective. [She laughs] Whatever crumbs you drop along the way I'll pick up.

JD: I think it's very nice of you. But I can't imagine why you're interested. I never published a book that made the best seller list. I did publish books that stayed in print for 40 years. So I think that's something.

WT: There's a lot of writers who can't say that. I've had most of the material I've gotten from you typed up.

JD: Mercy, I say, and I mean exactly that. Save me. [laughs]

WT: There's quite a bit. [Turns pages in typescript]

JD: Good grief! [laughs]

WT: It's all you. Can you tell me about this one? ["I AM"] How you came to write that.

JD: Well, I wrote that for Jimmy Carter. He had this daughter, Amy. And he was having Amy sit with him at state dinners, you know. It was not very well received in those days, but I thought it was nice to have Amy there. And I wrote this just for the fun of it.

WT: I wondered there if you had been possibly drawing on some of your own experiences.

JD: I'm really horrified to tell you that I'm starting to work on a new novel. Whether it will come out, I don't know. In the morning, I try to wake up ... I used to wake up about six and write for a couple of hours without disturbance. Well now they've changed the time and I'm trying to adjust to the time. I work up this morning and I had no ideas. Then about nine or ten I began to have ideas, so I wrote until about two. I'm not working the way the planets go around the sun. So whether this will ever turn out to be a novel, I don't know.

WT: What's this one about?

JD: It's about a young man who's sent over here to inherit from his uncle. And that happened to my own ancestor here, but I've fictionalized it. And the little boy is like other little boys I've know who were sent to an uncle into situations they didn't understand and found difficult. And the uncle is like other people I've known who meant to do the best by him but had not idea what he was facing. Who knows? It may come off. It may not.

WT: That's a good start. You could use a few days of uninterrupted time to get your draft together.

JD: I don't seem to get the time. I don't understand it. I live alone. I have a warm, loving friend downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs that are empty tonight. (They weren't empty last week. Three different couples stayed there.) I just don't seem to have the uninterrupted time. Now in the old days when I was writing and had children at home, it was different. They would go to school and I would leave too. And I would have a room where I went. It could be a room in a friend's house who was away, or it could be a place that was for rent. All I needed was a typewriter and a pad and pencil and a chair and a desk. And that's all I used when I wrote. I'd go there from nine to one and then I'd come home for lunch. And I had no disturbance. Now I can't say that.

WT: Well it's nice to have friends who like to keep in touch, but it's probably an interruption.

JD: And I have helpers who help to do the things, and then they have to have some supervision. But I am starting to write again, probably ineffectively. We'll see.

WT: It's always good to try. Within the next week I'm going to try to have your play "Possession" retyped, and there are a couple of pages that are missing from that. I'd like to give you a copy of that and if you could fill in a couple of pages of dialogue ...

JD: Oh yes, I'm sure I could.

WT: It's a shame to have 99% of a play there and two pages missing.

JD: My manuscripts have not been taken care of because nobody's done it.

WT: Well, you move around too, and things get misplaced and lost ...

JD: And I've always said as a writer I needed a good little wife, but I never had one. I had three pretty difficult husbands, all of them contrary. Any one of whom I would remarry if I could get them back.

WT: I've got some of your poetry in here. Maybe from looking at them you can recall situations ...

JD: I thought I had some upstairs, but it hasn't shown up. I think these two are the same one.

WT: There were a couple in there that looked like variations on the same poem.

JD: [Reads] ... It's lucky his grandpa could hustle." [laughs].

WT: Is that about Ramon?

JD: No that's about my mother's brother, a McDonald. [Looking at another poem] That one was written from Ramon, who had so many girls.

WT: There were two of them that I thought were probably related.

JD: They're related, but they're different aspects. I think you should keep both of these. This line says "Splinter of God, whirling in space, / Never to have a resting place. / Never to build save on the sand...." That line is "Whirling in space, never to know a resting place." This is my Ramon, who has now found a resting place and who is now coming next Monday.

WT: Is he a musician now?

JD: Well now he is trying to be a writer. He didn't want to be a writer because his father was a very famous writer in Spain. He did have a lot of musical talent. When I was first working with him he wanted to be a musician. And then he dropped me a note from the top floor to the balcony saying he no longer wanted to be a musician. This [poem] is from him to his girl friends. [Reads] Well now he's married a lovely woman who is coming with him Monday and she understands him. But these were comments along the way. [Reads the next version of the "Splinter of God Poem"] "Seeker" it should be, not "searcher." I think this [the second one] is

the final version. [Readers further] I like this "Epilogue" "Grandchildren are more fun than frogs, but given my druthers I'll take dogs." I do have as you've seen by now a nasty sense of humor. I didn't write much poetry. I think you got most of it.

WT: That's good. I was afraid there was this treasure trove of hundreds of poems.

JD: I never wrote hundreds. I just wrote the occasional poem.

WT: But after 91 years that adds up to a lot of poetry.

JD: [laughs] Not a lot but a creditable amount. [Reads on. Comes to poem about giving up ...] This one should have a P.S. I did give it [gardening] up. [Reading on] These I remember. Some of the others I do remember now that I've seen them.

WT: There was one there I wanted to ask you about.

JD: There's one you haven't got there, and the only one that was ever published, and it was published in the ... what was the name of the ... it was a writers' publication. It was very prestigious to get into. You haven't gotten it have you?

Now I can hear only the sea gulls crying
Only the long wash of the water on the sand.
Now I can see only a white sail flying
Down the horizon to an unknown land.

Audible silence, followed without hearing,
Tangible shadow, lost to sight and touch,
Only in dreaming can I reach your hearing,
Found, lost, forgotten, and remembered over much.

WT: Do you remember the title to the poem?

JD: I think it was "Lament." I wrote it a long time ago.

WT: Can you tell me about this one, "Commentary."

JD: This was watching the changes in the valley. This other one was the only one I ever published. *Story* magazine ... I think that was it. [The poem just quoted was not the one that was published. Repeats verses.]

WT: What was the occasion for that?

JD: [Laughs] I'll never tell. [Laughs.] I've told you the things I'll never tell you. "Tangible shadow lost to sight and touch... Audible silence lost to sight and touch. Only in dreams can I reach your hearing. Found, lost, forgotten, and remembered over much."

WT: I wanted to talk to you about the way in which you balanced your career, children, and husbands over a long period.

JD: It was never a balance. It was a struggle.

WT: From what you've told me, in your first marriage, your husband appears to be very supportive of your writing. Is that correct?

JD: Very much.

WT: And that was during the period that you wrote off your six obligatory children's novels.

JD: Well, I signed the first thing, but by the time I wrote the whole thing, we'd divorced and so forth. I just had this to work off. And I mean work.

WT: As far as your opportunity to write, when you talked about the ability to go away and have a place to write. Did you have a good atmosphere for writing during that time?

JD: Well, I had to go somewhere and do it. Different places. All I wanted was a place I could sit down and know I wouldn't be disturbed.

WT: When you were living with your first husband you were living in New York?

JD: We were living in New York and in Canaan in the Berkshires. It was still New York, but it was right on the border from Stockbridge.

WT: Around 1933 or 1934 was when you took the job at the adoption agency and then you married Paul. And I believe you were working on *The Shenandoah*.

JD: I think I was working on something else.

WT: That would seem to me, as far as having a lot of things going on in your life, when you were married to Paul West, there were a lot of things going on. You had Nina and Ramon. Was Paul West, Jr. staying with you?

JD: He came. And also I had Bill and Mary left over from the earlier experience with the adoption agency.

WT: So there were five children circling around your house while you were trying to write. What kind of an atmosphere was that? Was that why it took you so long to get *The Shenandoah* out?

JD: That slowed that down a bit. Also I was driving my aunt while I was doing research for it and we had an automobile accident and she lost her right arm. It was horrible. It was one of the two or three times in my life when I would have liked to have committed suicide, but I couldn't because I had to stay with her.

WT: And she recovered and was very active.

JD: Tremendous. Tremendous.

WT: She seems to have been a remarkable woman.

JD: I'm going to do, I hope, just about her, a piece that I'll try to sell to a magazine. I haven't done it yet. Now I'm working on this novel. I have to write. As soon as I could make the scratches on the paper, I started to write. I could show you some day. I've got some here. My first little stories. As soon as I could get those things to mean something. I don't remember learning to read because, I learned to read before I was four. By the time I was four I could read anything. My grandmother just pointed out a word and in a history of Egypt or whatever and said "That means that." I can't remember learning to read, but I do remember learning to write. As soon as I could do it, I began to write my own stories. I think I was meant to be a writer.

WT: Was there any writer when you were a child that you wanted to be like?

JD: My first stories were very imitative. First about queens and princesses and then about the "Just So" stories. I wrote "Why the Pig has a Curly Tail." I think I still have that. I wrote that when I was about eleven.

WT: When you were a teenager you might have been exposed to some of the women writers like Kate Chopin.

JD: I read everyone. By that time I read every known writer of that era.

WT: Back to the busy time with the five children plus working at the adoption agency. It's amazing you could find time to write anything.

JD: Well I had to do it because I had to pay for their education.

WT: And during that time then, at least from 1942 on, Paul was in the service. He went into the service after Pearl Harbor?

JD: He went into the OSS and he was dropped behind the lines in Greece and for eighteen months I didn't hear from him. During that time, my son Bill and my Spanish children and his son were living at home out in West Virginia because the house was occupiable. And before that we had sold our land in Bedford and house in order to allow him to go into the army. And I had all those children. And we went back to a little apartment in the top of a house I had and it was very uncomfortable. And when my aunt died we moved back to West Virginia at Clarksburg and they went to school there. And I was fine. It worked out all right. There was a certain amount of adjusting.

WT: Was Paul supportive of your writing?

JD: I don't remember. I don't think he gave a damn.

WT: You both had your own jobs ...

JD: I took the job in the adoption agency. We got married because he had a job that paid \$50 a week and I had one for \$35. Big fortune. So we could get married on that.

WT: Raising lots of kids on that.

JD: Well, we didn't have lots of kids. They came later. I did have two left over from Oh don't try to understand my family. You'll never get it straightened out.

WT: Did any of the children get to spend time with the McDonalds at Media?

JD: Well Louise was one of them. And Bill, my oldest son was very fond of my uncle Marshall.... Don't try to understand my family. I do and that's enough. They all come back to visit except the one who is dead. So I must have done something right.

WT: Your husband Charles [Chip], at that point Nina and Ramon were grown and moved away?

JD: Yes. And then here came Erin who said "Can I come and live with you?" Because her mother had said "Get out." But you don't say to your thirteen-year-old daughter, "Get out." I never did and I'm sure you never did. You might be tried by your thirteen-year-old daughter. You might wish "What in the world can I do?" But you don't say "Get out." Her mother did. She came to us and said "Can I live with you?" and so she has moved to California and I see her at Christmas. I have a loving relationship with all of my children. My father said "Julia has a good mind, but her heart is mush." And I wish he were alive today and I would explain to him the heart has paid off better than the head. It has. I'm not a well known writer, although my books have stayed in print, but I'm a very successful mother. They all come back, and they are darling to me. They call me once a week. They couldn't be sweeter. And they are all doing what I wished they would do, which was to make their own place in life and be independent. Because I had to tell them all, there were so many of them, "I'll educate you as much as you will take and then you're on your own. You've got to make your own way." So they all grew up with that idea. But they didn't lack for love. Because I loved them. And I tell them now, "You did as much for me as I ever did for you." Because I'm a very motherly woman. I needed children and I couldn't have them.

WT: One of the things that seems to go through both your writing and your life is, on the Davis and the McDonald side, particularly the McDonald side, a long series of men who end up going off somewhere to do something heroic or adventurous and they leave the women at home to do all the hard work: raise the family, run the plantation, take care of the children, make a living. In a sense it seems like, when they had a choice between family and career, they have said (and in some cases the characters in your novels). The men are saying "I'll take the career and you, wife, are going to have to take the family." It seemed as though you had to deal with both. You had a career and a family at the same time.

JD: Men and women are different. If you ever lived on a farm, you know you cannot make a bull out of a cow. And you cannot make a ewe out of a ram. Men and women are different. And that's why some of the new feminists annoy me so much because they are trying to prove they are just the same. They are not. They will never be the same. Work with animals, which everybody

who worked on a farm as I did when I was growing up. You can try to make a bull out of a cow or a cow out of a bull, but you can't do it. And we're all animals, you know.

WT: But you did seem to be able to have both a family and a career.

JD: Well, each one suffered from the efforts of the other. I think the career suffered more. I'm not sure. I think now that I'm not a terribly talented writer. I'm a good writer, a conscientious writer. But if I'd been an Eudora Welty type of writer, then I would not have wanted a family. I would have wanted to just write, write, write, write, write. I didn't. I wanted both and I let the family win because they were alive. I might have been a better writer, but I don't think I had all that much talent. I don't think I was a George Elliot or a George Sand or, going back to the earliest women. I just don't think I have that much talent.

WT: There were things you wrote about, for example Lucy in your trilogy, and the fact that your second novel about Lucy, *Brindle the Wind*, did not sell well, and ...

JD: It didn't, and yet I still like it.

WT: Tell me if I'm overstating the case here. It seems as though, I think that novel is important for what it said...

JD: I thought so too.

WT: But at the time, I would guess you had a choice. You could have written a third Lucy novel with Lucy taking charge of everything ...

JD: I did write a third Lucy novel ...

WT: But she was essentially in the background. If Lucy had continued to grow into the forefront, you wouldn't have sold the book.

JD: No. Not that. She had thrown her opportunity to be the controlling influence away out of her compassion. You can't throw it away and get it back.

WT: What interested me in the third novel was the potential there for, with Angus off in Mexico and the oldest son June off in Mexico and Madame McLeod now dead, there's really a vacuum at the McLeod plantation in terms of male leadership. Even

though the South and all the traditions are there sort of propping things up, in a way it's a situation in which Lucy has to deal with everything going on.

JD: Well, you know, Steve Benet, who was a great friend of mine, who asked me to write *The Shenandoah*, in his *John Brown's Body*, he wrote about Southern women as well as I've ever seen them written about,

"Always, always to have the charm
That makes the gentlemen take the arm.
But never the great unseemly spell
That makes strange gentlemen love too well
Unless you were married and settled down
With a suitable gentleman of your own."

And then it goes on ...

"And run the gentleman's whole plantation
In a manner befitting the female station."

That's what I come out of.... They did.

WT: It seemed to me that, in the 1950's, that if your second novel with the emphasis on Lucy was not a great seller, then another one along the same vein probably would not have sold very well either. Is that ...

JD: By then I was interested in getting the son off to war and the Mexican War.

WT: That one seemed to be quite popular.

JD: Yes, but today it might have done better.

WT: That's why I was asking if I was overstating the case by ... if you look back through the history of writers and painters, you see many of these people who starved in attics for years and years writing whatever it was they thought was important but never sold. Living on practically nothing and then after they died someone discovered them and decided they were really important and now their work is selling in the millions of dollars. Yet at the time when they were starving or working for very little, they had to

make a conscious decision about whether they were going to make a living for themselves or their family or just write whatever it was they wanted to write.

JD: I wrote what I wanted to write. And that's why I didn't write very much. I did manage to educate my children, but I certainly didn't make a living. No. I wrote the third book, not because the second book was unsuccessful. I'm sorry about that. But I wrote the third book because Lucy had come home and I had to reestablish her with her family and I had to get into the Mexican War. So there wasn't any "Was I writing this to sell?" I never. One year in my life I tried to write to sell and out of that year I sold the one poem that I quoted to you. "Now I can hear only the sea gulls crying..." That was the one thing I wrote in that whole year [that sold]. Editors said "Write this." I tried to write it. They didn't publish that. That one year, I tried hard because I needed money for the children's education, to write what the publishers said to write and it wasn't successful except for that one poem. Of course nobody told me to write that. I did publish it and got ten dollars for it. And after that I said "Obviously I can't do that," so I went back to writing what I wanted to write.

WT: It seems then that, aside from a couple of the very early books you wrote under contract, you were writing pretty much what you wanted, right?

JD: Absolutely. And even after the second book about William Tell, then even to get out of that contract I wrote what I wished to write about. I wrote *Stonewall Jackson, Remember and Forget*, but it was my way. I can't write somebody else's way. I'm sorry. That's very stupid because if I could write me a best seller today, fine.

WT: There are lots of formula writers out there but I'm not sure in the long run that they will be remembered as great writers.

JD: I'll never be remembered as a great writer either, because I'm not.

WT: Well, I think you've got several good novels and good short stories and some very solid historical work that's going to be remembered.

JD: Oh, I'm a solid writer. I'm not a great writer. But that's all right because another thing I wanted to do was bring up children and that's been extremely successful from my point of view. They're darling. Ramon and Judy are coming next week. He wanted to come when I was ill and I told him it was no use because he would have just sat here. And he could have come earlier, but he said he'd wait until now until Judy could come with him. I love Judy. He's now found the right woman.

WT: I wondered if you could fill me in on some of the details from your first play. The one you wrote at Barnard. You were starting to tell me about part of the plot ...

JD: It was a play about West Virginia mountaineers coping with modern life. And the son was drafted into the army, World War I. And his mother came up and talked to my aunt, who had a Sunday school, and she said "Why don't we line 'em up on this side of the river and shoot them as they come out of the water?" Well, that was pretty hard to do. And then eventually her son Selby had to go. And they all came down to see him off. He leaned out of the train (this is true) and said "I'm a-gonna get 'em." And they said, "Get who?" "The fellow they're sending me after." The play was along that line. It was chosen to be performed at the end of the play writing series. It was done by Bronx Jewesses at Barnard. It was funny. It was so far from the feeling of it that I was just sitting in the back row and dying laughing.

WT: Was this the one that you mentioned had three women in it at three different times in their lives?

JD: No, that was a different one. And that one I can't find either. It was three women, just after adolescence. In the springtime, middle life, and old age. And they had taken three different paths. And that was written much later. That was the one Brock Pemberton optioned it, but then he died. Not because he'd optioned it. [laughs] He died and it was never produced. I've lost that one too.

WT: Is that one that may have gone through your agent?

JD: I can't remember.

WT: It sounds as though you've written four plays at least. The West Virginia mountaineer play at Barnard. The one about the three women and three different times in their lives.

JD: They said at that time "Who cares about women when they're sixty?"

WT: Today it would be a best seller.

JD: But I did show how these three very different women went along. One was an intellectual, never married. One was a charmer, married, remarried. And I don't remember what the third one was. And then, you have my play *Possession*?

WT: That's the one I'm transcribing now.

JD: That was about, she wasn't a relative but she married a relative in the Davis family. And her sisters-in-law always thought she had murdered him. But I don't think she'd really murdered him. I just think she allowed his drink to be found in the bottle she put her lye in. And that was never produced either.

WT: Was that written before *The Anvil*?

JD: Oh, much.

WT: You said in *Possession*, the husband died. The first one died in 1914, according to the play.

JD: Her first husband died under suspicious circumstances. He was a great drunk. He was the love of her life. She'd run away to marry him, and it turned out he was a drunk. A real alcoholic, and he died under suspicious circumstances. And then she married an aged senator who had wanted to marry her the first time but she refused him. He gave her a great deal of financial help. He had a daughter with whom she made friends and she was suspected of having forged his will. She wrote up his will. And then after that she learned his relatives were going to sue her for theoretically having forged his will, and at the time she had in her pocket a pardon from the governor of the state, whom she was about to marry. This is all true. They didn't finally bring it to court because they knew she had the governor's pardon. And then she married the governor. And she used to say, she had married once for love, once for money, and once for power. And give her money every time. But that was when she got to be a very old lady and she used to visit her son in Clarksburg. And they would have nurses for her. And she began to talk very freely in her old age. They'd get the nurse from Pittsburg and when the nurse made a friend in town they'd discharge that nurse and get another nurse so that what she was saying wouldn't pass all over town. And I did make her into a play. But I never had it done because my very dear cousin, who's over there in the hall (now dead), she was his grandmother. He said if I ever published it while he was alive he'd never speak to me again. We were like brother and sister, that particular cousin. Because we were the only two artists in a famous family. I wrote and he painted. We were very close, very loving, about six months apart. Grew up together. And so I never did publish it. And then I wrote the John Brown. Four plays. I wanted to be a playwright because when I first started writing I resented the long hours you have to spend alone. Now I love them. Now I fight for them. But at that time I resented it because I'm a friendly person. I like to be around people. So I wanted to be a playwright because a playwright is involved with a lot of people. But I was an unsuccessful playwright.

WT: It's one thing to write a play and another thing to get it produced.

JD: It's terrific. I was very close to it a couple of times. It was a big thing in playwriting, a big organization. And they optioned one. And then Brock Pemberton optioned one and died. So I never had a big play produced except when John Brown went back to New York, and that was produced. The John Brown they had in New York was a young method actor, and he made himself look like the

apocalyptic picture of John Brown with a long beard, wild hair. When he said "I'm worth more now to die than to live," he sounded like an old man who said "These eggs aren't right, take them back and do them over." Really. It was a ghastly failure because he did not project the fanatical power of John Brown. Now when we did it down here, my first John Brown was a retired Marine colonel (they were all amateurs), a retired marine colonel. And when he said "I'm worth more now to die than to live," he knew what he was talking about. He had considered the options and he had made his decision. And so had John Brown. He was a very good John Brown, very convincing. Here was a man that was so dedicated to a certain idea that he was quite willing to put his life on the line, which a Marine colonel has to be. And he conveyed that. But this young man absolutely had no idea. It was a thing he was doing. I knew it was going to be. My producer, Charlie Wood, he was the one who did the first here and then he did the second here and then he died. But in New York it was a disaster. It was off "off Broadway," but the actors didn't have any idea what they were talking about.

WT: So it didn't run very long?

JD: Two weeks. It got ... I do have reviews of it somewhere.

WT: I read some of the reviews generally good.

JD: Yes and no. Yes and no.

WT: Part of the comment on it seemed to be a problem that plays of this nature seem to have. One critic said that the play spent too much time in the first act setting the scene, and I don't know how you get around that because unfortunately a lot of people don't have the vaguest idea what Harpers Ferry and John Brown is all about. You can't just walk in and start the trial ...

JD: Here it is. Of course, down here we did it in the courthouse where he was tried. It was very successful, and then this new opera company has done it one time, not nearly as well. Because we stuck to having a jury and the jury box. And most of the people in our first performance were related to people who had been in the original "act" if you may call it that.

WT: So they had grown up with the tradition.

JD: And the Marine colonel who was John Brown was very convincing, and everybody else was convincing too. The descendant of the prosecuting attorney became the judge, and everybody really knew what they were talking about and produced it with good effect.

WT: I'd like to see it happen again.

JD: Well, the opera company here did it once not too long ago. It wasn't as good as the first two times we did it. Because the first two times Charlie Wood put it on. We did get descendants of people who had really been in it, and the Marine colonel as John Brown, who was wonderful. When he said "I'm worth more now to die than to live," he said it as a man who had considered the options and made his decision. He didn't do it with any great fanfare, but he did it with entire knowledge of what he was saying.

WT: I imagine a lot of people who either acted in that or read the play bring a lot to it that probably wasn't intended to be there in the first place.

JD: And the son of the prosecuting attorney was the prosecuting attorney, the grandson. The whole thing had a great deal of authenticity. People knew what they were talking about. And they tried it again. Apparently the Opera House doesn't want to be bothered again.

WT: I guess when you're dealing with volunteers rather than a paid company, you have to somewhat ...

JD: Oh, yes. And you have to do it in two weeks in October because we should do it in the courthouse when he was tried. But we had to do it in August when the court is not sitting. The first two times we did it for two years, we had two weeks in August when the court was not sitting and we could use the courthouse. And that gave it a certain authenticity.

WT: It seems to me that there are enough people coming into Harpers Ferry and trying to absorb the whole John Brown experience that it could run every summer and get a good attendance. And I'm sure there are actors who would not mind coming into the Shenandoah Valley and spending the summer playing "The Anvil" for three months.

JD: Well, work on it. I'm too old to work on it.

END OF TAPE

Interview with Julia Davis Adams, May 7, 1992

JD: [Looking at article by Julia Adams, "The Serious Young Speak Up]. I don't believe I wrote it. I wish I had written it because I agree with it.

WT: I seem to have found a lot of ideas you have expressed, either in your writing or in our previous talks, in here. Were your Davis aunts and grandmother active in the suffrage movement?

JD: Well, not very, because it wasn't very active in our area [Clarksburg]. You'd have had to get up and wave a flag all alone from the front porch. My grandmother certainly thought it was a shame she didn't have a vote. I've a wonderful letter from her to my father, when he was expressing doubts about running for congress. Maybe it was even when he was running for the legislature (it was when he was quite young). She said "Mud will be thrown at you but it won't stick," because he hadn't done anything to make it stick. And "You have to expect that and ignore it." And then finally at the end of it she put this little twist in. She said "You have my vote." [laughs] Which of course she didn't have.

WT: One thing I haven't seen reference to in your works is that, with all of the political life your father was into, there were several very strong, very talented Davis women who certainly were capable of exercising their judgment to vote even though they didn't have the right to vote.

JD: Oh yes. My grandmother was one of the most brilliant women I've ever met. What she would have been today I don't know, but it would have been something formidable.

WT: Would they have been what the woman writing the article in 1928 characterized as feminists?

JD: Then I'm sure I didn't write it. This sounds a little bit like my writing. I thought I might have written it. I don't remember everything I wrote.

WT: This is something that struck a note and wanted to talk to you about. This woman appears to be saying that, in 1928, her generation (which is your generation) was heir to the efforts of their mothers and grandmothers, the results of the suffrage movement. And that they were being criticized in 1928 for not being as active as women traditionally had been in the areas that women had traditionally gone into because they were denied other areas of occupation. such as volunteerism.

JD: Yes.

WT: Was that something you were ...

JD: Oh yes. I remember that. I could have made my first vote in '24, agewise. And I wasn't allowed to vote for my own father because my husband was than a registered abroad American. Because he was living abroad. He was running the business for the United Rubber Company in Scandinavia, which was four countries then. Norway, Sweden, Denmark (we lived in Denmark), and Finland. We travelled to all of those. And I came back to partake very briefly in my father's campaign. In those days, you were not supposed to make speeches or travel around with the candidate but to do little things on your own: attend teas, meetings, and whatever. The one thing I got out of that was, whatever I went into, it wasn't going to be politics.

WT: It appears then, that when you talked before about not being able to vote in the 1924 election, it was bad enough that you weren't able to vote in the election in which your father was running for president, it was also the first time your were entitled to cast a vote in a national election. Which is really a double blow.

JD: I was pretty angry about that. That's no longer the case. You can be born and married to a man now who is overseas, and you live with him overseas and keep your own registration in your own voting area. But it wasn't the case then. But I didn't have a strong feeling of having to ... I wanted a good little wife more than anything at that point, but not being the least bit of a lesbian, I had no idea how to get one. [laughs]

WT: It appears as though, from what the woman in the article is saying, her generation and your generation were the first women in modern times who were (they thought) free to pursue whatever career they wanted in a man's world and were free to compete with men and try to be like them competitively.

JD: I've never thought I was the least bit like a man. I've always been very fond of men, liked men very much indeed. I never thought I was like them, never wanted to be like them. Thank God I wasn't like them because I could see the difficulties they had.

WT: She seems to be saying that, for the first time, around 1928, her generation was faced with a new choice. It had always been accepted and traditional to have a career and, in a lot of cases, to sacrifice their family for their career. It was taken for granted. And the women, for biological or whatever reasons, were expected to take up the slack and maintain the family, care for the children, make whatever money was necessary while their men were off doing something else. But she appears to be saying at this point, women appear to have a choice, and that is, first they have some more control over their own bodies than they had before, so they had something of a choice in whether they were going to have children or not. They had something of a choice in whether they could have a career exclusively, or a career and a family. And the big question of "Should I have a career or a family or both seems to be ..."

JD: The usual answer was they would have both, and that's not easy. Because I tried to have both. Of course mine was also overshadowed by the fact that physically I did not bear children. It was all started by a miscarriage when I was first married and I was badly treated and peritonitis set in, and I found many many years later that the tubes had been blocked because of the infection, but it took a long time to find that out. But I, as the psychiatrists say, overcompensated. I raised seven children, not mine, and they still visit me. They're darling. My great grandchildren were here two weeks ago with their mother (who's my granddaughter, whom I took a great deal of care of when she was little). I don't take care of this generation because it's too late. I can't do it.

WT: It seems like you've written about the problems that women have keeping a family, particularly raising children in very difficult circumstances.

JD: I know a lot about that. I also worked for five years in an adoption agency.

WT: That was during the Depression as well, wasn't it?

JD: I suppose it was.

WT: I was going to ask if that had any affect on the people you saw, but I guess the people you saw were already on pretty tough times when they came to you.

JD: Yes. The parents of the children were, in those days it wasn't so easy to prevent having children and then once the child was conceived it was not easy to get an abortion. And a lot of young mothers gave their children away just because they didn't think there was anything else they could do. And all of the children I raised had very bad experiences in their early childhood and still carry the scars, of which I'm aware. I think I was easier on them than I would have been on my own children because they come from various backgrounds and had bad experiences. Not that they brought them on but because of their situation, one way or another. And therefore I was very well aware that I couldn't make them into models of me or of my family. Things that if they had been my own children I would have said "We don't do things that way." But I never used that editorial "we." I just said "If you do that, you won't be happy and people won't like you." If you bring up a lot of children you get very quickly to believe in original sin because all children are born little animals and have to be taught to be people. And I'm very proud of all mine. They all turned out to be people. I must have done something right.

WT: It seems as though, even though you had to struggle to balance your career and your children, that in the long run it was probably your children you decided in favor of.

JD: My father once said "You have a good mind but your heart is mush." And I wish he were alive today and I would say "Father, the heart paid off better than the head." Now the head might have paid off better, but then I don't believe I had the talent that would make me have to do that one thing and nothing else.

WT: Have you known women who made the attempt to pursue the career exclusive of children and others things and who have been happy in doing that?

JD: No, I'm trying to think of women writers of my own generation, Edna Ferber, they had children but I don't think they had children. Either they couldn't have children or couldn't find a man who would give them children. [laughs] I never had trouble getting a man. That was not my problem. But getting a good little wife, yes. That was a desperate problem which I never solved.

WT: The more I read what you've written, the more I think there's an interesting story behind it.

JD: Well, it's not awfully interesting to me because I've lived through it and done the best I could with it.

WT: Would it be fair to say that, whether you realized it or not, in 1928 when this woman was writing, you were being faced with the same challenge, career, children, or both...

JD: I knew that, but then you see I had to go on with the writing because I had to send the children to school.... When I got the job with the adoption agency loved the work but then I took on so many children at home, I couldn't do them justice and go on taking care of other children. And also telling people how to raise their children. It's very different you know. You can go in and say "Do this and do that." It's very different when they're in your home because you can't close the desk, go home, and forget it. It's there and never gets away from there.

WT: When I look through what you've written and your life, I see a story of what a lot of women for your generation probably went through in terms of trying to make decisions about family and career.

JD: It was a dichotomy.

WT: It's also interesting that a lot of men who pursue careers find out at some point in their life, after they've devoted a lot of time to their career and possibly sacrificed a lot of time with their family that in the long run they might have been better off spending more time with their family.

JD: Well men and women are very different. If you haven't noticed that, grow up on a farm. When I read that they're just alike. I read so much of that nonsense now. "Women are trying to be just like men." Forget it. You can't make a bull out of a cow or a cow out of a bull and it's not because of the way their mothers trained them. Men are different. Men are happy fighting I'm sorry to say. Maybe the world would be better off when women run it. It couldn't be worse off than it is now. Maybe women will run it. It will be a good thing I think because I like men enormously but I do not think that they are the supreme human being.

WT: I think some men find after pursuing a career for a long time that sometimes the career wasn't the main thing or shouldn't have been the main thing.

JD: They're born to fight and they will fight as long as they live. If they don't fight one thing, they'll fight another. Grow up on a farm. A ram will fight. A bull will fight. A stallion will fight. Men will fight. Now there was a time in the development of human nature when it was necessary to be like that. But I think men, because they're extremely intelligent too, I don't think we would have ever had the wheel if it had been left to women. Really. Because they have to accept what's going on and make the best of it. The only time you'll get a fight out of a cow is if you try to take her calf. She'll fight that. Protection of the young, that's very instinctive, very strong. Fight and kill and eat you if that would help. But they're different. No use pretending they're alike. No use trying to pretend that they can fill the same slots in the same ways.

WT: The conclusion that you're stating is one that the woman in this article says she may come to. The point she is at in 1928 appears to be: "I want to compete in the workforce alongside men because I've been told I now have the right to do that and that they're not going to give me any more privileges than they give themselves."

JD: Well I think that is true. They don't give each other privileges. If you put two rams together, one doesn't say, "You nice ram. You come along and you can have that ewe and I'll take these two." The ram says "I'm the boss." And the other ram says "I'm going to be the boss here."

WT: This woman seems to be saying that in 1928 the idea of competing with men on their own level was somewhat experimental and that it was yet to be determined whether women could compete with men or should compete with men or can compete with men.

JD: I never wanted to compete with men. I wanted to manage men, and I did. [laughs] You never have to compete with somebody you can manage.

WT: That's another one of the options she talks about. She says one of the things I could say instead of going out and getting a job is "Why should I compete with men when I can get men to give me whatever I want."

JD: I have letters from all three of my husbands saying the happiest years of their lives were spent with me, so I wasn't a failure with that. My father was probably right. I'd never have made a lawyer. The law would have bored me terribly. The dry dusty part. Writing doesn't bore me. Maybe I could have written better if I'd had no other interests but I could not have lived better. I couldn't have been happier.

WT: Maybe that's the lesson to be learned from what you've done. Perhaps you could have been a more famous writer if you had ...

JD: Cared about nothing else.

WT: Right. But is it worth the price you would have paid.

JD: No, but the women I've known who were famous writers... They never had something that was very deep in me, and that was being a woman means to rear children. And there's nothing more fascinating to me. They didn't have that. Edna Ferber didn't. Willa Cather. She's the one of that generation of women writers that I greatly admired. Maybe she was such a great writer that she didn't attract men or didn't want men. The writing was the thing. I didn't have that much talent.

WT: I don't remember reading anything of yours that was bad. I think you've written several things that are excellent. I think you probably could have written more things that were excellent ...

JD: If I hadn't had other things to do. Maybe so.

WT: When you weigh everything at the end and ask yourself which is more important, my children or my writing and you say "My children, although I like to write..."

JD: Now, they're not more important to me now. They're just like that [balanced]. I think that if I had been a better writer, they'd be like that [writing outweighs children]. Or maybe if I'd had my own children they'd be like that [children outweigh writing].

WT: To me and with other people, whether they're artists or in other professions, if you have a certain amount of talent you can write at a certain level very easily. It's almost like an athlete going into training. If you were able or interested in devoting yourself exclusively to something for a long period of time, a year, two years, five years, you might become much better than you were previously. The question is, what do you have to give up, or what are you willing to give up to do that?

JD: I was never willing to give up everything and just write, which probably means I didn't have the drive to be a top, genius, remembered writer. Because even the men who did that, the men we remember, gave up practically everything to write.

WT: I don't consider most of them geniuses. Certainly there were some and probably to me they excelled either because they wanted to or in spite of themselves, but a lot of them were people who were talented but not geniuses, who plugged along day after day, year after year, and perhaps made decisions about sacrificing things that other people weren't willing to sacrifice, like their family.

JD: Even Shakespeare didn't have a very happy personal life, and yet he is, I think, the outstanding genius. That's real genius. Like Mozart. I minored in music at Wellesly and I don't have any talent to create music but he and Mozart just got it from heaven. Because they had it to a degree. You can analyze them but where the inspiration came from. It just flowed into him and he wrote it down. And Shakespeare the same way. But his private life was a misery. He fell in love with the wrong person, abandoned his early wife. But he had this other thing. He just couldn't help it. There it was. Flowed in. Flowed out. I never really understood Shakespeare until I had a small operation on my foot and a nurse brought me an omnium compendium of English poetry and I lived on it for a week in the hospital. And I discovered that other people tried to write English but Shakespeare did it.

WT: We were talking about the protective feeling mothers have for their children, and it comes out a lot in your work. You use the analogy of a tigress fighting for her cubs, and you told you last week about some of the incidents in your first play about West Virginia mountaineers that's been lost. And one of the things you mentioned was the son Selby leaving on the train ...

JD: "I'm agonna get 'em."

WT: Right. And with the mother standing there. And it reminded me of your two Indian stories. In both cases the sons are going off on a train to die. The mothers are standing there watching. And the sons are going off to something they don't really understand.

JD: No young sons understand what war they're going into.

WT: It seemed to me that, what you were doing for the Indian stories was taking experiences in your own family and childhood such as the experiences of mountaineers being pulled into the 20th century because of World War I similar to the Indians who were being overwhelmed by white men's ...

JD: Yes.

WT: ... civilization and how they dealt with it. And yet the similarity between the two was that mothers and sons are mothers and sons, whether their Appalachian or Indian.

JD: Grow up on a farm and you'll know that.

WT: And that the theme is there and carries through into other works. Your story "Return" where the woman gives her child back ...

JD: Because the child is happier that way.

WT: And one of the themes that you seem to be dealing with is a conflict between a mother's natural wish to protect her children and be with them and a wish also for them to have the best, even if it means being separated from their mother.

JD: For as long as we can trace the stories of the human race mothers have done just that.

WT: But it's not easy is it?

JD: No.

WT: It's something I would guess men have a hard time understanding.

JD: Men couldn't do it. Men are so egocentric. No, they have that terrific ego. You're in my way so I'm going to fight you. Women if they have their children with them will say "That's your side of the road? Well we'll go on this side, but don't you touch my child! To get real fury, try to take a bear's cub away from its mother. They're different. They're not the same kind of people. I'd rather manage men that compete with them. And I have.

WT: The play *Possession* is another good example of dealing with that theme. The mother sacrifices an enormous amount ...

JD: She would do anything for those children to get them a good education.

WT: Sacrifices to the point where ...

JD: That's the story of the man in that picture on the mantle, who was my cousin. James Davis.

WT: Was he a professional artists?

JD: He couldn't be anything else any more than I could be help being a writer.

WT: He grew up in Clarksburg?

JD: Yes. And he was 6 months younger than I was. And we were great friends as children. I was more of a friend with his older sister. But as we grew up a little more we were great friends. Close.

WT: He was your father's brother's son?

JD: No. He was my grandfather's cousin's son. But he was also the child of one of my father's two best friends. His two best friends were cousins.

WT: What was his father's name?

JD: His father was Horner Davis and Carl Vance, whose mother was a Davis, were the same relation to my father and were his two best friends. I've just written a little verse about Cyrus Vance.

WT: Where did he go to school?

JD: Princeton.

WT: Has anyone done any biography?

JD: No.

WT: When did he die?

JD: Not too long. It was about ten years. Before I came back down here, certainly.

Therriault's notes from Interview:

Julia Davis' stepson, Paul West, Jr., was sent off to boarding school by his divorced mother at the age of four. Paul Jr. came to live with Julia and Paul Sr. but had "problems." The boy seemed to blossom when he went into the Marines. But when he returned, Paul Sr. used to take him drinking, and the boy became an alcoholic. Eventually, Paul Jr. married, his drinking problems continued, and he was divorced after a daughter was born. Paul West Jr. committed suicide. Julia Davis, as she was watching Paul Sr. lead his son further into drinking, vowed to herself that, if Paul Sr. ever tried to do the same thing with Ramon she would kill Paul. "I wouldn't just have hurt him or warned him," she said. "I would have killed him." By the time Ramon was older and of drinking age, Paul and Julia were divorced. I mentioned the parallel to Ruhema Martin and her first husband in Julia's Play *Possession*, and she said, although that incident was true, the incident was also based on her own experiences. Characterizing her husband Paul, she said "He was shallow, a hollow man. No substance." She also noted that Ramon's father (Ramon Sender) wanted to marry her, but she refused. "That would have been a disaster," she said. The romance interest in *The Sun Climbs Slow* between Jean Moffat (Julia Davis) and the Spanish children's father, may have been based on actual events at the time. The novel was published in 1940 (midway through Julia's marriage to Paul West, 1933-1949) before Paul joined the service (after Pearl Harbor) and went overseas. The husband of Jean Moffat in the novel (is a missing war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War), who appears briefly at the beginning, is unheard of for a long period, and then reported dead. I didn't follow up on this with Julia Davis, but it seems possible that their marriage was in trouble when the Spanish children arrived and that there were other loves in both Julia's and Paul's lives before they were divorced in 1949.

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