

Joan Gallegos Oral History

San Francisco Conservatory of Music Library & Archives

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

Interview conducted November 26, 2013
Tessa Updike, 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 through the past century.

Joan Gallegos Interview

This interview was conducted in one session at Joan's home in Kensington, California. Conservatory archivist Tessa Updike visited Joan to record the interview on Tuesday, November 26, 2013.

Tessa Updike

Tessa Updike is the archivist for the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Tessa holds a B.A. in visual arts and has her Masters in Library and Information Science with a concentration in Archives Management from Simmons College in Boston. Previously she has worked for the Harvard University Botany Libraries and Archives and the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley.

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Joan Gallegos (1931-2014)



Joan Gallegos, 1997

Born in Stockton, Joan Gallegos was a native Californian, as were her parents. Her mother was a ballet teacher, her father a doctor. Joan started piano lessons while in pre-school. Her passion lay with the violin, but she had to wait until her hands were big enough to handle the instrument before she could start lessons.

Joan attended Stanford, and while she was mainly interested in music and history, she graduated as a poly-sci major. After Stanford, Joan worked for Wells Fargo. Following her father's death, she moved for a short time to Carmel, but found life there limiting. Joan moved back to San Francisco and took a job with Foremost Dairies in California. Joan then moved to Berkeley, and entered the graduate program in music at the University of California, where her adviser was Albert Elkus.

Joan studied piano privately with Marcus Gordon, and studied composition at U.C. Berkeley with Arnold Elston and Seymour Shifrin. It was at U.C. Berkeley that Joan taught her first class in ear-training and sight-singing, and realized that her true passion lay in teaching. Through a connection at Berkeley, Joan was recommended to Milton Salkind at the Conservatory to teach a musicianship class, and joined the Conservatory's faculty in 1968. In her 29 years at the Conservatory, Joan helped to develop the Musicianship program, and directed the New Music Ensemble. For an article printed in a Conservatory newsletter, Joan described her involvement in the New Music Ensemble:

"In 1969, when Howard Hersh and Robert Moran started the New Music Ensemble, I found myself involved as a performer and stage manager. After John Adams took over the Ensemble, and as his responsibilities with the San Francisco Symphony gradually took him away from the Conservatory, I assumed the responsibility for directing the New Music Ensemble."

Upon retiring from the Conservatory in 1997, Joan was awarded an honorary doctorate. She then moved to Kensington, California, where she became very active in the community, and served several terms on civic boards.

A staunch advocate for women and a pioneer in the field of new music, Joan remarked in a 1994 Conservatory newsletter, "It's essential for students to have the chance to perform all types of music written." In November of 2013, Joan was interviewed for the Conservatory's Oral History Project. When asked for some favorite memories from her life, Joan described early memories she had of visiting her grandmother in Berkeley and going out for ice cream floats, but also spoke of the importance of the many special people who made up her life.

Tuesday, November 26, 2013

UPDIKE This is Tessa Updike and I am with Joan Gallegos at her home in Kensington. It is November 26th, 2013 and we're doing an interview for the Oral History Project at the Conservatory. So Joan, if you could start by telling us about your early history; about where and when you were born?

GALLEGOS I'm a native Californian, as were both my parents. In fact, my mother was born in San Francisco and my father was born in Berkeley. I remember after the war when my mother was going to do some traveling; she had to do a lot of documentation of where she was and when, because her birth certificate had gone up in the San Francisco fire of 1906!

UPDIKE Oh, my goodness! What did your parents do?

GALLEGOS My mother was a dance teacher – ballet – before she was married. My father was a doctor – Ob/Gyn. He practiced in Stockton for a long time. We lived in the house that my mother's parents had had. It was fun when I started high school in Stockton, because it was about a block and a half from the building where my first class was in the morning. The class would bet about whether I would arrive just before, or just after the bell. [laughter] My parents started both my brother and myself in a pre-school that was run by two piano teachers in Stockton, one of whom later on started the field of music therapy. My brother and I both started piano before we started school. It was in the days when the piano teacher came to the house. I remember my mother telling me that Ms. Pfeiffer (that was the piano teacher's name) would always stay for coffee with my mom after the lessons. My mom said one day Mrs. Pfeiffer said, "You know, it's always so interesting to come and give your kids piano lessons because I never know what I'm going to hear." My brother had a fantastic ear; he'd learn his piece really quickly and then be able to transpose it to any key. I liked to read, so it was a sure bet for her that I would play almost any piece except the one she assigned. [laughter] Sometime (I don't remember exactly when – my first orchestra concert) Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* was played and I fell in love with the violin. So that was ... every year ... "Are my hands big enough? Can I start violin yet?" My mom told me a few years ago that when she told our next door neighbor that I was about to start violin lessons, he stopped for a moment and said, "Well, it will be winter soon, and we'll all have our windows closed!" [laughter] Music has really been a big part of my life.

After World War II, when my dad decided to stay in the Navy and we moved to Vallejo, I was not a very happy camper. Two of the teachers there (one of whom actually had been in Stockton for a while – the orchestra teacher – was a man named Virl Swan) and the chorus teacher, Margaret Cartwright, who I just discovered thanks to looking at the Cal alumni directory lives not too far from here, she's retired – I credit them with keeping a very unhappy camper busy through music. Miss Cartwright had me accompany her chorus, and Mr. Swan put together a trio

of violin players. We would play for people's luncheons. Actually, I think that's how I first came to go to Crockett; there was some occasion there that we were playing for. Anyhow, that was pretty much it in Vallejo. It was not the happiest time in my life.

How did I decide to attend Stanford? Well, that's also a music related story, as strange as it may seem. There was a man named Jan Popper, who conducted the Stanford Orchestra. At the time I was in high school there were area-wide orchestras that were put together and guest conductors came and conducted us. One year, Dr. Popper came and conducted us, so I liked what he had to do. I also met a lot of kids, particularly through the Santa Rosa area, and some of them were going to Stanford. My dad was a Stanford grad, so I kind of rode that chariot into Stanford. When I applied they had me put down my major, and I had said, "Well, music or history." My lower division advisor was in the history department, and I remember at the end of my sophomore year I went into his office and he was looking at my transcript, and said, "What are you going to major in?" [laughter] Well, I had made friends with a lot of kids from southern California private schools, and there was a school pipeline of interesting courses to take. After this sort of – shall we say, "intellectually unchallenging experience" in Vallejo – I had taken all kinds of courses. By the time I got to the end of my sophomore year I had taken several poly-sci courses. I'd also taken some music courses, and a good hard look at the majors. I had taken enough poly-sci courses so I think I had about half the major already completed. And I liked the courses, I found them interesting. So I majored in poly-sci. That was kind of it for a while.

UPDIKE What did you do after Stanford?

GALLEGOS After Stanford? Well, the year after I graduated from Stanford my father died. My mother came back out from Philadelphia, and said, "Your father and I used to talk about retiring to Carmel. Maybe I'll move down there." We used to go there in the summer because Stockton was very hot in the summer. My folks would rent a house down there. My brother and I became very acquainted with poison oak. [laughter] I said, "Well, if you're going to do that, I'll move down there with you." I was working at Wells Fargo bank, that was my first job after college. It was okay, but it wasn't all that interesting. So I moved down to Carmel, and found living in Carmel kind of like living on an island. It's very limiting. I knew some people down there already that I knew from Stanford. I worked in a doctor's office. One of the doctors was the father of one of the gals that I'd known at Stanford ... I think he had also been in med school about the time my dad had. After a while I decided – as I said – it was kind of like living on an island. And there were some aspects of working in a doctor's office that weren't too pleasant. So I moved back up to San Francisco. Eventually I ended up working for a division of Foremost Dairies, which was the conglomerate that took over Golden State, which was the milk outfit in California. It was a very interesting job, they had contracts with the armed services to set up milk recombining plants in the far east, in Japan and Guam and Okinawa. When I was hired I was given to understand that there would be an opportunity to travel. But, this was still

the '50s and after I'd been there for a while I decided ... it's only the men that get to travel. So if you're going to be supporting yourself, you might as well do it at something you like. At that time I had taken a couple of courses – UC Berkeley had had a very active music extension that was run by Estelle Caen, the sister of Herb Caen, of Chronicle fame. She ran a really good program. I thought, "Well, if that's any indication of what's going on, I'll try that." I quit my job, moved to Berkeley, got a room in a house with a very nice guy who advertised through the UC student housing thing. I lived there until I moved up here.

That cat that I showed you in that picture ... he and his brother adopted me while I was living there. It was a very, very warm August, and you got to my place by going down a flight of stairs. These two cats started coming down the stairs to visit. After a while – I don't know whether it was the cats or I that discovered it first – but my landlord had a greenhouse right next to my window. They could jump up on top of that greenhouse and get through the window. I had a chair right by the window. So it didn't matter whether I was home or not, they could still come in. So one night I came home (I'd been at the Conservatory for a concert) and I came in and the other cat, whose name was Leo, greeted me at the door and he was acting really weird. Really weird. I looked over at the chair that was by the window and there was some blood on it. I looked him over – nothing wrong. I turned around and here's the other cat on the bed with his crushed right front paw. So I called my friend who had just dropped me off. I didn't have a car at the time, but I knew she was an animal person. So she took me to the 24-hour vet, and he said, "Well, he's in shock right now, but that leg's going to have to come off." So the leg came off, and we came home. Some friends who had just come back from Navy duty had one of those huge packing crates. So he lived in that packing crate while the stitches were still in, and was teased by his brother from time to time. "I can get out, and you can't!" [laughter] So the day came when I was to take him to the vet to have his stitches taken out, and the friend who had loaned me the crate was there to take him, and my doorbell rang. Here's this woman at the top of the stairs. I said, "Come in." I'm holding him, and she said, "I understand you've been taking care of my cat." Well, I knew these two cats had existed someplace in the neighborhood before they decided I was providing food – but a lot of the neighborhood was providing food and drink for them. So I said, "Yeah, he's right here." I had to hand him to my friend Gay and go up the steps to talk to her. She said, "Well, I guess you've spent a lot of money on him, and you'd be upset if I had him put down." I just looked at her, and I said, "There's no need to do that." And she said, "But ... it's not natural for a cat to have only three legs." I've had occasion to tell this story quite a bit, and it has occurred to me it would have been the perfect rejoinder to her – "If you lost a leg, would you want to be put down because it's not natural for a human to only have one leg?" [laughter] I never heard anything more from her. What I did find out later was – what had happened to the cat was – he had been under somebody's car, and someone had started it up. There apparently had been several neighbors out on the street when this happened and they tried to catch him, but he ran away from them, down a hill, jumped up on the greenhouse, and so I thought....

UPDIKE He came home.

GALLEGOS “You decided what was home, didn’t you?” [laughter] He actually lived longer than his brother. They both moved up here to Kensington with me, and became indoor cats. When his brother died, he would snuggle up to me in bed – “I’ve just been waiting for this, now you’re all mine.” [laughter]

UPDIKE Did Estelle Caen teach lessons through the extension program?

GALLEGOS I think she had some piano students. She ran a really nice outfit there. It doesn’t exist anymore, but that’s how I sort of became what I call a Stanford grad and a Berkeley dropout. I decided to enter the graduate program there. It was very interesting; I worked in the music library there at Cal and met some very nice people – one of whom is married and lives down the street below. Another would come to the practice rooms – she’s now a doctor and lives right next door to this other friend. The grad program and I at Berkeley didn’t quite work out, but one of the things I got to do when I was still a graduate student, was to teach a course in ear-training and sight-singing that probably in this day and age isn’t required anymore, but it used to be a requirement for an elementary school credential. It was a really interesting class because most of the guys in the class had not sung a note since their voices changed. There was one gal in the class, whose name I really don’t remember, but she had a lot of problems. So I said, “Look, we’ll just work together outside of class. If there ever comes a day when you think you can do something in class, just raise your hand and I’ll call on you.” And before the end of the semester, she raised her hand, and she sang one of the things in the book, and the whole class applauded, because they knew what was going on. That was really a very soul-satisfying moment. I was talking to one of the teaching associates, a man named John Swackhamer, from whom I had also taken some theory classes in extension before I became a regular student. I said, “You know, Jack, I really enjoyed that year I taught that class.” And he said, “Funny you should mention it.” He’d just had a call from Milton Salkind, who was the director of the Conservatory, asking if he would come teach musicianship at the Conservatory. He said, “I can’t do it, but I’d be happy to recommend you for it.” That was it! [laughter]

UPDIKE Did you interview with Milton Salkind? Or with – I think the dean at that time was Larry Snyder?

GALLEGOS Probably ... I remember the process of the recommendation and it turned out that someone else that had been hired to teach the same sort of things – her name was Anne Kish – she lived in Berkeley, and she had a car. But she didn’t want to go out of her way. I lived on Rose Street, just below the Rose Gardens, and she lived at the top of Spruce Street. So I

would go and wait on the corner of Spruce and she would come and pick me up and we'd commute together. So anyhow, that's how I came to end up at the Conservatory.

UPDIKE The Conservatory was on Ortega Street when you started there.

GALLEGOS Albert Elkus was the one who was responsible for getting it there. I had known him in the music department [UC Berkeley]. We used to call him Uncle Albert. He wasn't the one that was instrumental in getting me to the Conservatory, but yes, there was that connection.

UPDIKE Did you ever take any lessons with Albert Elkus at UC Berkeley?

GALLEGOS No.

UPDIKE Marcus Gordon was a student of Albert Elkus. Did you take lessons with Marcus?

GALLEGOS He was on the piano extension faculty, and I had met him that way. I started to take piano lessons with him, and I continued – he lived someplace up the hills. At that time I didn't have a car so I'd take the bus up to his house. Sometimes I'd get there a little early, and there was a park there ... I went there one day and had one of those "Aha" moments – it was a place my brother and I used to go when we visited my grandmother. It was a very small little park. I studied piano with him pretty much until he died.

UPDIKE Could you tell me about him?

GALLEGOS He was just a really nice guy. Made you feel very much at home with your lessons. He was married to a very nice woman, Leona Gordon, who was a singer – who after his death moved east with their two daughters. I have no idea what's happened to them.

UPDIKE How long did you take lessons with him?

GALLEGOS Well, from the time I started in extension until he died, I was still taking lessons with him.

UPDIKE When you started at the Conservatory, could you tell me what your impressions were of the Conservatory – the atmosphere of the school at that time?

GALLEGOS It was just a nice place to be, because it was a small school. The kids were there because they wanted to be there. The faculty, for the most part, was very congenial. There

was at least one character – Juliet Karres – who was the receptionist and telephone operator. She had a little office right by the front door. There was usually a coffee pot there for us to come when we had some spare minutes. She was the first person I ever knew who was a member of the Bahai faith. Was very much devoted to it. Another couple of really nice folks were the student services people, Colleen Katzowitz and Ruby Pleasure. I think Ruby succeeded into that job when Colleen died, which was after I left there. I’m looking over this list of people that was there ... of course Elly [Armer] I’d known from Cal, from the practice rooms. There was a very sweet lady named Jane Imamura who ran the practice room desk. I think anybody who knew her really loved her. I remember going to a memorial for her not too long ago, and her daughter Hiro – she’s a pianist, I had known here while I was there – it was really very exciting to make connections with her again. That brought back a lot of memories. A lot of memories. Speaking of memories, I just heard from a mutual friend that Madeline Duckles, who was the wife of the librarian at UC Berkeley, just died.

UPDIKE Vincent Duckles?

GALLEGOS Yeah, Vincent Duckles was the librarian. They lived on Eucalyptus Path, which is literally a path with steps. It goes up from the Claremont Hotel. She had lived there for a very, very long time. Just before all this stuff happened, I remember getting some kind of a card that said, “Madeline has gone away.” So when Barbara – this friend – called me the other night to tell me that Madeline had died, I said, “Well I’m glad you cleared that up, because I thought it had already happened.” What that meant, was that her kids had decided (even though she had somebody living with her full time) she shouldn’t stay there anymore. And I can imagine it probably took a lot of convincing, because she was very actively involved in a lot of the political activities of the ‘50s and ‘60s. Almost cost one of her sons a job because they really questioned his – I don’t remember what it was, he was in some kind of job at the University, and her connection with one of these organizations came up, and it was not good.

UPDIKE Could you tell me about Milton and Peggy Salkind?

GALLEGOS Well, I knew them mostly with the Conservatory connection.

UPDIKE Did you ever see them perform together?

GALLEGOS I must have. I can’t recall specific occasions. Their son, he runs some kind of fancy school.

UPDIKE Mark Salkind?

GALLEGOS Mark, yeah. Have you ever been to Renee's Place? It's a Chinese restaurant on Solano. I guess it's officially in Albany. I walked in there one evening – it used to be a Mexican restaurant – when Renee had taken it over. Her son had been a voice student at the Conservatory. He has since gone back to China because a person in the Voice Department told him that he probably had better opportunities there to teach after he graduated. Renee and I have kept in touch. It was one of the places I got to eat after I got out of Chaparral House. It was nice to see her.

UPDIKE Do you have any memories of Laurette Goldberg that you'd like to share?

GALLEGOS Larger than life ... early music. She bought a house down ... I think it's on the corner of Martin Luther King and whatever the street is that comes down the hill. I had known her from Berkeley. She was totally, totally devoted to early music.

UPDIKE Do you have any memories of Bonnie Hampton or Nathan Schwartz?

GALLEGOS Oh, lots. I'd known them before ... Bonnie was married to Colin Hampton, the cellist. Oh, Nathan ... apparently he'd been in love with her for a long, long time. Once Colin died he stepped forward. They lived happily ever after in a house on Spruce Street. Bonnie has done a lot in chamber music, both here and all over the place. I understand that she's sort of cutting back a little bit, and giving up some of the East Coast things, and will be more Berkeley-centric. She and Nathan were very, very nice. Bonnie is a wonderful cellist, and chamber music coach. You name it, she can do it.

UPDIKE Would you like to say anything about Alden Jenks?

GALLEGOS Oh, Alden's a sweetie. He's also somebody I'd known from Berkeley. He's just a really nice guy. We go back a-ways, in the field of new music.

UPDIKE Do you remember seeing any of his compositions performed at the Conservatory?

GALLEGOS Probably, there was a lot of that. But I can't really bring to mind ... those have gone out the window.

UPDIKE How about Hermann le Roux?

GALLEGOS Oh, Hermann! You see the picture right on the corner there? See the guy who's sitting opposite Elly? His name is Michael Isadore. He appeared in Berkeley, and I think he'd known ... I've forgotten his name right now ... he had a music friend at Cal for a while.

He's a really interesting guy. He's been all over the world, and lived in Philadelphia. Hermann had met him when Michael was living in South Africa. He came up here – Hermann did. He's problematic.

UPDIKE How was he problematic? Just a character?

GALLEGOS Just a character, yeah. That's a good way to put it.

UPDIKE How about Adolph Baller? Did you know Adolph?

GALLEGOS Not really. I knew people who had studied with him. He was a pianist in the trio [Alma Trio]. I never did any work with him.

UPDIKE Do you remember Beulah Forbes?

GALLEGOS Oh, do I remember Beulah! She was ... I don't know what's happened to Beulah. I don't know if she's around or not.

UPDIKE You know, I don't think she is.

GALLEGOS She was a character. She was a fellow teacher in the Musicianship Department. She was a good teacher, and a good friend. I remember getting very, very upset with her once. I was in charge of the Musicianship program – we'd set up the sections – there was somebody who I think was one of her advisees who wanted to come study musicianship with me. The kid was in the office with Beulah when Beulah asked me, and I'd already put all the sections together, and I remember getting very upset with her. Which, you know, was not good to do in front of the student, but ... no, Beulah I think made a lot of wonderful contributions to the school. I think she was actually a graduate of the Conservatory.

UPDIKE Was she also a jazz musician?

GALLEGOS I think so. At least according to some of the biographic stuff ... I sort of plowed through those catalogs to find some names so I could picture those I couldn't remember. She sure could have been playing jazz.

UPDIKE Do you remember Andrew Imbrie?

GALLEGOS Well, he was a composition teacher. He taught at Cal while I was there. I don't remember really working with him.

UPDIKE Do you remember Richard Howe? I think he was the dean.

GALLEGOS He was the dean ... just that he was the dean, and I recognized the picture in the catalog.

UPDIKE What about Colin Murdoch?

GALLEGOS Yeah, I liked Colin. He was very good about staying in contact with me after I retired. I hear he is now gone into his own retirement, which is well-deserved.

UPDIKE So, you performed in the New Music Ensemble at the Conservatory before you took over as director?

GALLEGOS Yeah, Bob Moran and Howard Hersh had it when I first came there. And then John Adams took over. When he got a full time composer in residence for the Symphony, I took over the New Music Ensemble. That was a lot of fun. I think that was one of the reasons for my going to that seminar at Harvard on contemporary music. There are a lot of things that I don't really have an accurate timeline for. [laughter]

UPDIKE Did you play the piano for the New Music Ensemble?

GALLEGOS It was usually somebody else.

UPDIKE Do you remember some of the music that you chose while you were the director of the New Music Ensemble to perform, or how you chose that music? Did you know some of the composers?

GALLEGOS I probably knew some of the composers. We did students' music. You haven't asked me how I got started conducting.

UPDIKE No, I didn't. Please tell me.

GALLEGOS Well, I never studied conducting. But one year some of the guitar students came to me and they said, "If we put together the orchestra, we'd like to be able to play some more concertos." So that's how I got started conducting, because of those guitar students who wanted to play their concertos. I had learned the gestures by teaching musicianship, but that was very flattering, and very nice. It expanded my horizons a little bit. That probably led to some things like my being involved in the Veil of Isis, which was the group of women singers, some of whom are still around. I remember one of them getting very, very upset with me when I said

something about my singers. “What do you mean your singers?!” [laughter] She was very ... shall we say ... frank? [laughter]

UPDIKE Was the Veil of Isis an a cappella group?

GALLEGOS For the most part. It was started by Liz Anker and Carol Negro. Liz ... I think she moved east. Carol was a bassoon player (I don't know if she's still here now, she did stay out here). I think the group kept going for a while after I left. It was fun.

UPDIKE Do you know anything about the beginnings of new music at the Conservatory? What was there before the New Music Ensemble? I think I read about a group called the ... Artists Ensemble?

GALLEGOS I'm not sure. It was Bob Moran and Howard Hersh who I became involved with. You just have to go by whatever it says in those catalogs, and I don't have them going back to even my beginning.

UPDIKE Did you have any memorable students at the Conservatory that you would like to talk about?

GALLEGOS Well, I think all of them were in one way or another. But one who's sort of come back in a very, very nice way is Tracy Randolph. A few years ago she approached me. She wanted to go back to school, I think to get a teaching degree, and came to ask me to write her a letter of recommendation, which I did. It turns out that she's been tutoring Elly's daughter Hopey, so we have reconnected that way.

One name that isn't on your list is David Garner. He'd been a student at the Conservatory, and then joined the faculty. One of the things Tracy brought me was a copy of one of my poems that he set.

UPDIKE Oh, my goodness.

GALLEGOS So Tracy brought me this when she first came to see me. It's also a copy of the program.

UPDIKE This is wonderful. Have you been writing poetry your whole life?

GALLEGOS No, that was my major effort. I did a little bit not too long ago because there was a poetry group at our library. The woman who runs it is the mother of a woman who used to run the restaurant down – Colusa Circle – Robin Lo. Her mother's name is Diane. So I

did a little bit there. But no, it was one those things that sort of came and went. That's a poem inspired by a lot of things that were going on.

UPDIKE Do you know if there was a recording done of this?

GALLEGOS Very likely.

UPDIKE I'll look in the library to see if I can find a recording of it. That's very nice.

GALLEGOS I may very well have a copy myself, but at this point ... there are a lot of things, I have no idea where they are. I tell a lot of people – my house when I left it to go to the hospital was a monument to, “Never do today what you can put off until tomorrow.” [laughter] I came back to something very different, thanks to Elly and thanks to my friend Drew. I've been trying to remember, because it seems to me when I first started going to the Conservatory, that there was somebody who lived not too far from me who was some kind of relation to one of the founding mothers. But I don't remember....

UPDIKE To Ada Clement or Lillian Hodghead?

GALLEGOS Yeah, I don't remember who it was.

UPDIKE Did you ever meet Lillian Hodghead?

GALLEGOS No. Totally off the track, but one of the things that I discovered not too long ago was that Leonard Bernstein's wife, Felicia, is a cousin of mine. And she lives here in Berkeley, her father was known as the other Roy Cohn, because it was spelled the same. But I can remember when we would come and visit my grandmother, there were a lot of relations who lived in the Berkeley area at that time. I'm pretty sure it was Felicia – there was this one young gal who would come in and just chat, chat, chat, chat away through the whole thing. My mom told me once she asked my grandmother why she never spoke Spanish around my brother and me – why she never taught us Spanish – my grandmother said, “I didn't think you'd like it.” This was the '30s.

UPDIKE Where did your grandmother come from?

GALLEGOS She came from Costa Rica. Her maiden name was Beales. Beales was apparently a steward on a ship that some of the ancestors had been on and he fell in love with this one ... married her and stayed in Costa Rica. I've never been to Costa Rica, but I went to a ceremony in San Jose not too long ago. Because San Jose – the capital of Costa Rica – there's

apparently a very elaborate cemetery where they have all the former presidents buried. They discovered that one of them was missing. It had been the one who had come up here with the rest of the family to California. Apparently one of the reasons he left Costa Rica was that he was responsible for killing one of the other presidents – who also was a relative. [laughter] Mora and Montealegre were two big family names. If you look through the list of former Costa Rican presidents you'll find that name there. That was several years ago – they had a big ceremony and disinterred this guy and took him – well, over a century they had forgiven him. Some cousins did some very active sleuthing of genealogy, which was someplace in the house. I've yet to discover what happened to that while I was gone. My recollection of it was that it was on the piano. I haven't discovered the place where the stuff that was on the piano went.

UPDIKE Do you have a large family?

GALLEGOS No, not any more. There are some Beales cousins – in fact when I bought this house, one of them who would have been my parents' generation lived in Piedmont. He came and looked over the house, which was very helpful. My brother has passed. His wife, my sister-in-law, lives in Fresno with two of their kids. One of them – they had three – one of them came down with childhood leukemia just as he'd started school. They were living in Santa Barbara and I remember going down there. We played card games and visited with the kid. I cried all the way back on the train, because I knew I wouldn't see him again. Apparently at that time there were a lot of – there were some, anyhow – kids around that age that had come down with leukemia in the Santa Barbara area. It's always made me wonder if there's something in the air that helps bring that out. My sister-in-law's name is Charlotte and the two surviving sons and their families live in Fresno. That was not good.

UPDIKE This was something that I meant to ask you at the beginning, but can you tell me what type of music you listened to when you were growing up?

GALLEGOS Oh, lord. Whatever was on the radio.

UPDIKE Was it mostly classical music?

GALLEGOS I think it probably was. My father could play the piano. There was one piece that he remembered, and I remember listening to it – it was called *Farewell to the Piano*. [laughter] I used to listen to it on the radio, and I still have an old AM radio – it's out in the living room – that I got when I was little. A lot of times I had it in my room, and I'd put it under the covers and listen to it at night. How I didn't set myself on fire, I don't know. [laughter] There were broadcasts ... FM wasn't there yet, it was all AM.

UPDIKE Was your mother musical at all?

GALLEGOS Yeah, but she didn't make a big deal of it. She liked to sing. As I said, she taught ballet and some of her friends had continued ... I took ballet for a while with one of her friends, but it didn't take with me. [laughter] I couldn't put my best foot forward. By then music, particularly the violin, had captured me.

UPDIKE Do you have any advice that you'd like to give to Conservatory students – to music students?

GALLEGOS Just students in general ... when I graduated from Stanford, teaching was the last thing in the world I thought I ever wanted to do. I went through a whole bunch of different jobs. I may be a Cal dropout, but one thing Cal did for me was they allowed me to teach that course. I think particularly with this group of students – you could see that you were accomplishing something – with this one gal. Follow the yellow brick road. Never say never. [laughter]

UPDIKE Do you have any favorite memories that you'd like to share? Either from the Conservatory or just anything from your life? You're welcome – I don't mind if you repeat anything that you've already said.

GALLEGOS Well, one is the experience with that student, who finally was able to perform in class. That was very special. A lot of them are just people. Like meeting and knowing Thalia [Polos], and her making the cimbalom beaters for me. Different people. Going to visit my grandmother when she lived in Berkeley. She lived on Cherry Street, and there was a pharmacy there that had a soda fountain. We'd go down there for ice cream floats. There are a lot of very special people. One of them is the nurse that owns that dog, in the picture. [gestures] We've stayed in touch since I left Chaparral House.

Several years ago I had a heart attack. I knew I was having a heart attack because I remember talking to ... his name was Don ... he was one of the building managers at the music building at Cal. He had had a heart attack and I remember him telling me what had happened was that he'd come home one night, sat down at the edge of his bed, and just started sweating, and feeling very tired. It's several years ago now – we had had monthly green-waste pickup, as opposed to every other week, like we have now. I'd been moving some bags out to the curb, and I started to feel really, really tired. So I came back in the house, and sat down in a chair. Just started sweating, and I thought about Don. I thought, "My father died from a heart attack. I think I'd better call 911." So I did, I called 911, and said, "I think I'm having a heart attack." Then just went and sat at the door and waited for them to come. So I'm in the ambulance and we're going down Arlington until we get to the circle down there, and I hear the guy who's driving ask the guy who's in the back with me, "Do I go straight, or do I turn right?" Most of our ambulance drivers

go to the medical center out in Pinole. So I raised my hand and said, “No, no, no!” The guy who was with me said, “Could you give him directions how to get there?” I had to think for a minute, because you may not have been around here at the time, but Martin Luther King [Avenue] was all torn up. It was being paved. I thought, “Well, it will be a very bumpy ride, but I don’t want to have to think about telling him where to get off...” So I said, “Just go down here, go to MLK, turn left, go to Ashby, turn left again.” [laughter] So that was the story of my first ambulance ride ever.

UPDIKE Lucky for them that you were well enough to do that. Or not well enough, but that you were able to.

GALLEGOS Aware enough, yeah. It was kind of the same thing with my dad, when he had his heart attack in Philadelphia at the Naval hospital, I remember my mom telling me they’d been out folk dancing. Came home ... he said, “Well, I think I’ll just sit here in the living room and rest for a little while.” He called to her a little bit later and said, “I think you’d better get somebody.” That was pretty much that.

Stockton in those days (I understand it’s not the same anymore) was a pretty good place to grow up. A good neighborhood – you could ride your bike all around. Vallejo not so much. It was pretty good. I don’t know if anybody is left on my mother’s side. She had two sisters. One of them died when she was pretty young. The other one didn’t, but I think something had happened to her husband, and she came back and they were actually living in the house with my mom and dad for a while, before I was born. I kind of lost track of them. My family is Kensington. You see that blue basket right here on the bed? Those cards I got from friends.

UPDIKE That’s nice. This is wonderful.

GALLEGOS I had been eating out a lot – I wasn’t cooking much for myself. I’d go down to eat in Kensington. I always sat at the same table, in the same chair. It’s the last one before you get in the kitchen – I sat in the chair facing the door. I was told a lot of people came in and said, “Where’s the woman who usually sits at that table?” I was even told that once somebody came in and sat at the chair that I usually sat in, and was told very politely to move to the other side of the table. [laughter] It reminded me of a story when the Sullivan family still owned it – it was called The Bistro – it was a little restaurant down on Colusa Circle. Lyn, the owner, gave me a little plaque – they had a counter with some stools and she gave this to me on my birthday to put on the chair. I remember coming in once – I don’t know who the staff was – I came in and this gal said, “Oh, he’s sitting in your chair!” And the guy said, “What, does it have her name on it?” And we both just broke up, because it did! [laughter]

Kensington has been a really good place to live. We have two independent, special districts. One oversees our fire services, and the other, police, recreation and garbage collection. That's the board I was on. I tell people it's not too different from teaching. In the middle of that group of pictures there [gestures to wall] is Kensington Park. The woman who's in the middle of the picture on the left-hand side – she's the one who put it together for me. She used to be the district secretary. She said, "I put that picture there because I knew if I needed a check signed I could find you." I would drive up there and park in the park and read my morning newspapers and do the crossword puzzles. She's also the woman who brought me crossword puzzle book after crossword puzzle book, and she finally topped it with this. [takes out a gigantic crossword book] I said, "Okay, Helen, that's a challenge!" I'm going to her house for Thanksgiving dinner, I've gone there for several years now. I'm up into the 200's since she brought it to me. I can't tell you how many pens I wore out while I was at Chaparral House. I'm now doing them in pencil. I think I was on that board three terms, so that would have been twelve years. I got very involved in the community. We've got some very nice people down at Mechanic's Bank. I was going by the ATM, and whoever I passed would say, "Oh, you're back!" And whoever I was with said, "Gee, they really know you in this community!" The only place in the community I haven't really been since I got back is the library, where I used to spend a lot of time.

UPDIKE Oh, that's right. Elly had said that you might want to say a few words about ... was it Viola Hagopian, who was the librarian at the Conservatory?

GALLEGOS She was certainly a mainstay of the organization.

UPDIKE What was the library like on Ortega Street when you were there?

GALLEGOS Well, that building used to be an infant shelter. The library was upstairs, in what I think had been sort of a common sleeping room. The steps up to the library were about that wide [indicates a small step] so you had to be very careful going up and down in the library! There were a lot of things that were good about being up there. I think it's very nice that they found someplace downtown. I've only been down there a couple of times, but the existing building that they bought – I think it was some kind of "Y." It was a landmark building, so there wasn't an awful lot they could change in it. This one room, I just remember these beautiful tiles. I think it was a ballroom or dance ... apparently they bought the building next to it ... tore that one down, built a new building, and then punched through the wall so they could have the audience area in that lovely room. All the stuff for modern performances are in the new building. I haven't been through the whole building. From what Elly tells me, I understand that while it's nice, it's kind of isolating compared to what the old building was. They've all got their security tags, and it's sort of ... unless you see someone on the elevator when you're on your way to the studio ... there are a lot of people you don't see.

UPDIKE On Ortega Street you would run into people all the time?

GALLEGOS Oh, yeah! As I said, Julie's office was sort of the hang-out. You could always check with her – "Have you heard from so and so?" She was very much an integral part of the place. That was right across the hall from where Colleen and Ruby and the Student Services office was.

UPDIKE Do you remember when Hellman Hall was built on Ortega Street? I think it was in the mid '70s.

GALLEGOS Yeah.

UPDIKE Where did you have performances before Hellman Hall?

GALLEGOS That's a good question. I've been trying to picture that. But I can't, really. What I do remember is the year before the Loma Prieta earthquake, the trustees decided to have the building retrofitted. So we got an extra month so this could be accomplished. I remember calling up this friend – again, somebody I'd met through the music department at Cal. Somebody that wasn't really a part of the department, but would come and practice in the evenings. I said, "Hey Gay, remember that trip that we were going to take to Greece, except that you decided to get married instead?" [laughter] So we went to Greece for a month. We went to Athens and did all the museums, then took a boat over to Crete and ... I had found this nice cottage that had three bedrooms. Another friend joined us there. It was complete with somebody who washed the dishes and I remember Gay's husband Bob one morning washing some things in the kitchen. This gal came and said, "Oh, no, mister! You no do that – that my job!" [laughter] That was my one trip out of the continental United States. As opposed to my friend Michael, in that picture, who's been all over the place.

UPDIKE Have you traveled across the United States?

GALLEGOS Not very much. I did go to that conference at Cambridge.

UPDIKE At Harvard?

GALLEGOS Yeah. I was already in college when my dad got transferred from ... he'd come to a hospital in Oakland, which I don't think is there any more. Then he got transferred to Philadelphia. But I didn't have to go back there with him, I was already in college. My brother was really upset that he had to leave. I could understand because that's how I felt earlier but as soon as he turned eighteen he joined the Marines. I would get these letters from him, the return address would be "Filthy-delphia." [laughter] Well the Naval hospital was down by the

Schuykill River, and I think some garbage dumps, and it really stank. [laughter] It was not the most pleasant place to be. I could empathize with him about having to go back there. His wife Charlotte told me at one point he said to her, “You know, I think I probably should have just stayed in the Marines. That was a pretty happy time for me.”

There was a very nice woman named Dorothy Steinmetz, who taught humanities, and I think German. There were a lot of people who came from this side of the Bay to teach over there.

UPDIKE I’ve heard nice things about Dorothy from other people, too.

GALLEGOS Good people. Did you track down the house where they started the Conservatory?

UPDIKE I don’t think the house – that original house – is there anymore. But it was on Sacramento Street. 3435 Sacramento Street. It was the home of Lillian Hodghead’s parents. They convinced her parents to move into the carriage house next door, and she and Ada took over the larger house and turned it into – they first called it the Ada Clement Piano School, and then a couple of years later they hired other musicians to teach so it became the Ada Clement Music School.

GALLEGOS I know it’s got a long, long history.

UPDIKE Well it was founded in 1917, so the centennial’s coming up in just a couple of years.

GALLEGOS I lived on Sacramento Street when I first got out of Stanford. It was called the Monroe Residence Club; it was on Sacramento just above Van Ness. It was a very nice place. I think it was my roommate from Stanford who had heard about it from some friends of hers. We moved in together, and then she got married and went off to live in Sacramento. I think the building’s still there, I don’t know if it’s still a residence club or not. I didn’t move back in there when I came back to San Francisco, but I did live in a place in San Francisco on Sacramento, but it was on the other side of Van Ness. It was a house that the woman had converted into different living units. My room was the dining room. One of the really distinctive things I remember about it was that it went up the driveway at a very steep angle, and they had this turntable so you could get out of your car, turn it around, and it would be facing forward so you could go back down the driveway again. Really neat. I have some friends who live up here on Highland, and I said, “You guys really ought to get one of those turntables,” because a lot of the houses up there are really up a big incline.

UPDIKE That’s a very good idea.

GALLEGOS I think it was a really neat thing. When I bought this house a lot of people said, “Why don’t you just buy in San Francisco?” I said, “Because I want to come home to this side of the Bay.” I had my fill of living in San Francisco. Not that it was that bad, but this was better. Kensington has really turned out to be a family.

UPDIKE You retired from the Conservatory in 1997?

GALLEGOS Whenever. [laughter] The first year of my retirement, there was some problem with the bridge, or with public transportation. I used to lie here in bed and listen to the traffic reports on the radio and think, “I don’t have to do that anymore!” There was a time, when there was that bridge collapse, when we used to go over the San Rafael Bridge and the Golden Gate, which was not too far out of the way to get to 19th Avenue, but ... I definitely don’t miss the commute.

UPDIKE Well Joan, thank you so much for having me over. I’m just so glad you wanted to participate in this.

GALLEGOS Well, thank you for your interest in the Conservatory. I guess one thing I was bugging Elly about, because I kept hearing about – “Rooms being name for this person....” I said, “What have they done for the founding mothers?” She said, “Well, there’s some pictures up....” We wouldn’t have had any of that if it wasn’t for them. And Albert Elkus bringing it out to 19th Avenue. That wasn’t so long ago.

UPDIKE It really wasn’t.

GALLEGOS It’s nice that his son has gone on to be part of a music department. A good friend of mine from my Cal days, Jim Russell, he was someone who couldn’t pass a bookstore or a music store without going to buy something. He was living down a way here, I guess it was El Cerrito. His wife, Jo Anne, had gone to live in her parent’s house up north here somewhere. I remember getting a phone call from her one day. She said, “I don’t know what to do, can you come down and help?” So I went down, and as opposed to me, he was a very organized person, so things were in stacks ... but there was just this little narrow alleyway where you could walk from one end of the house to the other. All this stuff ... and then I also remember getting a phone call from her ... he had a storage space somewhere and she had gone down to it. She said, “It’s just like the house!” But apparently Jonathan Elkus took a lot of the music stuff to help start the music library at Sonoma State, which is a really nice thing.

UPDIKE That’s very nice. Jonathan was our first narrator for this project.

GALLEGOS I don't know that I ever met him, but his dad sure was a nice guy. My advisor at Cal was Joaquin Nin-Culmell. I remember one time when I was walking down the hall – I think it was Joe Kerman who was teaching a class, and it was overtime. Nin-Culmell was supposed to have the room, and he was kind of pacing up and down. Bill Denny, who was another one of the faculty members, a real jokester ... he said, "Why doesn't he just 'Walk-In'?" [laughter] Those were a good bunch of folks. I worked not only in the library, but also at the Berkeley Music House, which doesn't exist anymore. Bill Denny's daughter Gail worked there for a while I think. Again, it was a nice place to work.

UPDIKE Well Joan, thank you so much for having me over.

GALLEGOS Thank you for doing this project, its time has come, darn it! [laughter]