

A Conversation with Ava Jean Brumbaum

San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives

San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives
50 Oak Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

Interview conducted June 25, 2014
Robin Sutherland, Interviewer

San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives

Oral History Project

The Conservatory's Oral History Project has the goal of seeking out and collecting memories of historical significance to the Conservatory through recorded interviews with members of the Conservatory's community, which will then be preserved, transcribed, and made available to the public.

Among the narrators will be former administrators, faculty members, trustees, alumni, and family of former Conservatory luminaries. Through this diverse group, we will explore the growth and expansion of the Conservatory, including its departments, organization, finances and curriculum. We will capture personal memories before they are lost, fill in gaps in our understanding of the Conservatory's history, and will uncover how the Conservatory helped to shape San Francisco's musical culture throughout the past century.

Ava Jean Brumbaum Interview

This interview was conducted at Ava Jean's home in Nicasio, California on Wednesday June 25, 2014 by Robin Sutherland. San Francisco Conservatory of Music archivist Tessa Updike was present for the interview.

Robin Sutherland

The American pianist, Robin Sutherland, studied with Rosina Lhevinne at the Juilliard School and with Paul Hersh at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. While still an undergraduate, he was appointed principal pianist of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra (SFS) by Seiji Ozawa. The recipient of numerous awards, Sutherland was selected at 17 to be sole participant from the USA at the International Bach Festival, held at Lincoln Center. He was a finalist in the International Bach Competition in Washington DC and has performed all of J.S. Bach's keyboard works.

An avid chamber musician, Robin Sutherland is co-director of the Telluride Players and a regular performer at the Bay Chamber Concerts in Rockport, Maine. Many composers have dedicated works to him, and among the world premieres in which he has participated was that of John Adams's *Grand Pianola Music*, with members of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra.

A frequent soloist with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, Robin Sutherland has been featured in Leonard Bernstein's *Age of Anxiety* with Michael Tilson Thomas conducting, in San Francisco and on tour, and last May he was featured in Martin's *Petite Symphonie concertante*. In 1996, his recording of J.S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations* (BWV 988) was released on the d'Note label.

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Ava Jean Brumbaum



Ava Jean being interviewed by Robin Sutherland, June 2014

Ava Jean Brumbaum was born in San Francisco on July 11, 1922. She grew up in Berkeley, California, and attended the John Muir School, Willard Junior High School, the University High School in Oakland, and the University of California, Berkeley. Ava Jean was a member of the Kappa Alpha Gamma sorority at U.C. Berkeley, following in the steps of her two older sisters. Majoring in pre-med, Ava Jean worked in laboratories, including a summer spent working at the Marine Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts.

Ava Jean's involvement with classical music in the Bay Area began with Philip Boone, who enlisted her sorority to help sell box seats to Symphony performances. A member of the Student Forum, Ava Jean loved attending these performances, and worked diligently to fill seats. At U.C. Berkeley, Ava Jean took a class with Albert Elkus, who later became director of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and invited her to join their Board. Chairing the Conservatory's Board for several years, Ava Jean assisted with their move from Sacramento Street to Ortega Street in 1956.

Ava Jean Brumbaum has spent a lifetime supporting and promoting classical music in the Bay Area. At 94 years old, she still attends San Francisco Symphony and Conservatory Board meetings, and actively attends concerts at both.

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June 25, 2014

SUTHERLAND My name is Robin Sutherland, I'm an alumnus of the San Francisco Conservatory and it is my great pleasure to be here interviewing Ava Jean Barber Pischel Brumbaum, on the 25th of June, 2014. I have some questions, and Ava Jean, can we just start at the top?

BRUMBAUM I'm very happy to, Robin, whatever you want to know.

SUTHERLAND I am a tiny bit scripted here. We are dear friends from absolutely decades ago.

BRUMBAUM I think I handed you your diploma.

SUTHERLAND You did, in 1975 at the Hamlin School, because in those days the Conservatory did not have facilities to graduate people. Anyway, I'm going to give you question number one, which is to tell us about your grandparents – where did they come from originally, and what were their occupations?

BRUMBAUM My grandfather was a ship builder and my grandmother told me once that when she was seven years old she went around the world on her father's ship. He built his ship in South Thomaston, Maine. I've seen his house – it was wonderful – it was one of those houses with a widow's walk. I'm sure she had a good life in Maine. She married a man from Maine who had been offered a job in San Francisco. Everybody thought she was very brave – she didn't know this man awfully well, but she got on a train with him and spent the rest of her life on the West Coast. The thing I think is interesting as far as this conversation goes, is that when she was sixteen years old she was sent from South Thomaston to Boston, Massachusetts to the New England Conservatory. She played the piano ... I don't think she ever expected to make a career of it, but she loved to play the piano. She moved into my life about when I was in high school and lived with my family, because her husband died in Berkeley. We all lived in Berkeley. She was a very sweet, loving person, but she was stone deaf so I could not really talk to her very much about her past life. That's one grandparent. The other grandparents I don't think enter into this very much.

SUTHERLAND So you have a connection to the state of Maine. Thomaston being the site of the prison, I think, in Maine.

BRUMBAUM South Thomaston was a little peninsula where they had a great big thing they called the Skids, or something. That's where they built ships, because it's all protected in there. They built these big schooners. And, if you look around this room, you will see a lot of

things that came [from him]. He got into the China trade – that big bowl and those lamps – they all came from his China trade. They were all in my mother’s house, and when she died I had my eye on them. I don’t know what’s going to happen to them now.

SUTHERLAND Your forebearers came from the sea.

BRUMBAUM Yes.

SUTHERLAND Isn’t that interesting, and we’re dealing now, as the Symphony closes its season, with a semi-staged production of *Peter Grimes*, which is about life on the sea. Anyway, I love your connection to the state of Maine.

BRUMBAUM Good! You have one too?

SUTHERLAND Not necessarily. But I love it because for me, you’re Ava Jean Barber from Berkeley, California.

BRUMBAUM I really am Berkeley. Growing up in Berkeley was a very unusual experience, I think.

SUTHERLAND Well, this is perfect! Stop right there, because question number two on my script says, “Please tell us about your parents; their occupations and characteristics.” So keep going, we’re good.

BRUMBAUM Well, my father was born in Carson City, Nevada. His father had a general store in a little town called Brody. Have you ever heard of Brody?

SUTHERLAND Brody! Of course, Brody’s world famous. It’s in the middle of nowhere on the side of a lake.

BRUMBAUM Right, and that’s why they lived there. His mother was named California Ferris, and her brother invented the Ferris Wheel! I never paid much attention to that until I started reading a book which came out just before Christmas (I gave it to all of my relatives) about George Ferris. Apparently it was a real engineering feat in those days – sort of to compete with the Eiffel Tower. I didn’t know – I always thought, “You go to every fair and they have a little Ferris Wheel.” I never was very proud of that. But I am proud of George Ferris.

SUTHERLAND So George Ferris was the brother of your grandmother.

BRUMBAUM He was, and they lived in Carson City, Nevada.

SUTHERLAND And he invented the damn Ferris Wheel – that’s awesome!

BRUMBAUM It was for a big exposition in Chicago. I forget what year that was.

SUTHERLAND It was 1893.

BRUMBAUM Good for you! Have you been doing your homework?

SUTHERLAND I just happen to know, because that’s where a lot of people got their start, at that exposition.

BRUMBAUM It was really quite an engineering feat, in those days. And I never really appreciated that until I read a book about it.

SUTHERLAND Question number three is going to be super simple. Where and when were you born?

BRUMBAUM I was born in San Francisco, for some reason. My parents lived in Berkeley. I never found out why, there must have been some special doctor in San Francisco that my mother went to. But anyway, I really spent my entire life in Berkeley.

SUTHERLAND I would have thought you would have been born at Alta Bates. I don’t know why.

BRUMBAUM I’m probably older than Alta Bates. I’m not sure about that.

SUTHERLAND I think of you as a Berkeley girl. Are you prepared to divulge the year of your birth?

BRUMBAUM 1922. That means in about two weeks I will be 92.

SUTHERLAND July.

BRUMBAUM July 11th. Good for you, Robin, you remember.

SUTHERLAND Okay, here’s question number four. “What was it like to grow up in the East Bay? How was the East Bay different when you were a child than it is today?”

BRUMBAUM Well, Berkeley was special.

SUTHERLAND Tell me about it.

BRUMBAUM Well, there were very nice, sort of solid people, living all the way around. I went to a school called John Muir School. My parents were a little older than most of my friends' parents, but they all knew each other. We went from John Muir School to Willard Junior High School, to University High School in Oakland, to the University of California. At my sixty-fifth reunion from the University of California, I was at one time standing and talking to a group of people – there were thirteen of us who all went to kindergarten together.

SUTHERLAND Thirteen of you?!

BRUMBAUM Thirteen of us had gone all through those schools together. And they're still my friends – well, if they're living they are.

SUTHERLAND Had you remained on speaking terms with all of them?

BRUMBAUM Absolutely. I knew them all well.

SUTHERLAND That is awesome, Ava Jean! Given the span of time that transpired.

BRUMBAUM It was Berkeley, it was that way. We all knew the people at the University of California, we all knew President Sproul and his children. Not one of us ever considered going to any school except Berkeley – the University of California, Berkeley.

SUTHERLAND I remember – I will just interject here – at the testimonial dinner for you in the Wattis room – we had the octet from the University of California come and sing for you.

BRUMBAUM It was a bunch of male singers.

SUTHERLAND It was eight guys, and they came and sang for you, and I thought that was one of the coolest things that I had ever seen. Did you know those gentlemen personally?

BRUMBAUM Oh no, they were way too young for me to know. My children – Kap was the only one who went to the University of California, and he didn't finish there. But my children didn't go to the University of California. Ava went to the University of California in Santa Barbara.

SUTHERLAND Well, that still counts. It's just not the home campus, that's all.

BRUMBAUM We were very faithful to the University of California. We grew up with it, it was around us all the time. Our parents knew the people who were there. We had the same rules, we had to be home at a certain time. You know, in those days it was two o'clock in the morning that we could stay out – that's ridiculous, if you ask me! But if we went dating, we could stay out until two o'clock. My sorority allowed that.

SUTHERLAND Really? That seems kind of late to me.

BRUMBAUM I thought it was very late.

SUTHERLAND So you were content in your Berkeley nest?

BRUMBAUM Very happy.

SUTHERLAND And yet, you have friends in the Stanford community?

BRUMBAUM Well, in those days the Big Game was the most important thing. The football game, Stanford vs. Cal, we all went to it and we didn't even think about Stanford! Never thought about going there. It was really a wonderful life, growing up in Berkeley. We all knew each other, and our parents knew each other. It was very sheltered. I can remember when I first met Harold Pischel – his office was on Sixth and Mission Street.

SUTHERLAND Sixth Street, as opposed to Sixth Avenue.

BRUMBAUM Yes. The first time I went over to pick him up, was the first time I'd ever seen a drunk lying in the street. I had never, never heard of that. My father was a very strict prohibitionist, so there was very little liquor in our house. It was during prohibition.

SUTHERLAND Well, you've touched on some things that are in my script already ... let us just go at random to number nine, which is, "Do you remember any of your early teachers through high school?"

BRUMBAUM Yes, I do. Mostly from my elementary school, John Muir School.

SUTHERLAND Why don't you share something about them.

BRUMBAUM I don't remember them very well. I remember a couple of names ... I remember once I picked up ten cents off of somebody's desk and it wasn't mine and I got

caught. I never did that again – I was told by that teacher ... I can't remember her name. Oh, I don't remember the names too well, it was so long ago! I do remember some teachers from the University of California.

SUTHERLAND Well then, do share that with us, please.

BRUMBAUM I thought I wanted to be a doctor. I completed my pre-med with the exception of organic chemistry lab, I never finished that. And I took a lot of zoology. One of the zoology professors spent the summer in the same place I did. I used to play tennis with him, and so forth. What was his name? I can't quite remember. But I was always glad that I majored in pre-med because I got a lot of laboratory experience. My father said to me, "I hope when you graduate from college, you will be prepared to earn a living." So I looked at laboratories the whole time I was going to school. I had a doctor friend who asked me to be his receptionist one summer, and I'm so glad I did that. He had a lab in his office – he was with a group of doctors. I learned that the main thing they did was urine analysis, and the other kind of analysis, and I thought, "I don't want to do that kind of lab work!"

SUTHERLAND So that was the end of that.

BRUMBAUM That was the end of that. However, when I finished my third year in college, my sorority was having a convention in Chicago.

SUTHERLAND Let's stop briefly, and remind us all – our listening audience – what was your sorority?

BRUMBAUM I was a Kappa Alpha Theta.

SUTHERLAND Kappa Alpha Theta. I think that's good to know.

BRUMBAUM I'm sure it doesn't matter to anyone else who wasn't one.

SUTHERLAND It matters to me.

BRUMBAUM My two sisters had been, and I decided I was supposed to join that sorority. I considered joining the Kappa Kappa Gamma's, and I was asked, but I didn't do it because my two sisters would have been very disappointed in me.

SUTHERLAND How many young Barbers were there converging on the University of California at that moment?

BRUMBAUM There were four. I had two older sisters, and one younger brother. The sisters were seven and eleven years older than I, and led very different lives than I did. I admired them and was interested in their boyfriends ... my older sister made me an aunt when I was in junior high, and that gave me quite a bit of importance. Suddenly I had a nephew and I was a baby.

SUTHERLAND You weren't even out of high school!

BRUMBAUM I was only twelve, or something like that. My younger brother was only fifteen months younger than I, and we were very close friends, always.

SUTHERLAND Tell me what you did, as you and he grew up.

BRUMBAUM Well, I can remember in elementary school there was one boy – when I went to college I used to date him, I really liked him – but when he was younger he was a big bully. He used to be tough, and my bother would defend me. He'd get out there if we were playing games out on the school grounds, and he would come up and make sure that I was okay. I was very fond of that brother. He died in '76, I think.

SUTHERLAND And his name was?

BRUMBAUM Tom Barber. And his children – he has a son named Tom Barber, who is a distinguished doctor in Oakland – the Chief of Orthopedics at Kaiser Hospital. A very busy guy, he has four children.

SUTHERLAND And he is your nephew.

BRUMBAUM He's my nephew. My father was born in Carson City. We had a house up at Fallen Leaf Lake, which is very near the Nevada border. We used to drive over to Carson quite often, he had some cousins living there.

SUTHERLAND This is the property you hold most dear to this day.

BRUMBAUM Fallen Leaf Lake. But we used to go over to Carson City. I had never been out of California, except to go to Nevada – to drive over the summit and down into Carson City. I went to this sorority convention – I wasn't supposed to, the president was supposed to – but she didn't want to go. She was a tennis player and she wanted to be around for the tennis matches during the summer. So I got a chance to go to this convention in Chicago. I just said to myself, "I am going to see more of the United States than I have ever seen before. I'm not coming home for the summer." Well, as luck would have it, the sorority supported one of

their alumnae who was involved in a medical career at the University of California. Her husband was a professor at Berkeley. And she needed an assistant for the summer, and I got the job – and guess where it was? Woods Hole, Massachusetts.

SUTHERLAND No kidding.

BRUMBAUM Out on Cape Cod. So my father said, “Yes, I will send you, if you want – any way to get a chance to go see more of the United States than you’ve ever seen here, I will help you do that and buy you a train ticket that takes you all around the United States.” So I went on the train on the northern part, came home on the southern part, and spent the summer at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, which was absolutely a wonderful place to spend the summer. It was called the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole. It was very distinguished, it had people who had earned all kinds of degrees, and so forth. It was a very interesting summer, I met lots of very interesting people. Plus the fact that it was right on Buzzard’s Bay, and Buzzard’s Bay was full of ships going over to the war in Europe. Lots of traffic. Lots of interesting Navy men were around there, too. It was a growing up experience. I was probably nineteen, and I’d never been out of California, except over the hill in Nevada. It was a wonderful experience. I was always able to get a lab job after I got home, too. When I graduated from college I worked in two different laboratories. First of all, I was writing a bacteriology paper. In those days, the lab where doctors spent their first year cutting up people in formaldehyde was in Berkeley, and I happened to be right next to that lab, and the smell of formaldehyde ... I just decided that I didn’t want to go to college for six more years. To be a good doctor, I would have to go six more years. So I just got a lab job. It was at a government lab in Berkeley, and I learned a lot about bureaucracy. I had a big lab – as big as this room – full of equipment which I never used. I mostly made coffee for my bosses and did things like that. I really didn’t have any interesting work at that lab. Well, then I decided I wanted another job, but that’s another story, after I met Harold Pischel. He helped me find my second job.

SUTHERLAND Well, I think the fact of your meeting Harold Pischel is crucial to your importance to the Conservatory. And I want to know – how did you venture from the world of biology and zoology and things ... where did you find your love for –

BRUMBAUM Music.

SUTHERLAND What it is that we do at the Conservatory? Was there a single thing that occurred?

BRUMBAUM There was a single thing, and a single person. His name was Philip Boone.

SUTHERLAND Tell us about Phil Boone.

BRUMBAUM Somehow I met him when I was a freshman. He lived in Berkeley, and I thought he was an interesting guy. It was the best thing that ever happened to me, because he was about to start a Student Forum. He had met Howard Skinner, who was the Executive Director of the Symphony at that time. We had another exposition out at Treasure Island.

SUTHERLAND 1939.

BRUMBAUM Robin remembers every date!

SUTHERLAND I just know these things.

BRUMBAUM Phil had worked out there, and he had met Howard Skinner. And Howard liked him. It was obvious that it was necessary to get younger people interested in music – in the Symphony. This man had been running the Symphony as the Executive Director for a long time. Anyway, the Symphony was taking place in the Opera House in those days; we did not have a Symphony Hall yet. They had not been able to sell their box seats because they were the most expensive seats in the house. Phil Boone got an idea. He went home, and the next time he talked to Howard he had lined up eleven fraternities and sororities.

SUTHERLAND One of which was yours.

BRUMBAUM One of which was mine – my Kappa Alpha Theta. So he sold all the box seats for Howard Skinner, just like that. So then we had all these box seats, and we had to fill them. My job in my sorority was to make sure that all eight seats were filled whenever there was a concert. Strangely enough, I met a young man who loved classical music. He was the only person I knew who did. He played the piano, and he was in a fraternity. They didn't like him practicing the piano at their place, and so I invited him to come play. I don't know where it came from, but we had a Steinway baby grand in our house.

SUTHERLAND In the Barber home.

BRUMBAUM Well, mother played the piano, but not seriously. She always played Christmas carols so we could sing, and things like that. But Craig Woolley came very often to use our piano, and I discovered that he also liked to go to Symphony concerts. I must say, I think I used Craig a little bit, but he and I used to go to the all of the Symphony concerts together. And you want to know something funny?

SUTHERLAND Tell me.

BRUMBAUM He's 94 years old, and he called me this morning.

SUTHERLAND I love that.

BRUMBAUM He lives in Minneapolis. I talked to him this morning.

SUTHERLAND Does he still practice the piano?

BRUMBUAM He still takes piano lessons! And he's 94. Every now and then he'll send me a disc that he's put together. He said, "When I'm playing a recital, the next oldest person is usually thirteen."

SUTHERLAND This talk of Phil Boone ... and this will never translate in this audio interview, unfortunately, but I have to say it ... I'm looking at a picture of you and Phil Boone in the same room as Pierre Monteux. [Looking in *Music for a City, Music for the World: 100 Years with the San Francisco Symphony* by Larry Rothe.]

BRUMBAUM Really?

SUTHERLAND I'll show it to you. Just look at it. I think this is important.

BRUMBAUM Yes, there's Pierre. And there I am with a horrible hat on.

SUTHERLAND It's a marvelous hat.

BRUMBAUM That's Phil Boone. And this is the Student Forum – the main part of the Student Forum. And I have to give credit to Howard Skinner – he knew how to get young people interested in music. We would go out and have dinner with Pierre Monteux sometimes. He would bring other musicians over – this was Leonora Wood Armsby, who really started the San Francisco Symphony. Howard Skinner was very smart, and he became a very close friend of Phil and myself. I remember he was dying, and Phil and I became close friends as couples and families as we grew up in San Francisco. Howard Skinner was dying, and was in the hospital. We were going someplace together, and Phil said to me, "Let's go see Howard." We saw him – it was night – we had both been to see him, so we knew where he was. He was in the hospital and we went in about two days before he died. I am so grateful to Phil Boone. You see what a small guy he was, but all these people got interested and stayed interested in the Symphony. This lady was president of the Board – and look, it was during the war. We sold tickets – Army, Navy, the whole group. What does it say? "Surrounded by forum admirers. Opening night in

1943. Military personnel hear the orchestra at the War Memorial Opera House, where throughout the war they attended concerts free of charge.” I didn’t know it was free of charge.

SUTHERLAND That was the arrangement that was made.

BRUMBAUM It changed my life, there’s no question about it.

SUTHERLAND So you attribute it mostly to Phil Boone.

BRUMBAUM And the Student Forum. I was right in the middle of it.

SUTHERLAND Okay, and that’s the Symphony. Where does the love affair with the Conservatory come in?

BRUMBAUM That came later, I’ll tell you about that in a minute. The Student Forum – we were a bunch of college kids who didn’t know much about music at all. Howard Skinner made a point of bringing well-known musicians over to have dinner with us, or to speak to us. We would gather a little group of people together in somebody’s sorority house, or fraternity house, and have a speaker before the concert that we were going to go to the next time. I don’t know what my job was, but I was very active in the Student Forum. I liked it, and I liked going to symphonies, and I soon got very intrigued with classical music. My brother used to say, “You would come home from college, and go up and lock yourself in your room.” I was buying vinyl records with every cent I had, and I still have them. They’re right in that next room over there.

SUTHERLAND They’re not in your garage?

BRUMBAUM No, they’re in the room. I don’t know what to do with them. I remember I loved Tchaikovsky, I liked Rachmaninoff’s concertos. I had no background in this, I just learned a lot about classical music, just listening. And ... well, you know what it’s done to my life – it’s made a difference in my whole life.

SUTHERLAND Well, it’s informed your entire life, and your life has informed the classical music situation in the Bay Area admirably.

BRUMBAUM Well, I don’t know about that.

SUTHERLAND I don’t overstate the issue here at all. In fact, Peter – when I was in school in Colorado with your son – he said, “If you ever get to San Francisco you should meet my mother, she’s involved in classical music.”

BRUMBAUM Oh really?

SUTHERLAND And who knew this would turn out this way?

BRUMBAUM I got really into the Student Forum completely. I can remember going to – Albert Elkus was the head of the music department at Berkeley, and I would go and speak to him and ask him, “Which of your professors do you think would be good to speak to our student group?” So we would have these little meetings, and I got to know Albert Elkus slightly. This is jumping up, but when he retired as Chairman of the Music Department at Berkeley, California (I keep saying Berkeley, it’s Cal) he became Chairman [Director] of the Conservatory. He is the one who invited me on the Board of the Music Conservatory. That was the other nice thing in my life, that I got involved with these two different organizations.

But before that I wanted to tell you something about Phil Boone. This was in 1942 or so – ’43 [1941] was Pearl Harbor – all the men that were at the University of California disappeared. My brother went to ... the Navy sent him to med school in Rochester... all the men disappeared. When I graduated from the University in 1943, I think there were only about three men left to get their diplomas. They were all scattered around. The Army and the Navy paid for their careers. My brother, for instance, he went to med school but the University of California gave him a degree in pre-med. When all the men disappeared, I became Chairman of the Student Forum. That’s why I probably was asked on the Board of the Symphony and, as I say, Albert Elkus was then Chairman [Director] of the Music Conservatory; after he retired I think he did a short time, about five years, but he asked me to go on that Board. These people were smart – everybody on that Board was eighty-years-old, it seemed to me, as I went to Board meetings. Tessa [Conservatory archivist], in that list you gave me, you wanted to know how I knew certain people. They were on that Board, mostly.

UPDIKE That’s right, I think Robin has that.

SUTHERLAND I have the list. So Albert Elkus was the force that drew you onto the Conservatory’s....

BRUMBAUM He invited me. And you know what he said? This is famous, I’ll never forget. “There won’t be any fundraising.”

SUTHERLAND He said that to you.

BRUMBAUM He said that to me. Mrs. Hellman was on the Board. The reason the Conservatory did not have to raise funds – they were still in that Sacramento Street home of Ada

Clement – a private home on Sacramento Street. And Mrs. Hellman picked up the tab every month. That’s what Albert told me.

SUTHERLAND This is Ruth Koshland Hellman – Nancy Bechtle’s mother?

BRUMBAUM No, Warren Hellman’s wife. Warren Hellman was head of the bank, Wells Fargo bank.

SUTHERLAND This is the Ruth and Marco Hellman Hall thing?

BRUMBAUM No, they were brothers.

SUTHERLAND They were all named Warren and Marco, that’s the problem with that family.

BRUMBAUM The Hellman’s were all related. There was a wonderful book, written by ...

SUTHERLAND Frances Dinkelspiel.

BRUMBAUM Frances Dinkelspiel, who was the granddaughter of Warren Hellman.

SUTHERLAND *City of Gold. [Towers of Gold]*

BRUMBAUM All the Hellman’s are related. Mrs. Hellman, who was on that Board, was a very old lady. I wasn’t a very good judge ... if they were sixty, they seemed like they were very old in those days. I remember going to the Board meetings, and it was a case of Albert Elkus saying, “We’ve got to get younger people!” They were all in their sixties, seventies, eighties. But, of course, they could pick up the tab. And they did.

SUTHERLAND And that’s the reason the arts organizations in San Francisco are as vibrant as they are.

BRUMBAUM Absolutely. Thanks to people like the Hellmans, the Haases....

SUTHERLAND The Jewish philanthropic families.

BRUMBAUM And do you know, in Frances Dinkelspiel's book, she mentions that those three families that were so prominent in San Francisco, all immigrated from [Reckendorf], in Bavaria, near the same time.

SUTHERLAND In the early 1850s they all came from Bavaria. And they all ended up in the Bay Area.

BRUMBAUM Well, Warren Hellman started out in Los Angeles. But he eventually came up here.

SUTHERLAND Isaias Hellman – his grandfather.

BRUMBAUM I think you're right.

SUTHERLAND He came up here and founded Wells Fargo bank. You can say he didn't do so bad. Well, now we're on the list – we've discussed Albert Elkus and Mrs. I.W. Hellman.

BRUMBAUM Oh, I want to tell you about Albert Elkus. He gave the best class I ever attended. It was called Music 27A and B, which I took as a senior. It was the only music class I ever had – that's all I really know about music. I wish I knew a lot more about being a musician, and so forth. But I took his class. He had a dreadful stutter. My first two lectures, I thought, "I can't stand this." He stuttered so badly when he lectured, you got so you just loved the man. He was able to give out his tremendous love of music, and it was the best class I ever took at Cal, I just loved it. And he was head of the music department. He had different famous people as speakers who came in ... it was a wonderful class, and I learned the very little I know about music. Our senior exam was Mozart's *40th Symphony*, and we had to identify each theme as it came on – was it A or B – and put them all together, and that's all I learned ever about music. I don't know much about it, but I learned to love it. That's more about Albert Elkus.

SUTHERLAND It's interesting, when I was admitted to the Conservatory, I was awarded the scholarship that bore his name. I didn't ask for it, it was just given to me. Sadly, I never knew him.

BRUMBAUM He was an adorable man. I just loved him.

SUTHERLAND But his wife Elizabeth, I came to know quite well, and now their son Jonathan Elkus, who is now retired of course. But Elizabeth I knew. Albert Elkus I didn't know, but I did bear the scholarship bearing his name.

BRUMBAUM Well, Harold Pischel and I got to know the Elkuses too. In fact, we invited them up to our place at Fallen Leaf Lake one summer, and we saw them socially. I was very fond of Elizabeth and Albert.

SUTHERLAND Wasn't she divine? So proper.

BRUMBAUM He was just a lovely man, he was.

SUTHERLAND Well, we've discussed him. Shall we go on? How's the old brain doing there? Next on my list is Ada Clement and Lillian Hodghead.

BRUMBAUM I really didn't know them. I think I may have met Lillian, but Ada Clement I don't think I ever met. I knew who they were – at the Conservatory the first two or three meetings I went to for the Board were in her house on Sacramento Street. But it wasn't long before we moved out [to Ortega Street]. I was a good friend of Joan Escobosa. Her husband was the head of I. Magnin, and was a pretty distinguished man. Joan was a very smart lady, and she was president of the Board. I went on the Board I think at her request. I became Vice Chairman, and eventually Chairman, of that board, later.

SUTHERLAND Well, when the school moved to Ortega Street, you were the Chair of the Trustees.

BRUMBAUM I've never forgotten that.

SUTHERLAND I know that for a fact. That was 1956?

BRUMBAUM But the Conservatory was nothing compared to what it is now. You just can't imagine how simple it was. We bought this building that had been a children's ... what was it? It was for babies and little kids [infant shelter], and we had to change all the toilets, because they were only this high off the floor!

SUTHERLAND Do you happen to remember the price tag of the building at 1201 Ortega Street?

BRUMBAUM No, but I'll tell you one thing. On the Board was Mortimer Fleishhacker, Daniel Koshland, and people who were the big businessmen in San Francisco, and the big fundraisers. It couldn't have happened without them. Those two I knew the best, but there were other people on the Board that came from the distinguished older people who had been on the Board, like Mrs. Hellman.

SUTHERLAND Let us just touch briefly on Morty Fleishhacker, if you don't mind, because he's on my list here of people to ask you about.

BRUMBAUM Well, I didn't know him awfully well, but he was very, very supportive. A good fundraiser, a well-known name in San Francisco. I had the feeling that I was just a kid, I didn't know anybody in San Francisco of that caliber, but they could just go to their friends and ask for some money, and get it. They did all the fundraising.

SUTHERLAND They did all of that. So that's Mortimer Fleishhacker. Would you work Daniel Koshland into that same...?

BRUMBAUM Yes. He was running Levi Strauss at that time, I think.

SUTHERLAND Right. Because his cousin was Walter Haas.

BRUMBAUM He was married to...

SUTHERLAND He was married to Eleanor, who was Walter's sister. His sister was Maggie Sloss. Remember Maggie?

BRUMBAUM We're talking about the really wonderful Jewish families who were so involved in building San Francisco's artistic community, both museums, orchestras, everything. Without them...

SUTHERLAND We wouldn't exist. None of us.

BRUMBAUM We really wouldn't. They were so important. As far as moving into the new building ... I didn't do any fundraising. I was Chairman of the Board, but I didn't know anybody like that. They did all the fundraising. They just went to their friends, and were able to raise the money that was needed. They were very supportive. Dan Koshland and Morty Fleishhacker ... I don't know what I was doing as Chairman of that Board! I had no business being Chairman. But they didn't want to be Chairman, and so I did all the little stuff, and they did all the fundraising. They were very supportive of me as Chairman of the Board. I can't think who else....

SUTHERLAND Well, there's another name here. It's interesting, the day I came to the Conservatory, Milton Salkind introduced me to two people first of all.

BRUMBAUM Ruth Lilienthal.

SUTHERLAND Dan Koshland was one, and the other was Ruth Haas Lilienthal. They were lunching with him that day, and he said, “Oh, meet Robin, he’s the new piano player here.” At that time, I had no idea who they were. I just thought they were two sort of old, very sweet people. I didn’t realize that I had just been introduced to two of the titans....

BRUMBAUM Well, Ruth Lilienthal was an absolutely lovely person. In those days, whenever there was a concert and there was going to be a little reception afterwards, Ruth and I and Joan Escobosa, all made cookies and served ... it was informal in those days. Ruth was an absolute dear. She was always available to do anything we needed. And she had people to help her do it. We got to know each other pretty well, by just always being hostesses at all the gatherings. After every concert, we always did that. I just loved Ruth Lilienthal. We worked together a lot.

SUTHERLAND She was the sweetest thing ever.

BRUMBAUM Was it her sister who was married to Dan Koshland?

SUTHERLAND Dan married Eleanor Haas, who was the sister of Walter Haas. But the point is, without the Jewish philanthropic families in this community....

BRUMBAUM No Symphony, no Music Conservatory.

SUTHERLAND It would be pretty grim. We still have ... you look at the commemorative wall at the Conservatory ... all those names are still there.

BRUMBAUM Well, you still read the Haases, and the Goldmans....

SUTHERLAND They’re all the same family! It’s kind of interesting, isn’t it, how that happened. Here’s some more names. Adolph Baller.

BRUMBAUM I didn’t know him at all. But he was the mainstay of the Conservatory. He was the pianist that everybody came for.

SUTHERLAND Well, he was with the Alma Trio.

BRUMBAUM I guess so. But I really didn’t know him at all. But I knew he was very important for the Conservatory. He was the most important teacher at the Conservatory at that time.

SUTHERLAND Here’s another name. Alfred Frankenstein.

BRUMBAUM Well, I got to know Alfred pretty well. He moved to Sixth Avenue and lived directly across the street from me. Harold Pischel and I bought a house on Sixth Avenue.

SUTHERLAND Number fifteen.

BRUMBAUM Number fifteen. Three houses from the Presidio. The Presidio was right there. The house was kind of a mess. It belonged to a well-known lawyer, I can't remember his name. I've never forgotten – we made it our TV room – but he had built a mantel that looked like a fireplace, but there was no flue. There was no place to burn anything! I didn't like it very much, but we needed a house; I was about to have a baby. We turned out to love that house. Living on Sixth Avenue, we knew all the neighbors at the top – including Alfred and Sylvia Frankenstein. Alfred Frankenstein was the music critic for the San Francisco Chronicle, and he was well-known around.

SUTHERLAND He always liked me, and I was adoring of him.

BRUMBAUM I loved Alfred. We got to be friends because we lived on the same block. Living on Sixth Avenue was a wonderful experience. I can remember a couple Fourth of Julys where we wouldn't let any cars come up and had a barbeque right in the middle of the street for all the neighbors. It was really fun to live there. And it was a great place to raise children, because they could play ball on the street, and be perfectly safe. But I'll tell you, when it came to Halloween, when they all go knocking on your door and want candy, people would just park their cars at the bottom of the street and say to the kids, "OK you're safe, go on up to Sixth Avenue." We never could eat dinner because so many children came up and rang our doorbell all the time, and we had to open the door and give them candy. But it was a fun place to live, it really was.

SUTHERLAND Let me continue on this list. The next thing that comes up is the Griller Quartet.

BRUMBAUM I heard them several times, but I did not know them personally. But they were important to the Conservatory; they were the biggest name.

SUTHERLAND Well, the cellist of the Griller Quartet was Colin Hampton, who then went on to marry a woman named Bonnie.

BRUMBAUM The Grillers were a big name. When I came on the Conservatory Board they were a big name, but I didn't know anything about quartets. I got to learn about quartets, though, through Peter [Oundjian].

SUTHERLAND Well, he's another name on my list. Let me just sort of take these down – Marion Murray. I remember her, she ran the Preparatory Department.

BRUMBAUM I remember her, but I didn't know her very well.

SUTHERLAND Do you have anything you'd like to share about Richard Howe? Dick Howe, the dean.

BRUMBAUM No. I worked with him, and I liked him, but I didn't know him socially.

SUTHERLAND What about May Kurka, the director of the Preparatory?

BRUMBAUM I just knew them from the work I did at the Conservatory. I was there often.

SUTHERLAND They were tremendously dedicated, always. Marion Murray and May Kurka were.

BRUMBAUM Very dedicated people. The Conservatory was really nothing compared to what it is now.

SUTHERLAND But I think it's from the dedication of persons such as yourself....

BRUMBAUM Not myself, but the people who taught there.

SUTHERLAND Here's another name, Jimmy Schwabacher.

BRUMBAUM I'll tell you about Jimmy. Jimmy Schwabacher and I met through the Student Forum, and we became very good friends. We even dated, later on in our lives. We became very close friends. I remember after moving out here, Jimmy was alone, his family was all gone. I invited him to come out and see some wildflowers. We drove around, after I lived out here.

SUTHERLAND Oh, you invited him out here. How nice.

BRUMBAUM Jimmy and I were very good friends socially. I was often at his house, he was often at mine ... I didn't entertain as much as he did. We were very good friends, and I was very fond of Jimmy. And as far as him being gay; in those days we didn't talk about it. I didn't really know my sons were gay, and I didn't know he was gay in those days. I knew that there were certain older men who always lived alone and never got married, but I didn't really know why. But I found out.

SUTHERLAND This is wonderful. Now, I'm going to have to ask you to edit your thoughts about these next three people. Peter Oundjian, Milton Salkind and Colin Murdoch. I know you have a billion pages of thoughts about each one of them.

BRUMBAUM Peter Oundjian and Milton Salkind became maybe my closest friends. Peter first came when Milton Salkind became Chairman [Director] of the Conservatory, and was for what – twenty-five years? During which time I was Chairman of the Board for a while. That meant I spent a lot of time with Milton. During that time Peggy Salkind decided to move out. Milton was devastated. I used to invite him here. Harold was fond of him, and there was never any jealousy or anything like that. But at one point he was almost my best friend. We went to concerts together ... we had gone as a couple when Peggy was with Milton. When she moved out he was devastated and we had him for Christmas parties and Thanksgiving and family things. I just adored Milton, and I learned a lot [from him]. I went to a lot of concerts with Milton – Harold and Milton and I.

SUTHERLAND Harold number two or Harold number one?

BRUMBAUM Number one [Pischel]. We went with Milton and Peggy to a lot of concerts, and then when Peggy left and Milton was alone we did a lot of things with him. It was an education for me to be with Milton that much. I learned a lot about musicians and about music just by talking to him. I saw him a lot and he was very important in my life. I have a picture of him holding my babies and things like that because he needed a family at that point. His wife had left him and his daughter was in Chicago, or in New York.

Peter [Oundjian] was very important in my life. I consider Peter almost as a son of mine. Milton Salkind planned a month in the summer as chamber music. It was a very important thing. He at one time was chairman of NASM – National Association of Schools of Music. He had been traveling around, had been to a lot of Conservatories, and met a lot of professional men and women. He decided that it would be very helpful for San Francisco to have a month of chamber music and invite some of these professionals for our students to play with, and then he invited some of the best students from say ... Juilliard. Peter Oundjian was one of them. Milton called me one day and said, "Ava Jean, I've promised everybody who's coming to this chamber music...." What do you call it?

SUTHERLAND Chamber Music West.

BRUMBAUM He said, “I’ve invited all these people and I told them I’d find them someplace to live. I have four students and I can’t find them a place to live.” Well, you know where those four students came.

SUTHERLAND They moved right to Sixth Avenue.

BRUMBAUM I had had four children, and they were all gone. And so I had four bedrooms. So I took the four music students, and that was an absolute education for me in chamber music because we went to all the concerts that they gave. One of them was Peter Oundjian. He was at Juilliard School in those days, and was a violinist. As I said, Harold and I really had a great time with those guys. We did this for several years, and Peter Oundjian almost always came back. It was for a month every summer. Sometimes we’d let him stay in our house if we were away in the mountains or someplace. Nicky Mann was another one.

SUTHERLAND The son of Bobby Mann.

BRUMBAUM About a year ago he came out with his father – his father had left the Juilliard String Quartet and formed another string quartet. He was in his eighties or nineties, and had started another quartet. We went out to the community music school and heard him play.

SUTHERLAND And how was it?

BRUMBAUM It was good. But I’m not a very discerning person, I must say. But I started to tell you about Peter. Peter came every year for several years, and we formed a real attachment with each other. We are very close. In fact, Peter used to call me his West Coast Mom. He even announced that from the stage once.

SUTHERLAND At Davies, I was there.

BRUMBAUM You were there?

SUTHERLAND I thought it was completely cute.

BRUMBAUM It was very cute. I was thrilled. Peter left the Conservatory to be the violinist with the Tokyo String Quartet. I thought Peter played the violin marvelously.

SUTHERLAND He was masterful.

BRUMBAUM I really laugh, because he sent me all the recordings of the Tokyo String Quartet, and we always went. Harold Pischel and I always went to the concerts if they were in San Francisco. Their last concert was about two years ago, and I went. There were two Japanese left in the quartet, and it was the last of their San Francisco concerts, and they still remembered me.

SUTHERLAND Well, you're not that easily forgettable.

BRUMBAUM In fact, I think they even came ... well, I'll tell you, Peter did things like that ... when Harold Pischel died he got the quartet to play a special memorial concert in my church. And then he talked about why he was doing that, and it was very touching. I'll tell you something else about Peter; his last concert with the Tokyo Quartet – he was there twelve or fourteen years, I don't remember – he got dystonia. These two fingers weren't working very well and he knew he was going to have to leave the quartet. Their last concert was in Avery Fisher Hall in Lincoln Center. It was an AIDS benefit, and he dedicated the concert to my two sons. Harold Brumbaum was not a great lover of New York, but I talked him into it and we went back to New York for that.

SUTHERLAND How perfect.

BRUMBAUM It was. Peter's father was there, and they had a party afterwards. It was exciting to me, I had never had much to do with Avery Fisher Hall, or the whole New York scene. So it was really exciting for me to be there. But Harold Pischel laughed, because in all of my quartet recordings, I love to hear the first violin. Harold used to say, "That's just like a mom talking!" I don't know if he can still play the violin or not.

SUTHERLAND If he were able to I think he could.

BRUMBAUM André Previn had a concert that he couldn't play. Peter had been doing some conducting; he'd been running a festival. What was that festival in New York that he did in the summer? I can't think of the name of it. But he had done some conducting and André Previn gave him a chance to conduct at some famous concert and suddenly he was the conductor of the Tokyo String Quartet! And still is.

SUTHERLAND Can I ask you about some other personalities?

BRUMBAUM OK, but I just want to tell you, Peter is very special in my life.

SUTHERLAND I know. He's your pool house boy, with his kids, right? He comes here.

BRUMBAUM Right. He calls me. He called me last December and said, "I'd like to come down and visit for a couple of days." He's bought a condominium in Tiburon, he loves coming down here. So he feels free to call me, and say he'd like to come visit, and I just love it every time he comes. He's a very special man. He and Milton were two of the best friends I made through music at the Conservatory. My best friends have come through music, just through this accidental thing I got when I went to Berkeley, and got involved in the Student Forum.

Colin Murdoch – While we were fundraising for the Conservatory, it always seemed important to tell how much we all had hoped the Conservatory could move the building from 19th Avenue, where it was miles from downtown, to the vicinity where it was near the other cultural buildings – the Opera House, Symphony Hall. One day, after moving to the new building, Colin called me and said that Robin was playing two Brandenburg concerti with the Symphony, and would I like to go hear them? I parked my car, went to Colin's office, and together we walked the two blocks to Davies Hall, and we listened to Robin play. That was our dream, and it came true.

SUTHERLAND Well, here's my next question. Could you share some personal memories of Doris and Pierre Monteux?

BRUMBAUM Yes. Pierre was a sweet, not very vocal kind of guy. Doris did all the talking when they were together. I'm sorry to say that I have this strong impression ... the San Francisco Symphony when Pierre was conducting was going on tour ... I think it was their first tour, a U.S. tour.

SUTHERLAND This was their first train tour. An unbelievable thing, 1947. They still talk about it. Fifty-two cities in fifty-one nights or something – all by train.

BRUMBAUM Well, we were on the Student Forum, we knew they were going, and we decided we would go after a concert to where the train departed in Oakland to wish them well. We took them a big bouquet of flowers. The last thing that happened – you know what happened?

SUTHERLAND I think I know, but tell it anyway.

BRUMBAUM Doris, or "Doress" as he called her, had this big thing of flowers and couldn't find a place to put them on the train. So the last thing we saw, she threw them out the door! She was kind of a tough little lady. He was a sweetheart. She did everything just for him, she protected him in every way from too many people. I must say, we occasionally had

dinner together or something ... he didn't project himself very much, she did all the talking. But it was nice knowing them, and being with them. Not a lot, but on occasions.

SUTHERLAND I don't like the fact that she chucked your bouquet of flowers.

BRUMBAUM I wish that wasn't the thing I remember about them.

SUTHERLAND [Looking at list of interview questions.] Here's an interesting one. It says, "You are in a unique position where you have seen the Conservatory in all three of its locations – Sacramento Street, Ortega Street and Oak Street – what are your thoughts on the nature or character of the school as it has moved from location to location?" This is actually a very good question. I can only sort of mentally feature Sacramento Street. It was somebody's living room!

BRUMBAUM I don't remember ... I went to a couple of Board meetings there ... it was somebody's living room.

SUTHERLAND It was Ada Clement's parents' home, I think.

BRUMBAUM I was never there very much.

SUTHERLAND You were in charge of the Trustees when it moved to Ortega Street. You were the Chair of the Board.

BRUMBAUM That sounds like a big job, but I want you to know, I was a very naïve person. I don't know why I was Chairman ... they didn't have anybody else.

SUTHERLAND You were a grand total of thirty-three-years-old, for one thing.

BRUMBAUM I didn't feel very confident. I hadn't had a lot of experience. But they needed somebody, and I did it. I learned a lot, and I enjoyed it.

SUTHERLAND Did you see the move to Ortega Street as an enormous expansion of the school's capabilities?

BRUMBAUM Oh, absolutely. And Ortega Street was never big enough. Immediately when we moved in ... we took balconies off the back and closed them in and made practice rooms out of them. We added rooms in the basement, and a library upstairs in the attic.

SUTHERLAND For Viola Hagopian. Do you remember her?

BRUMBAUM No.

SUTHERLAND Where did you locate the funds to do all of this? This was not growing on trees.

BRUMBAUM Dan Koshland and Morty Fleishhacker. Without them, the Conservatory would never have done it. Then Nancy Hellman was on the Board at that time, and her father Marco – they gave Hellman Hall, which was absolutely needed, we had to have a hall. It was a nice little hall.

SUTHERLAND I assume it still is, I remember when it was opened.

BRUMBAUM I wonder what ... it's a school now?

SUTHERLAND Lycée Français. When I graduated from the Conservatory in 1975, that was the year prior to Hellman Hall, we had no facility. I had to graduate at the Hamlin School. You gave me my diploma. You and Mickey, you both handed it to me. But there was no Hellman Hall, it wasn't ideal at all.

BRUMBAUM It grew a lot under Milton Salkind.

SUTHERLAND Absolutely, it did. And Hellman Hall was indispensable to that. What do you think about – now we've relocated to where we belong, which is downtown.

BRUMBAUM It was time. I think the new building adds a great deal. When it was out in that little 19th Avenue ... it was time to have a new building, what it is now.

[BREAK]

SUTHERLAND I'm going to ask you about Agnes Albert, because I left her off of the list and I didn't mean to do that.

BRUMBAUM Good. I loved Agnes. She asked me to go on the museum committee, which was giving the Heifetz violin and doing those concerts. The wonderful chamber music concerts at the Legion. She was on the Board of the Legion [of Honor] and I was on that committee. I didn't do a thing – except I remember making a comment once, and the director of the museum said, "I know what you think!" As if to say, "That wasn't very helpful."

SUTHERLAND Who was that?

BRUMBAUM I can't remember his name. Agnes was on that Board.

SUTHERLAND Well, she introduced me to a man named Ian McKibbin White and his wife Floppy. They were very good friends of mine, and they were good friends of Aggie's.

BRUMBAUM They were good friends of mine, and I'll tell you why: Ian and Dick Pischel went to school together.

SUTHERLAND Down in Santa Barbara?

BRUMBAUM Cate School in Santa Barbara. Norman Pischel was the first graduate of Cate School. I spent a week in London with Curtis Cate one time, I had the best time in the world, he was a sweetheart. Ian is a painter, and he painted a picture of Fallen Leaf with Lake Tahoe in the background.

SUTHERLAND What else do you want to say about Aggie?

BRUMBAUM As a Board member she was very special because she was also a musician. She always was intimate with every conductor we had. In fact the first time I met Alasdair [Neale] I went over to meet Aggie and Alasdair was there. I'm very fond of Alasdair, and Lowell.

SUTHERLAND Well, the only connection Aggie didn't have anything to do with in her life was Pierre Monteux. And that's because Pierre Monteux was hired by Leonora Wood Armsby.

BRUMBAUM He was harder to get to know. He really was a very quiet little man. Somehow I got to know about his conducting school in Maine.

SUTHERLAND But every conductor since Pierre Monteux, starting with Enrique Jordá, Agnes was instrumental in engaging them. That's right up to Michael Tilson Thomas. So she has been....

BRUMBAUM I remember Michael Tilson Thomas coming here years ago. Do you remember? He was a kid.

SUTHERLAND 1974. He came with Mahler *Ninth Symphony*.

BRUMBAUM Really? What a memory you've got.

SUTHERLAND Aggie threw a luncheon for him. Do you remember Bill Brunelle? I was the only student from the Conservatory who was there, and I was seated between Bill Brunelle on one side, and on the other side was Madame Prokofiev. I was from Colorado, fresh off the turnip truck. It was a big fancy Lyon Street luncheon with maids. Michael was there, and Bill Brunelle was there. That was the first time I learned that salad could come after the entrée. It had never occurred to me that that was even possible. It was all very French. She was speaking French to the maids.

BRUMBAUM Well, I loved Agnes. I really felt kind of close to her at the end. The very interesting thing was, this business about the Heifetz violin. Heifetz left it to the Fine Arts Museum and it sat there in a case, and everybody who knew about violins thought that was terrible. I heard on KQED once, “A fine violin is like a beautiful woman, it needs to be loved and nurtured.” Well here was this violin sitting out there in the museum in a case, and nobody played it.

SUTHERLAND Stuart Canin played one thing on it, and a couple of people played....

BRUMBAUM And once, the Conservatory kids were allowed to play it.

SUTHERLAND But basically it sat there in that Lucite case.

BRUMBAUM Agnes and Milton were the two people on a committee ... Agnes sent me a copy of Heifetz’s will, which said it should be played by “Worthy people.” So the Conservatory kids go to play it, and as you say, Stuart Canin did. But it wasn’t enough. She wanted desperately to give it to Barantschik, at the Symphony. And now the concert master at the Symphony plays it. But he can’t take it on a tour, and they used to be so fussy at the museum that when anybody came out to play it they had all the curators sitting around watching them play it to make sure they behaved themselves. Especially when the Conservatory students played it. Finally, a committee was formed, and she asked me to be on that committee. I remember meeting with the Fine Arts committee and Brent, I think, was the one who talked them into doing this. Brent [Assink] made the arrangements that if Barantschik could play that violin, the Symphony would do four concerts at the Legion of Honor.

SUTHERLAND Which we do.

BRUMBAUM And the Symphony pays for them, and Brent tells me they’re fairly expensive.

SUTHERLAND But they're all completely well-attended.

BRUMBAUM Absolutely sold out.

SUTHERLAND You can't get a ticket to them, really not. So that's our little trade off, but that was largely Agnes Albert's doing.

BRUMBAUM Absolutely. Well, I was at Shell Island, and Harold Brumbaum loved to do the New York Times crossword puzzles on Sundays, because he was a good crossword puzzle doer, and we went in and bought the New York Times, came back, and he opened it up ... there was a picture of Barantschik holding the violin and the head of the museum and Brent.

SUTHERLAND I think in those days it was Harry Parker.

BRUMBAUM I think you're right. In any case, Agnes had gotten herself up – she was just about ready to die – and she got herself up and went to the concert where I guess Stuart Canin played it. I was up in Canada and I saw this picture. So I called her up and talked to her, and the very next day she died.

SUTHERLAND She had the stroke the next morning.

BRUMBAUM It was as if this was what she was waiting for to die. We gave her a 94th birthday party at the Symphony.

SUTHERLAND But it was as if this were waiting to happen.

BRUMBAUM She did so much. I actually heard her when she played a concerto with Pierre. She really was a good musician.

SUTHERLAND I loved the fact that when we used to have governor's reports – when people would actually stand up and give reports – she would always deliver the artistic committee meeting report from memory. She would recount everything that had happened in that season. She was quite extraordinary.

BRUMBAUM She was 94 when she died. We laugh, because on the Symphony Board, once you hit about 65 or something they make you a Life Governor. Nobody ever resigns from the Symphony Board ever, they just die. And I can remember Margaret Sloss was 102 when she died, and she was still a member of the Symphony Board. And they gave me a birthday

party – I went to a Board meeting when I was 90 and they gave me a party! They brought in a huge cake and shared it with everyone. Filled the Wattis Room completely.

Agnes was 94, Margaret Sloss was 102. Anna Logan Upton was up there. Phillis Wattis was up there. We're talking all the people who really cared about the Symphony and were on the Board. They just never resigned. Yesterday they were talking about – I think John Goldman is in charge of new members of the Symphony – they were elected for a three year term, and there was a question of whether they should only stay on so long. Nobody objected to the fact that they didn't have any length of time – everybody just stays on as long as they're interested.

SUTHERLAND Forever.

BRUMBAUM Forever.

SUTHERLAND Well, that hasn't hurt us, really.

BRUMBAUM I don't think it's hurt us, and it certainly hasn't hurt me. I like going! I went over yesterday, and I was glad I had gone, because the minutes they sent me were so confusing. But it was all straightened out at the Board meeting.

SUTHERLAND Good. Well here's something for you, now.

BRUMBAUM OK.

SUTHERLAND Looking back, what are some of the key life events that have meant the most to you? Family, friends – any stories or memories that you would like to share with this project.

BRUMBAUM I think maybe I've shared a lot of them.

SUTHERLAND You have done a pretty damn good job.

BRUMBAUM I think that some of the friendships I have made through being on these two Boards – people like Peter and Milton ... I never had better friends than that, really. I think that just being on those two Boards has enhanced my life and I am so grateful that it all happened to me.

SUTHERLAND Thank you.

BRUMBAUM My life has been just enriched by this love of music. I remember when Harold Brumbaum and I were getting acquainted, and he said to me, “What is your favorite music of the moment?” We were up at his house – his cabin up on the Novato Ridge. I said, “Well, the latest chamber music I bought I have played over and over and over – it’s a Schubert viola quintet, I think, or cello....”

SUTHERLAND The two cello quintet, possibly.

BRUMBAUM It’s the cello quintet. I said, “It’s my favorite at the moment.” Harold Brumbaum got up from where he was sitting, went in and found it in his collection, and played it. I thought, “That’s it! I’ve got to marry this guy.” So I did.

SUTHERLAND And so you did. And you would sit in that room and hold hands and listen to music.

BRUMBAUM Yes, we would. We wouldn’t hold hands until we bought that loveseat. He had an old chair that was one of those comfortable chairs. I would sit on the couch, and he would sit on his chair. Then he began to feel guilty about that, so he went out and bought a loveseat, so we could hold hands. It was very nice.

SUTHERLAND There’s two more [questions]. Number one is, what are your thoughts on the importance of classical music education for young people today?

BRUMBAUM I think if we could give them a gift, it’s the greatest gift you can give them, to enhance their lives. I want to tell you something about – I love Colin, we haven’t talked about Colin. I was concerned when he was appointed to run the Conservatory, but I was not disappointed. I think he did a very fine job. His cute wife is a school teacher. She teaches not far from here. They live in Novato, and she teaches out here in Lucas Valley, I think. She told me something that I wanted to do tremendously, but I realized I wasn’t really capable of it. Every morning – she’s done this for years – in the fifth grade she plays twenty minutes of classical music, every morning. Each student has a folder – a classical music folder – and she talks a little bit about the composer, and they write it down. They listen for the first twenty minutes, and she said one of her students came to her and said he didn’t want to do that, but when the year was over he came up and thanked her. I think if you can give the child a love of music it’s one of the best things in the world you could do. I considered going down at the school in Nicasio – I volunteered there for eight years, just helping kindergarten and second grade teachers and so forth – and I went to the fourth grade teacher and told her, and said, “I think that’s just a wonderful thing to do. Maybe you could do it, or I could do it.” Sam is a musician, and it’s much better for her to do it. I decided not to take it on, but I went to the fourth grade teacher and she

said, “You know what? I teach third, fourth and fifth grades, and I have the hardest time getting time to do anything. I couldn’t do that, I wouldn’t have that much time to spend.”

My youngest granddaughter is now twelve. She plays the violin – I’m so glad she does. She started when she was about six, and I’ve been able to buy her a bigger violin every time she needed a bigger one. I’ve given her lots of good music, but I don’t think it gets played around the house very much. I just bought ... you know what I’m talking about, the thing they [the San Francisco Symphony] just put out....

SUTHERLAND *West Side Story?*

BRUMBAUM *West Side Story!*

SUTHERLAND Bernstein.

BRUMBAUM Bernstein. I thought I’d give her that for her birthday. I don’t know whether she’ll appreciate it or not. What do you think?

SUTHERLAND Well, I think it’s a fantastic recording. The whole production. I smell a new Grammy, I really do. It’s the best thing we’ve done since the Mahler project.

BRUMBAUM Well, I’m going to be with her for her birthday, but it’s up at Shell Island, and we don’t have a television. I’ll wait and give it to her later.

SUTHERLAND Shell Island doesn’t have anything, hardly.

BRUMBAUM It certainly does! It has a solar panel in a tree.

SUTHERLAND It doesn’t have an electronic can opener.

BRUMBAUM No, it does not. However, it does have a solar panel. And that means I can play a little CD, and my electric toothbrush. That’s all we need. We use oil lamps.

SUTHERLAND Life is pretty Henry David Thoreau up there, isn’t it? It’s like Walden Pond.

BRUMBAUM You know what? I shouldn’t even mention it, but it’s a wonderful place. We started up there in 1963 – my first husband and I bought this little seven-acre island. It had just one room on it, maybe as big as from the fireplace over here. It had two beds in the corner, and it had a sink over here, but no running water – we had to carry out the water. And I

used to take my bird book and go down and sit on the beach, and try to get to know the birds. Well, the sad thing is, there's so much sewage in that water now, the birds don't come because there's not nearly as much plankton to eat, and there are very few birds compared to what there used to be, it's very sad. Did you know that the city of Victoria has all these years dumped raw sewage into the ocean? Victoria is right on the straights of Juan de Fuca. They figure there's enough tide coming in every day that it will take care of it. Well, there isn't enough tide. In Canada, you can dump your toilet stuff right into the ocean, you can't do that in the U.S. anymore.

SUTHERLAND I'm so sorry about that.

BRUMBAUM It's very sad. I wrote a letter to the editors of the newspaper, but I don't know if they ever printed it or not. It makes me very sad. We used to have migrating birds land on our island all the time, and nearby islands. Very, very seldom now. Not nearly as many birds as we used to have, it's very sad. Are we finished?

SUTHERLAND There's one more, and it's kind of a departure in tone from what we've been talking about, but I think you can address it very well. How is life different today for women? As opposed, say, to when you were a blushing young thing on the Board of Governors for the San Francisco Symphony?

BRUMBAUM I don't think it's so different.

SUTHERLAND Really? Tell us about it.

BRUMBAUM I had older sisters – my oldest sister was eleven years older than I. When she went to the University of California at Berkeley she was on the newspaper – the Daily Cal – everything. She was very involved, so I just don't think there's much difference. Then when she was old enough she went to San Francisco and helped our father in his office for several years, so she was always doing things, and I think that the women in my life always have been. My mother was President of the Berkeley Women's City Club. We've always done things, so I don't think it's that different.

SUTHERLAND When you were born, women could only vote for two years in this country. 1920 was the amendment that allowed women the right to vote in the United States, and you were born in 1922.

BRUMBAUM Are you kidding?

SUTHERLAND No, I'm not making that up. Obviously you came from very smart, able people.

BRUMBAUM Robin, you've shocked me to think that was only two years from when I was born.

SUTHERLAND It was 1920, the amendment that gave women the right to vote. See, Ada Clement, when she went off to study with my teacher's husband in Germany, women couldn't even vote. That was 1910, or something.

BRUMBAUM I didn't know that.

SUTHERLAND Well, now gay people can get married in many places. Things are coming along.

BRUMBAUM I had two gay weddings. I don't know why they impressed me so much. I guess the fact that they were a little unusual. My son Kap had a long affair, and lived a long time with a guy named Bob. And Bob took care of him when he was sick, and when he died Bob and I became very close. He's almost like a son to me ... he is like a son to me. I guess I don't hear from him enough, but I don't suppose if I had a fifty-five-year-old son I'd hear from him all the time, either.

SUTHERLAND Bob used to live within a block of Jose and me in Twin Peaks. He lived on a street called Garden Side, I think, and we were this close.

BRUMBAUM Then he and Kap lived right near U.C. hospital. They had a nice house there. Well, Bob has another partner, I think whose partner also died of AIDS, and he doesn't seem to resent me at all. So Bob and I still are very good friends. The nicest thing about Bob – he loved Ava. And he loved her children. This is my daughter, Ava. He loved her children, and he still sees them, and he's been very helpful in helping Elise's ... the funny thing is that the three grandchildren are just the same ages that my three children who died are. I call Aaron Kap all the time when he comes to visit me at Shell Island. It's interesting, the way I sort of them take over for my children. But I don't see them enough, they live in Berkeley ... we're talking about celebrating Ava's birthday – Elise's birthday (you see I call them by the wrong names) – we're going to celebrate it on Saturday, I hope. Are we through?

SUTHERLAND I think so. Thank you so much.

BRUMBAUM You know what it's done for me, Tessa, is it's made me realize how important the Conservatory's been to me. I just sort of forget about it, because I don't go

there very often anymore, because it's too hard to get there at night – I don't like to drive over at night by myself. I see a lot of concerts. I know what we didn't talk about! We did not talk about scholarships.

SUTHERLAND Let's address the subject of scholarships.

BRUMBAUM I'd like to say that one time – a time when Kap and Peter were sick – I was in a position to give scholarships. I was able to endow scholarships for the two boys. Kap was taking piano lessons at the Conservatory when he got sick. Peter always liked good music, and came to the Symphony with us often. I get the most wonderful letters from the young people who have had the advantage of having a scholarship. Robin has been very helpful by bringing them over here to let me hear what they can do. I try to go to their concerts.

SUTHERLAND I think it's silly for the recipients of the scholarships not to know who you are.

BRUMBUAM They do know. They always write me a letter. It makes me feel wonderful. Not only do they talk about how much it's helped them, but they talk about what a wonderful organization the Conservatory is, they often do. And that makes me feel good, because it was just a little music school when we started!

SUTHERLAND Those days are gone, honeypot. We're doing big stuff now.

BRUMBAUM I think we're big stuff now.

SUTHERLAND To show you what a small world it is, Carlos was just playing with the Miami Symphony not long ago, and who should be blowing through town but Andres?

BRUMBAUM You know Andres?

SUTHERLAND Andres is one of Ava Jean's scholarship students.

BRUMBAUM He's the only one who has really been close to me. Robin's brought him here, I have gone to his concerts. I love knowing him. The others have been – I've gone to their concerts, and it makes me feel awfully good when I get their letters and they tell me how much it's helped them. I think that's one of the best things I've ever been able to do for the Conservatory, was to endow two scholarships. Robin brought three of them over for lunch one day, and I invited Alasdair Neale, who is the conductor of the Marin Symphony, and his partner, and it turned out that it was a flute thing, and both Alasdair and Lowell are flutists! I think that was a very strange coincidence.

SUTHERLAND They played the Poulenc sonata.

BRUMBAUM When you guys left, you took them all back to the Conservatory, I said, “Oh my gosh!” I realized what a wonderful treat you’d given me by bringing them over.

SUTHERLAND What I think is most important is what you’re able to do, educationally, for the students. That I think is number one.

BRUMBAUM I think scholarships are very – especially in this day and age, when you read about kids graduating from college with \$30,000 or \$50,000 of debt.

SUTHERLAND See now, when I went to this school, I was the recipient of the Albert Elkus award.

BRUMBAUM I didn’t know that.

SUTHERLAND I was, I didn’t ask for it, they gave it to me. I would have given anything to know Albert Elkus. I did the next best thing, which was get to know Elizabeth, his wife, and Jonathan, his son. It would have been so nice if I could have known the man.

BRUMBAUM He was an absolute sweetheart.

SUTHERLAND See, that I will never get, so I’m happy to grease the wheels with you and your guys.

BRUMBAUM I think of all the nice people I’ve gotten to know through the Conservatory. Like Robin!