

Kris Getz 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 December 13 and 14, 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.

Kris Getz Interview

This interview was conducted in two sessions in the archives of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music on Friday, December 13th and Saturday, December 14th, 2013 by Conservatory archivist Tessa Updike.

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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San Francisco, CA
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Kris Getz, Conservatory Trustee



Kris at the Conservatory, February 2014

Kris Getz was born in Los Angeles, and grew up in Tucson, Arizona. Her father had a dry goods store in Tucson. Kris rode horses and enjoyed the outdoors at the family ranch. She began taking piano lessons when she was four, sang in church choirs, and took guitar lessons. Kris attended Stanford on a Westinghouse Science Scholarship, and was interested in becoming a veterinarian. At Stanford Kris met her husband, Harold, who was from an old San Franciscan family.

Kris joined the Conservatory as a volunteer in the late 1950s. Her early responsibilities for the Conservatory ranged from polishing silver, to entertaining guests and organizing fundraisers. Kris undertook the enormous project of starting the Conservatory's first bookstore, the Music Rack. She also co-founded the fundraising group "St. Milton's Guild", which later became the Friends of the Conservatory. After Harold's death, Kris worked tirelessly at the Conservatory's previous location on Ortega Street to create a garden courtyard in memory of her husband. Kris joined the Conservatory's Board of Trustees in the early '70s, on which she remains a Lifetime Member.

Kris has devoted much of her life to helping others. In addition to her thoughtful and generous attentions to the Conservatory over the years, she also helped to build a library at the Alamo School in San Francisco, worked as a tour guide for foreign visitors in San Francisco, was in a folk singing duo, was a food runner, and still volunteers for Hospice.

Friday, December 13, 2013

UPDIKE It is December 13th, 2013 and we are at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. This is Tessa Updike interviewing Kris Getz. So Kris, if you could start by telling us about your early history; where and when you were born?

GETZ My parents were married in Los Angeles, where both sets of grandparents lived. My dad had a store in what was then the territory of – it had not become a state – of Arizona. He had a little dry-goods store in the Mexican section of town. My mother's father was ill at a sanitarium in Tucson, and she was working at a bank so she would come in and visit her dad on weekends when she could. There was a woman who ran a boarding house, because single women didn't stay at hotels in those days. She said that there was a nice young man who lived at the Y, and he had meals there, and she would love for her to meet him. My mother looked at this very dapper looking man, with black hair slicked back, and she said, "I really don't want to meet any Mexican boys." She said, "Oh, he's not Mexican." So that was the beginning of a long courtship. He finally persuaded her to move to Tucson, because she loved living in Los Angeles. They married in LA, moved to Tucson, and after a couple of years I was born, but she took the train (that was the only way you travelled, except by car) to Los Angeles to have me born in LA. So I'm theoretically a native of California.

I grew up in Tucson, in what was a little town of about 50 to 75,000 people. It was a great place to grow up. In those days Tucson was a health-seekers paradise. A lot of people with sinus and respiratory diseases came. The schooling was wonderful. My dad had a ranch, and we rode – it was just a wonderful outdoor life growing up. The University of Arizona was a small institution in those days. The famous story is that when the state was being formed, the legislatures pulled straws for who would get the prison, who would get the insane asylum, and who would get the University. Yuma got the prison, Phoenix got the insane asylum, and Tucson got the short end – the University. Nobody went to university in those days, that's how times have changed. Anyway, I was very interested in becoming a veterinarian, and so I worked with some professors at the University on a splint (the Stader splint) which [investigated] what kinds of metals would be introduced to animals and cause the least amount of reaction. I hate to say it, but what they do to laboratory animals is sometimes pretty cruel. I hate to say it, but I was pretty cold-hearted. I couldn't do it today, that's for sure. They worked on the metal that had the least reaction, which was titanium. As a matter of fact, now I am walking around with two titanium hips, so thank goodness for early experiments. [laughter]

I went to Stanford, and I was going to be a veterinarian. In those days you had to take German, so I took two years of German and then the sciences. I met my husband, who had just come back from the war. It was his last quarter – he was going to take statistics. His family was a San Francisco family for many generations. He persuaded me that we should get married and live in

San Francisco – because I was all set to go back to Tucson and be a veterinarian; where I would be accepted to some university that would accept women, because in those days there were not many universities. Now a-days, I think over 51 percent of vets are women, mostly in the small animal practice.

Anyway, I started piano lessons when I was about four. Took them all the way up to high school; did not really enjoy doing it, but I was too cowed to say I wanted to quit to my parents. I was in all of the musicals – it was during the war and I was part of the choral group that went all over town to different churches and sang music in the churches because a lot of them had lost members to the armed services. I worked at the Southern Pacific Station. Tucson was a big rail center for Southern Pacific, and troop trains were coming from the East Coast to the West, and I worked at the Red Cross shop making donuts. I could not eat a donut for many, many years after seeing them made in that old grease. I started taking guitar lessons, and when I got to Stanford there was a veteran’s hospital that was taking care of severely wounded veterans who had plastic surgery and reconstructive prosthesis, and so forth. There was a group of us that would go and entertain them.

UPDIKE Were your parents musical at all?

GETZ No, not at all. They had to work from an early age on. My mother came from Russia when she was fourteen years old. My dad’s parents were born in Russia, and he was born in the east ... I forget which city. My mother’s family came to Los Angeles. The weather was nicer, and so forth. I have a sister who was a very talented actress. She starred in all of the Tucson Little Theater productions – the children’s theater. She also took piano, but did not enjoy it. That was all of the musical background that I had. I certainly enjoyed – in those days in Tucson we started having opera in sixth grade, and every year – seventh, eighth and ninth grades – middle school (junior high, we called it then) we put on an opera. And in high school, there was so much music coming out. We did not have television, it was a do-it-yourself kind of thing.

UPDIKE What sort of music did you listen to when you were growing up?

GETZ Besides what I played, I listened every Saturday to the Texaco Hour. I listened to opera ... I thought I knew so much about opera from those Saturday broadcasts! But I certainly enjoyed listening. That was about the only opportunity to listen to classical music. We bought records. In those days, during the war, you had to turn in records to get records – they were in short supply. I had all kinds of discs of operas which were put out in those days.

UPDIKE What were some of your favorite operas?

GETZ *Carmen. La Boheme.* The easy ones. [laughter] The ones that touched me, more or less. When I came to San Francisco, we were allowed in those days (they still had women under wraps) one late night a week. My roommate had a car, so we would drive up to San Francisco on Friday or Saturday and go to the opera, then drive back. There wasn't 101, it was just El Camino. We would drive back and be late. The house was locked. We had to wake up the RA, and get a demerit – take that to the commission and show our ticket to the opera, and then it was expunged. That was the price we paid. I think one or two years later, they just said, “We don't care when you come in – you can stay out all night.” I petitioned the Dean of Women so we could wear trousers. We were not allowed to wear trousers! We had to wear dresses or skirts and bobby socks – or no socks. That was life in those days. You don't know how lucky you are. [laughter]

UPDIKE What made you decide to go to Stanford?

GETZ Well, I actually got an offer to go because I had entered the first talent science search – the Westinghouse it was in those days. Now it's something else. They offered me different schools to go to, to study science – pre-veterinary. I thought, “Oh! Stanford!” I couldn't find anyone in Tucson who knew anything about Stanford, believe it or not. When you had the University of Arizona six blocks away, who needs that? I decided I wanted to go there – the weather would be nicer than Tucson. That's why I went to Stanford, and that's where I met my husband. He was coming back for his last semester to take statistics, which he kept putting off, and putting off. It took him three years to convince me that I should get married.

UPDIKE Could you tell me about the first time you met your husband?

GETZ I had walked by the humor magazine, it was called the [Chappy] – like the [Pelly] at Cal – Chaparral. I talked to the fellow who was the business editor, Maxwell Myers – I said I wanted to sign up for the women's department. He said, “Fine. Do you want to go out for a beer?” I said, “Sure.” When I stop to think about it now, I was not 21, but I guess they didn't really pay much attention in those days. So he called me and said, “Could you get somebody for my roommate?” I said, “Well, I don't know ... I'll see.” These were sophomores returning after the first year. I found somebody, and we picked her up. He had this fellow in the backseat, his roommate ... I didn't pay much attention. We went to Risotti's and had a beer, and talked, then came home. Apparently he [the roommate] asked Maxwell (the guy who had asked me) “Are you going to ask her out again?” And he said no. So he said, “Do you mind if I do?” He said, “Not at all.” So he called me up, and I thought ... I was going to polish my white bucks. [laughter] My roommate said, “Don't be silly! Go on out! Your bucks can be polished another day!” That was how my mind thought in those days. Anyways, that's how I met my husband. He was a returning senior. I said to him, “Could you do me a favor? There's a saying on campus that if you get kissed on the steps of Memorial Church by a senior, you are a Stanford woman.” So he

said, "Okay." [laughter] There wasn't anything very romantic about it, so that was the end of that. Apparently he drove back to San Francisco to his mother's house, and he said, "I met the girl I'm going to marry." She said, "Tell me in six weeks." Apparently he'd done this ... returning veterans, you know ... real keen to get married if they survived whole. That was our beginning courtship. It lasted until he died of pancreatic cancer. We had three wonderful kids, who were just the delight of all times. They all spoke at his memorial, which was the first one at 19th Avenue. Moving ... moving. The Ridge Quartet ... Krista Bennion and Jennifer Culp and two other people ... it was a lovely, lovely ceremony, and completely filled. He was the first person to die ... nowadays you couldn't scare up two dozen people because my friends ... the men are all close to ninety years old. This is just the passage of time.

UPDIKE How did you first hear of the Conservatory?

GETZ Well, I used to go to Donald Pippin, who has an opera program. He started in the back room of the ... on Upper Grant Avenue there was this little room, and he would have Saturday or Sunday afternoon concerts. There was somebody there, I don't know how I met her (this was before I had any children) and she said something about – we would go there – and my husband would always say to me, "Look for the fire exit, because that place is a fire trap." Somebody had asked her if she would do some work at the Conservatory of Music out on 19th Avenue. My mother-in-law said, "What a coincidence." She was a gray-lady with the Red Cross and she used to go out there once a week and bathe the babies in what was then the large room (it was an infant shelter – that's where the Della Robbia wreaths that were over the front door came from). She had not been out there for many, many years, since the Conservatory took over. I went out there with this gal that I'd met at Donald Pippin's. We did office work kind of things, for Marion, who was Lillian Hodghead's niece.

UPDIKE Marion Murray?

GETZ Marion Murray, I think. There was a plaque in the center of the courtyard with her name on it. Whatever happened to it, I don't know. I started working there, and did little things. I had a friend, Jimmy Schwabacher, who had grown up with my husband. He was very kind after Harold died.

UPDIKE What year was it when you started working with Marion Murray? Was it in the '60s?

GETZ In the late '50s, I think. What had happened, was, up to then, when Milton first took over – Milton and Peggy gave a series of fundraisers for the Conservatory at Ghirardello Square – in a makeshift kind of recital hall. Little by little there was money coming in, and they were starting to do things. The large room where the babies had been bathed became

the piano recital room, because it was the largest room. Whether or not they built that stage, I cannot remember. But the seats were there. The custom in those days – at the end of the year the teachers would put on order the books that they wanted to use for the new semester. Sometimes they left, and the new people coming in didn't want to use those textbooks, so they were still in their wrappings. They were building, in what used to be the old kitchen area of the infant shelter. Milton asked Pat and me (Pat Reardon was a friend from Stanford days – she was wonderful with numbers, she could do anything with figures). She and I got together and she contacted all of the publishers – they agreed they would take the books back and we would get a credit. Up to then, nobody had taken any interest. Milton said, “Well maybe you could work out of this space, and it would be like a book depot.” From there, we went to a place that was on the side of the building, near the old library, and started getting other things to sell. Finally, the head of the Voice Department's husband (who was a retired master carpenter) built tables, and they gave us this huge room opposite the offices on the main floor on Ortega. Paul Resnick was the new incoming numbers man – he was the predecessor of Pat Berkowitz. Paul (this was his first job) got a phone call from the Community Music School. They wanted to know if he wanted all of this sheet music ... they had sent out a call and all of this music came in huge banana boxes. Nobody had even thought to get them organized. I had built a library at Alamo School, where my kids went to school, so I knew the Dewey Decimal System, but I didn't know anything about music, really. So Pat figured it all out. That was about the time that we had this basement room – play room – and a ping pong table. Hellman Hall was going to be built, so they tore down the three houses on 19th Avenue – took two of them away – sold them for a dollar a piece, if people would take them away, because it was very expensive to uproot them and cut all the wires. The third house was empty, so Milton said, “You can have that house for your music sorting for now.” Those big boxes were very, very heavy. Charles the custodian must have lifted them all, he was just an amazing man of steel. He brought those boxes up to the empty living room, dining room, back bedrooms. I would sort – I started sorting in the back because it was noisy in the front, with the pulse of the 19th Avenue traffic. Little by little I was getting everything whittled down to be organized. The first sale Pat and I put on – we had all of the boxes of unsorted music in the old 19th Avenue recital hall. We sat there, and nobody came, except a few people. It's like having a giant birthday party, and nobody came. The one or two people who came said, “I'd like violin music but...” We realized then that we had to sort. It took a long time, but I did it. I got adult onset asthma, and my doctor thinks it was from the old sheet music – the old paper dust from all of the music! It's still with me if I get a bad cold, but my lungs are clear. Which is kind of ironic, coming from Tucson, Arizona and all of those sick people.

So that was the beginning of the Music Rack. We had some mothers who were very talented at sewing, and we went into making book-bags and covers ... we did all kinds of things for fundraisers. Silkscreens – that one picture of the Conservatory that is on a lot of old stuff – we used that. The color was a kind of orange. The school color back then was that dark, burnt orange. It was good looking. We had t-shirts of all kinds. We found this niche for all kinds of

gifts. Every once and awhile people would bring in collectable music. I bought a book that told me all about the collectables, and the categories. I had a little box about four inches high full of sheet music with all the different categories in that. Those were in the collector's circle, not in the main hall, where all of the other music was. Because collectors had started coming from all over Northern California for this music. We had all kinds of music. One particular kind got some people very upset. It was under the category of Coon music. That was a legitimate name in a certain time of American musicals. They were always sung in dialect by white people, never by black people. There was always sort of a dreadful caricature – cartoon – and up in the corner would be the white person (blonde, usually) who was singing. It was all in dialect. We ran up against a parent of two piano students out there, who was married to a black doctor. She was helping me sort one time and I heard [makes a ripping sound]. She was cutting them in half because she was so offended by them. I said, "I know what's offensive, but they didn't spare any religious or ethnic group." I saw a lot of this music at Ellis Island, because they had glass cases where they had the music of the time – anti-Italian and anti-black ... everybody coming up the ladder was put in a derogatory mode.

UPDIKE Do you remember what year the Music Rack was officially started? Was that in the '70s?

GETZ Probably.

UPDIKE And was it open every day of the week?

GETZ Yes.

UPDIKE Was it staffed by volunteers?

GETZ It was staffed by volunteers, plus I think we paid Pat, because she really put her time in. Then there was a room next to it which Ed broke through the doorway – that was the stuff that was really choice. We had a lot of texts which did not go out of date – solfège and memoirs by different artists. We really had a beautiful store. I was really proud of that store.

UPDIKE How did you advertise it to the community?

GETZ We couldn't really advertise too much, because we were a nonprofit organization. It was word of mouth. There had been only one music store prior to ours, and that was called the Music Stand. We wanted that name so much, but we had a contest to choose a name. Somebody who won (and I forgot what she won) named it the Music Rack. That was as close as we could get to the Music Stand, which later went out of business, and then there was

really no place ... except a little place out in the Sunset where you could buy sheet music. It was a great source for a lot of teachers, students and parents.

UPDIKE There was also a library at that time, at the Conservatory.

GETZ Oh, yes. Viola Hagopian ran it. I remember Archibald Calhoun – when the library opened he asked me to be the caterer for it, so I really knocked myself out. Stuffed eggs, and aspic on rounds, it was really very elegant.

UPDIKE Could you describe Milton Salkind when you first met him? What was your impression of Milton? He wasn't president when you joined, was he? It was Robin Laufer?

GETZ Robin Laufer for a very short time, and then Milton and Peggy, who had started the piano recitals as fundraisers. I forget how Robin retired....

UPDIKE Robin passed away in 1966, and then Milton was there right after Robin.

GETZ In 1967? Well, his office was on the main floor, opening out to the courtyard. I was the gardener out there. So I was kind of like his girl Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday.... He would say, "Could you have a look at these plants?" Or, "Could you do something about the silver?" The silver was on his desk; I would take it home and polish it. I'd come in through the window of his office. He was a dear, dear man. He knew what he was doing, and he certainly knew people to contact – he was a great fundraiser and a good friend of a lot of musicians. I worked with him for a long time. I remember when Hellman Hall was being inaugurated, he said to me, "Will you take care of the guest of honor?" It was somebody who was quite ill, he was dying of cancer. Milton told me to see what I could do for him, he was sitting there feeling very bad. I brought him tea, we didn't really have a kitchen, but had a hotplate. I did all of the odd little jobs around there. At that time I was not doing library work at Alamo School, I finished all of my responsibilities at the junior high and high school level. They didn't need Loving Hands at Home kinds of mothers to do things. I was at the Conservatory quite a bit. We ran those sales – instead of one big sale we ran three sales. One would be sheet music and collectables. Another would be records and books and collectables – that's what brought people in – these collectors from all over the place. I got to know a lot of them. There's a company in San Francisco called 42nd Street Moon which creates the old musicals of the Great White Way, Broadway, and they performed the original music of the time. A lot of those I had. It was fascinating – the history of sheet music – how it has come to be a part of our lives.

UPDIKE Do you remember some of the first performances, or events that you went to at the Conservatory? I think Bess [Touma] had told me that you have a story about a commencement?

GETZ Oh, yeah. The first commencement at Hellman Hall ... it was during the time of the hippy-dippies. The kids were wearing ponytails, and not wearing shoes. The girls were wearing granny dresses – that was getting dressed up. Milton said, “Could you put it on?” I said, “Sure.” So, Peggy Merrifield was commissioned to get a watermelon and make a basket out of it – you know, with the handle cut out and with melon-balls. I baked about three different kinds of breads, and a helper’s husband worked for Fromm Winery. So I said, “Doris, do you think you could get a couple bottles of champagne – about six bottles?” “Sure!” I never even thought about alcohol. The kids were all graduating – I thought, “What the heck?” So we had the bread, the melon, and the champagne before the commencement. Everybody was just beaming, and Milton said afterwards, “You know, I think maybe next time we’ll have the commencement first, and then we’ll have refreshments.” It was really very sweet. I think it was the first time in Hellman Hall. It kept growing, so the next year we got a case. After that, she said, “I don’t think I can get more than a case.” So somebody said, “All you have to do is get whatever base that you have and Seltzer water, and they’ll think it’s champagne!” It doesn’t have to be the real McCoy. After that I think somebody put the skids on having alcohol. It kind of grew. The year that Gordon Getty was going to be honored, Milton said, “You don’t have to do the commencement this time. Gordon’s going to do it.” The people started coming in early, they set these huge tables up in the Hellman Hall lobby. They had a background set up with all these kinds of sheets and things that made it look like hills. On the top was this outline of San Francisco – it looked like Beach Blanket Babylon. He had this baron of beef – which is the whole leg of a roast beef – on a stand with a spike coming down and holding up the beef. Some of the kids were not meat eaters, and it was quite rare as you got down to the bone. It bled quite a bit – they had all of these towels and it was dripping down on the floor. Some of the kids came in and were visibly upset at the sight of all that blood and rare meat. And of course there were fifteen types of cheeses, and crackers, and breads and fruit – it was quite an extravaganza. But kids would come in and see that puddle of blood on the floor ... so there were mixed feelings. So that was the story about Gordon’s commencement. But the first one was a kick, and everyone was very, very happy.

UPDIKE Did you go to a lot of performances at the school when you were working there in the early years?

GETZ Oh, sure. I’ll never forget – some of the best ones were when we had Michael Morgan from the Oakland Symphony come and talk to the kids before and afterwards. I sat in on a couple of those, and I saw him not too long ago here at the Conservatory, and I told him how much I appreciated his reviewing all of those things ... to let them know the feelings of the composer. I’ll never forget, there was one time Yo-Yo Ma came. We had a girl from, I think

Korea. Rather large, round, very pleasant face, but she always kept her eyes down, almost closed. She never would look at the audience. I saw her name recently, so she's concertizing somewhere. Yo-Yo Ma said to her, "I want you to open your eyes, and follow me. Keep playing, and follow me." He got to the back of Hellman Hall, and he walked the whole room, and made her keep looking at him the whole time, playing, and then back. As an exercise. He said, "I want to see that pretty face." What a wonderful way of keeping her ... I don't know what she does now, but I don't think she does that anymore. That was an outstanding afternoon. I can remember different people coming ... Thomas Hampson ... there were so many. I went to a lot of them.

UPDIKE When did you first join the Conservatory's Board of Trustees?

GETZ Well, the Conservatory had an understanding that you should contribute so much, and I didn't feel I could. I said I would continue to give all of our profits from the Music Rack to the Conservatory, until finally I decided I guess I could ... I don't remember the year, it was a long time ago.

UPDIKE Do you remember who invited you to join the Board?

GETZ John Beckman. He was from the northwest, and was a cattle rancher.

UPDIKE How did you know John Beckman? Were you friends?

GETZ I didn't know John Beckman. I met him for the first time when I joined the Board, and he had just been thrown by a horse, so the whole side of his face was raw – black eyes and everything. He apologized for the way he looked. I didn't know what he looked like otherwise. I said, "Don't worry about it. I was thrown from a lot of horses growing up, but I survived ... nothing like this, certainly." It was a very congenial Board, in those days. We didn't have this kind of a situation ... the size, or the problems. All of these fundraising problems. One of the first fundraising projects I worked on was the 50th anniversary of the Conservatory. It consisted of me selling tickets. Ava Jean Brumbaum had a cocktail party at her house. We had bought a box of tickets at the Opera House. There was no Symphony Hall in those days. The tickets were some ridiculous price ... at one point I came across one, if I do again I'll bring it to you ... they were less than ten dollars. That was the big fundraiser. Eugene Normandy and the Philadelphia Philharmonic. It was a wonderful program. I remember the first Messiah that we gave. That was so exciting, it was at the Opera House. All the lights were up because we had to read the programs. We were singing coming down the stairway. It was televised, it was the first Messiah in San Francisco of that size.

UPDIKE This was the Sing It Yourself Messiah?

GETZ Yeah, the Sing It Yourself. We had the books in the bookstore, we sold those. Either we sold them, or they borrowed them, I can't remember now. It was really very exciting. What else from that time?

UPDIKE Was the main responsibility of the Board of Trustees fundraising at that time?

GETZ Yes. We didn't have the power to select any positions, so it was just fundraising and different problems that might come up. Nothing more than that.

UPDIKE Whatever sorts of fundraising events did you have with the Board?

GETZ I can't remember. The commencement was free ... the Music Rack sales ... this was out on 19th Avenue. There were marathons that a lot of the teachers were involved with. A marathon of continual, 24-hour Beethoven ... Mack [McCray] was involved in those, so you'd have to check with him. They were terrific, really.

UPDIKE When you first joined the Conservatory, could you describe what the atmosphere was like?

GETZ It was very ... it wasn't very sophisticated, certainly. Everybody knew one another. It was like a little village, really. I'll never forget going down the hall in my garden clothes. When my husband died in '79, I decided I would build a memorial to him in the center courtyard. Hellman Hall was not there. Betty Shurtleff gave me thirty-five dollars to buy a tree, which in those days was a lot of money. So I bought a flowering plum, and put it in. I bought three large rocks and had a man put them in, for the three children. So the tree was to be my husband, and then the three children were the three black rocks. Then Milton said, "Wouldn't it be nice if we had some more green, besides that?" So May Kurka gave me some money for her mother, and I bought a tree for the corner. Then I had this young man ... we went to a rental store and bought a jackhammer and jackhammered some of the cement out, and put in some bushes. Then I went to a wine store on Fillmore Street, and bought some old used barrels, and put them in. I had made a trip previous to that to the Rhine country, and had seen wonderful barrels of flowers. They looked great in the used barrels, and I thought, "What a great idea." So I planted all kinds of flowering things and made the courtyard very nice looking. Little by little ... Viola Hagopian was the librarian then. She said, "You've done such a good job, how would you like to build another garden for us to look out on?" I think I gave you all of that stuff, and that was that story.

UPDIKE How long did it take you to put the garden together?

GETZ Oh, God. A couple of years. But it was very worthwhile, because it was beautiful when everything grew up. I remember Conrad [Susa] taught a class in one of those classrooms that had a door, he would open it up and I would be able to hear him. I told him, “I’m really enjoying your lectures, Conrad!” I had some wonderful meetings with people out there, or because of the garden – the openness of it.

UPDIKE You did a lot of the work for the garden yourself.

GETZ Oh, yeah. I was out there at least four or five times a week, because there was no water source ... I was dragging hoses. It was very good therapy for me, too. I didn’t have any strength to grieve, and I knew somebody from across the street who gave us permission to go out and get the PG&E poles, and had a guy come and make the thing, and then they brought it out ... things changed, but it turned out to be a really nice little place. [*When designing the garden space, PG&E poles were cut into rounds and placed on the ground as shown in the photograph below. Eventually these poles became rotted and were removed, at which point the walking spaces were filled with gravel.*] Somebody asked me about the garden here, and I said, “I’m not even going there because it’s up above and if there’s any water damage ... no, thank you.” I can’t chance that.



Photograph of courtyard at Ortega Street

UPDIKE Out in the terrace? That’s also just an enormous project.

GETZ I’m not up for it. I have things that I do on a weekly basis in my life. It’s enough for me to do my own garden at home.

UPDIKE Could you tell me about Milton's Guild, which was the group that became the Friends of the Conservatory?

GETZ Right. The Preparatory Department – I wanted to get some of the mothers to do different things. They were very willing, some of them would come out while their children were in class. So it started as Milton's Guild.

UPDIKE Do you remember how many people were in it? How large the group was?

GETZ Fewer than fifty, I believe.

UPDIKE And did you contact all of those people yourself?

GETZ Oh, yeah. It was a nominal annual fee ... I really can't remember but all of a sudden John Anderson decided it would be another source [of funding] so he kind of took it over. But that was alright, because I had enough to do with the sales and everything else. But that was the beginning of the St. Milton's Guild. [laughter]

UPDIKE What would they do? What was their function?

GETZ Well, we had mailings to do, whatever would come up. Teas for the Music Rack sales. And then May Kurka was interested in having the parents do some things. I cannot remember, too long ago – too many lifetimes ago! [laughter] This is really drudging up my memory, my lord.

UPDIKE Shall we start talking about a couple of different members of the Conservatory – your memories of them?

GETZ Certainly!

UPDIKE Do you remember Lillian Hodghead?

GETZ I don't believe so. The only thing I had about Lillian Hodghead, was when somebody would die, and Milton would call me in and say, "Would you please go and pack up their stuff, and have the people take it away? And if there's anything that you think you can bring back to the Conservatory...." Lillian died and she had this little place over in Marin somewhere, I think. A cottage. There were clothes, and her jewelry, and other things. So I had Pat go through any music. The clothes went to Goodwill. My husband and I had three little hosiery shops (this was prior to pantyhose) ... in those days the workforce of women was old women wearing dark suits and they would dress up and wear stockings that came to mid-thigh,

and they had little ties to keep them up. So my husband saw these little shops – there were three of them just as big as this room – there was a counter, a window, and they sold stockings. Occasionally in the window to catch their eye I would do displays for the seasons. For a dollar you could buy a pair of earrings, and for two dollars, a pin that matched. Women of those days made do with the dress codes. I thought I knew something about jewelry – I had been buying at this old building on Market Street – it’s the Old Navy now – it was the wholesale jewelry center of San Francisco. A friend of mine had a little second-hand shop on Clement Street near the Four Star Theater. I took the box to her, and said, “Meg, do you think if I clean these up and put them on boards, that you could sell them? The proceeds would go to the Conservatory.” “Of course,” she said. The lady to my right picked up this one necklace and said, “How much do you want for this?” A little alarm went in my head. I said, “I don’t know, we have to straighten all this up. But give me your telephone number.” So I talked to Pat Reardon, who was very savvy. I told her the story, and she said, “Ask for twenty-five dollars.” That’s more than anything that I was selling for one or two dollars. “If she takes it, it’s not enough. If she says no, it’s too much.” I thought, “Why didn’t I think of that?” I looked at it, and it said “sterling silver.” The pieces were like plastic ... they were yellow like ivory ... not cubes, but horizontal pieces. I thought, “Well, it looks like a nice necklace.” I was surprised that with all of the junk jewelry she had, she had this one piece. I don’t know if there are any pictures of her wearing jewelry – are there?

UPDIKE I’m not sure, I don’t remember if she’s wearing jewelry in any.

GETZ Well, this was a bunch of stuff that you wouldn’t give house room to, except this one piece. So I called the lady and she said yes. So my heart went down – it was probably worth more than that. Fast forward to the next week. I was invited to a home of some friends who live in Sea Cliff. On her table (she is a jeweler herself) was this book about modern jewelry. So I started looking at it – and there was the piece! I said, “Maggie, you will not believe what transpired!” It could have been worth hundreds of dollars, at least. But that’s life. That was the story of Lillian Hodghead and her stuff. But Milton asked me to go to the homes of different people who had died and left things to the Conservatory. Sometimes they lived in these apartment buildings where a lot of single people lived. I wasn’t really happy about it, but I guess he didn’t know anyone else to send there. So that was Milton ... Peggy I really didn’t have much discourse with, really. I know she was very talented, and was always very pleasant, but I was on the lower echelon, doing scutwork all the time.

And Jimmy [Schwabacher] of course had grown up with my husband, and wanted to be the world’s greatest tenor. He was a consummate singer, he just didn’t have a big voice, that was his problem. He studied, and was a great recitalist; where he could control what he was doing in a smaller hall.

Pat Berkowitz was the first woman to take over that job [Director of Administration]. She was tough. Paul Resnick, who was her predecessor, would practically give me anything if it was justified, because I was doing a lot of work out there for nothing. I still see Pat – she lived out in Sea Cliff.

Betty Shuffteff, what a sweetheart. She's still alive, I think, and lives at the Towers. She and her mother were some of the first people that I met at the Conservatory – they were stuffing envelopes. Her mother was this regal woman of another age, wearing this black lace dress. What an elegant, elegant look about her.

Bettye Ferguson, she's still alive, yes? She was very quiet, and always was very, very generous with whatever she was doing. I called her, and picked her up – there was one student, an African American fellow, and we went to some Baptist church – she had never been in anything like that. He gave his recital, it was wonderful. We were, I think, the only white people in there. She was a little hesitant, but I said, "This will be good for you." She gave a couple of dinners where her husband would shoot duck, and have duck dinners for maybe ten or twelve people.

George Sarlo was part of a group that went to Russia. Michael and Ginny Savage, and George with his then-girlfriend (I think they got married but I'm not sure, she was having some problems).

John Anderson – he wanted to build the Friends into a bigger thing than I was capable of. He and Jola have always been so warm to me.

John Beckman – I still hear from him occasionally. He was the chairman at the time.

Sol Joseph – what a wonderful character. On his door he would cut out the Peanuts cartoon. Whatever Schroeder was playing – the little tune – he would give anyone in the class who could identify that a grade up! [laughter] I thought that was so clever.

Beulah Forbes, she was so talented.

Mack McCray. I met Mack the day I came to the Conservatory. He was Mr. Hotshot. No girl was safe from Mack, really and truly. [laughter] He was a kick.

Paul Hersh was very intense. He and somebody else had an idea ... when the head of the Prep Department was going to retire, her assistant was May Kurka. They thought that they had this woman from back east ... she came out and lasted for one year. Her idea was grand ... she was envisioning a place like this for Prep. And there we were out there ... so it didn't work. So many

times this has happened at the Conservatory – the person that’s right for the job is right under the nose. So that’s how we finally got to May Kurka, she was wonderful.

Saturday, December 14, 2013

UPDIKE Alright, so yesterday we had left off talking about your memories of some people from the Conservatory. I think the next person we have on the list is John Adams.

GETZ John Adams’ first wife was working at the Conservatory. He was working some odd jobs I think in Berkeley – he had come out from the east. He would kind of hang out waiting to pick her up. Somebody we saw yesterday, Alden Jenks. He said that he could play around with the wires if he wanted to. He scrounged around a lot of different places and picked up all kinds of pieces of equipment. There was a little space upstairs, so John and Alden worked on things. It was the first electronic music ... he was interested in Indonesian music or something and Milton hired him. That’s how he got started at the Conservatory. He subsequently divorced his wife, and he’s been married now for many, many years to ... is it Deborah? I can’t remember now. Interestingly enough, the young woman who’s in my playroom now [*Kris Getz is hosting a young musician at her home.*] – I was out watering my garden and this young man came down the hill with her. She said, “This is Sam.” I said, “How do you do? You look a lot like somebody I know – what was your last name?” He said, “Adams.” I said, “By any chance...” And it was the son of John Adams! He was here to do some electronic music with the Symphony. I thought, “What a small world.” They were friends in New York, when Akimi was living there and concertizing.

UPDIKE Do you remember going to some of the new music performances that John Adams had at the Conservatory?

GETZ Yes, and frankly I didn’t really appreciate them. My heart was in other romantic periods.

UPDIKE Paul Resnick?

GETZ Yes, Paul’s first job out of school was the business manager. He’s the one who accepted this huge shipment from the Community Music Center. They had had a music sale and of course it wasn’t sorted, and it wasn’t sold. So he accepted it, and brought it out, and they piled it into a room at the end of the hall in the old building, and that was my room for a while. There was an upright piano in the room, and I just was diligently going through and trying to sort – trying to make some sense out of all of this unsorted music. I remember this young fellow coming in – quite chubby – wonderful ruddy cheeks. He was wearing a pair of overalls, which you never saw out here. He would be looking over my shoulder and humming. I said, “Do you

know this music?” He said, “Oh, yes.” He went over to the piano and started singing and playing. I said, “How do you know this music?” He said, “My mother’s a music teacher, and this is how I know it.” And it was Warren Jones! He’s gone on kind of a macro-biotic diet, he’s reed thin and preeminent among accompanists now. He goes all over the world accompanying people.

UPDIKE Would you like to talk about Pat Reardon?

GETZ Pat was a friend from Stanford days, and she was cracker-jack with accounting and figuring out spreadsheets, and everything. She was the one I asked to help me sort out all of the old textbooks that had come in and were not going to be used. That’s how we started, with a surplus and then ordering books ... and having that space and making the Music Rack. She was instrumental, and she ran it for many, many years. She was a wonderful person, I just loved her. She died, unfortunately, too soon. But she devoted a lot of time to the Conservatory.

UPDIKE And would you like to talk about Colleen Katzowitz?

GETZ Colleen was in student finances, or student resources, or something. She was the go-to person for scholarships, or loans, or whatever. She had a husband, Saul Katzowitz ... I don’t know what her maiden name was, but it was quite Irish. Then she married Saul. He was sort of at loose ends. He did a lot of things. He was hired as a cook, and kept making mysterious trips down to Mexico. Finally they realized why the kids were clustered around him at the lunch counter, and so finally he was let go. The next time I saw him he was a meter-maid. And he was enjoying it, because they had a very good retirement program – the city did. He also wound up as a cook at a place which is now a restaurant on Sacramento Street called Sociale. Just a couple blocks off of Arguello. He was doing well. I don’t know what happened to him, frankly. And Colleen died. Colleen – Mack spoke at her memorial, which was at Sinai, which is a Jewish memorial place. I had no idea that she had adopted Judaism, with that name ... not Katzowitz. She was a wonderful cook, she and Mack used to trade recipes that were so mouth-watering.

UPDIKE Would you like to speak about Betty Shurtleff?

GETZ Betty and her mother were the first people I saw in one of the offices, sorting envelopes. She later was on the Board, but she was very helpful when we started the Friends – the parents’ club, more or less. I saw her not too long ago, she lives at the Towers. I wanted her to come out, but she said no – she’s quite bent over with arthritis and walks with a walker. But she has just a wonderful twinkle in her eye. We have a lot of good memories.

UPDIKE Is there anyone else at the Conservatory you can think of right now that you'd like to mention?

GETZ Michael and Ginny Savage were the leaders of a trip that several of us took to different Conservatories in Russia – in Moscow and Leningrad – or whatever it's called today, St. Petersburg – it keeps moving back and forth. And also in Georgia. When we were in Georgia, that was quite an experience, because that was the time that they were pressing the grapes. These people are so outgoing, and they drink a lot. They were dancing on their toes – very effusive and very warm. We had a wonderful time, I have to say, it was an enjoyable experience. Michael and Ginny were top-notch leaders.

UPDIKE How many Conservatories did you visit when you were in Russia?

GETZ In Moscow just the national one. There was this young woman who was blind, and she had an escort, and she also had her dog. Her dog couldn't get the right kind of food, so I think we brought over some dog food for the seeing-eye dog. I also belonged to an organization which was against nuclear war, and Kirke Mechem, who is a composer in San Francisco, had brought over some Russian singers ... he had a joint concert at the Veteran's auditorium, next to the Opera House. There was some music that Kirke wanted to get to the lead singer, so he entrusted me because I was going to be in Moscow and he was afraid that it would never get through the postal service. So when we were in Moscow, after we had a concert, I said, "I'm going to go across the street and deliver this." He said, "It's very straightforward, it's just across the street." Well, the streets there are twice the size of Van Ness. So I went across the street, gave the music ... nobody spoke any English, and of course I didn't speak any Russian. I gave all of the music to the person in charge ... came back across the street, came into the lobby, and asked the girl at the desk, "Where's the group of Americans?" She said, "They left." I said, "They left without me?" I thought, "Oh, boy." Because then the hotels were vast, but they only had dining rooms that were very small, so you had an assigned time to have your meal. I thought, "Well, our meal is going to be shortly, so I've got to get back to the hotel." So I went out on the street and there were all these big black cars. I knew from a previous trip with my husband to Russia that these guys were paid by the day, but they would pick up extra money giving a short ride somewhere. So I went to the first one, and I had the name of the hotel written down. I said, "How much?" He said, "Four rubles." I said no, and walked down to the next one. "Three rubles." No, too much. I walked to the next one. "Two rubles." I thought, "Well, I can do that." I got in and we went to the hotel. He went to the base of the hotel's circular driveway and said he couldn't take me up to the top because he'd be reported. I went up there and into the lobby to the dining room, and there was our table with our name on it. There was a man asleep and drunk waiting to wait on us, but they weren't there. I was the only one there. I waited, and I waited, and finally the group came in. "Where were you??" I said, "Well, they said you had left!" They said, "We left the entryway to observe some students." I said, "Well here I am." They said, "How did

you get back?" I said, "I took a cab." [laughter] So anyway, that was my Moscow experience. It was very exciting.

UPDIKE How long were you there?

GETZ Between the two cities, about ten days. Well, the two cities, plus Georgia. We took the train, which is not the world's greatest transportation, but it was better than flying ... some of those airplanes, they were rather lax with seatbelts and everything else. But Ginny and Michael were wonderful. Emmy Callahan was another wonderful, memorable director of the Conservatory, on the Board. She was there. Everybody's gone. [laughter]

UPDIKE Would you like to say anything about Colin Murdoch?

GETZ I was gardening, and this new president came with his wife and three kids, and they were running up and down ... it was summertime, just before school started and they were in that house, the second half on 20th Avenue. I met this young man, and he was considerably younger in those days, but still with white hair. A wonderful attitude. He was very gracious about the shop and the space I was using. Through the years he brought the Conservatory to where it is now.

UPDIKE Do you remember if you attended the performances of Chamber Music West?

GETZ Oh, yes. I do, and I can't really tell you about it. I was there all the time, and we had a wonderful audience.

UPDIKE Could you tell us about some of the Sing It Yourself Messiah performances at the Conservatory?

GETZ The first one was at the Opera House, because Symphony Hall had not been built. That was the first time the lights were on ... they never went off, so you could read your parts. They tried to put us where we would be singing parts, if we were altos or sopranos, and then the tenors and basses. It was a magical time. I think I left the next morning to go to Tucson; my dad died the next day. I was there just in time to see him, but that was memorable in my mind because we had such an uplifting experience singing. Nobody really knew how it was going to work out, and it was so exciting! I guess they had some kind of transcriptions of it. After that, I guess it was taking place at Symphony Hall. Quite unexpectedly, as the people were coming down the stairs, they started singing Christmas carols. It was spontaneous, it was wonderful! The ones who had come down joined in with the chorus. It was very exciting.

UPDIKE Hellman Hall was built in the mid '70s. Do you remember where a lot of the performances were at the Conservatory before Hellman Hall was built?

GETZ No. I really don't ... what we had were in the old piano recital hall, which before that had been where they bathed the babies. That was the largest space. Of course the Conservatory couldn't fund ... we had ringers coming in from all over. We didn't have all the parts for an orchestra in those days. We could have done it with piano and violin, but we didn't have any horn players, really. It was not evenly spaced. I guess that's a dilemma today, even, to find adequate musicians that will fill out an orchestra. Now there's no room on the stage, practically, they're falling off the stage. I don't know what's going to happen next.

UPDIKE Could you talk about the Kris Getz Composition Award? When it was established?

GETZ I don't remember the first one, but Meikui and Mack decided that they wanted to have an award for compositions written by the students for the Preparatory Department. Because there was a feeling that kids that young couldn't play together – they never even tried. How can you have three kids playing different instruments all together and looking at each other and getting everything right? Meikui said, "They can do it." And so ... she is a martinet when it comes to discipline. She proved her point. The first one ... June Bonacich I think won the competition. It was a delightful piece. She had to learn the different parts, because I think piano was the only one that she was familiar with. She had to learn violin, and the other parts. It was wonderful, really. That was out at Hellman Hall. From then on it just progressed, until now, they're doing something different. So I don't know just what's happening to it.

UPDIKE Could you talk a little bit about the Conservatory's move from Ortega Street to Oak Street? The differences in the building and the differences, maybe, in the character of the school?

GETZ Well, they're profound. This is a vertical campus, where the other really was horizontal. There was much more a sense of community, I think, out on 19th Avenue. Numbers of students, of course, has accelerated. Far greater numbers. The level of musicianship has certainly risen, I believe, because they have so many more students to choose from in every category of instrumentation or vocal-ese.

UPDIKE Let's go back and I was hoping that you could tell us a little bit about when you built a library for the Alamo School. Could you talk about that?

GETZ My children – we lived about a block and a half from the Alamo School, which is on 22nd Avenue. I noticed that there was this large room, and it was the old library but

it was in the age when all of the books portrayed little blonde, blue-eyed children. So they had to get rid of those books because there was a multi-cultural aspect of children going to school, and they wanted to see children who looked like they are. There wasn't any money for it, and I used to hang out at the Museum of Modern Art, which was at the Veteran's building in those days. They had a little bookstore on the ground floor, and they were constantly having sales. I was buying up books for the library at Alamo. Then the mother's club, which I helmed for a number of years – we succeeded from the PTA because the PTA said you could only have one major fundraiser. The mothers were all kind of ... as the British would say ... Bolshe. Bolsheviks. The PTA was not going to tell us how many fundraisers we could have. We wanted to get a lot of money, which we did. We decided to buy books. There was a church school up in Angwin, California which had an original concept ... this was way before computers or anything like that. They would request from the schools, if you wanted to subscribe to their program, two copies of each issue of the National Geographic. Those were the days before they had ads, so if there was an article on butterflies, sometimes it would end on one page, and on the other page was something about buffalo, or something. So if you had two copies, you could take one for the butterflies and one for the buffalo. So we subscribed, and they came in boxes – on the outside edge of the box was the category – butterflies or buffalo or whatever you wanted. We started building up the library that way, and then purchasing books. It was a state of the art library at Alamo School, which the school department was so pleased, because it didn't cost them any money. They would hold their meetings there – “Look what can be accomplished if we only had enough money.” Then the computer came in ... famous last words. [laughter] There was my garden again!

UPDIKE Could you talk about your volunteer work being a tour guide in San Francisco?

GETZ Yes, somebody called me and asked if I would be interested in giving tours of the city. Two of my children were in school, so I had the time. The State Department at that time was bringing delegations of foreign visitors. They called on this organization to have volunteers give tours of the city in their own cars. I had a station wagon with bench seats, so I could take five people. Later on I started giving the tour on the bus. Well, the bus can't go everywhere that a car can. I wrote a tour of San Francisco, doing a lot of research on the history and stories about this location and that. I did that for ... I forget how many years now. It was wonderful. In fact, Libby, who is now 58, she was about two and a half, three years old. So that was fifty years ago, giving tours. She was in the back of the station wagon on a big mattress my husband had made – after the backseat where the tailgate is. So she would be playing ... that was the era before seatbelts, obviously. It was great, I would have sometimes just four or five people. They were visiting dignitaries from all over in San Francisco for a couple of days, they may be flying down to LA, or whatever their particular interest was. I'd have them to the house for tea

and cookies. I had quite a log of the people that I had taken over the years. Little by little it dwindled, and I don't even think ... they don't have the money anymore.

UPDIKE What were some of your favorite stories from historic San Francisco? Where would you take them?

GETZ I wrote out a guide. During that gasoline shortage I did what I called a Shanks-mare walking and buses. It took a lot longer to take buses, and it didn't last very long, but there were times when you lined up at a gas station for hours to get gas. We had quite a shortage, but we started usually at a hotel – the Chancellor Hotel – on Post Street. They would put a lot of State Department people there. I'd pick them up, and we'd go to my car or the bus. They'd get in, and we'd go to Nob Hill, to North Beach ... it moved around the city. We went all the way out to the Legion of Honor. In those days you could go past the de Young Museum. Traffic patterns are very different now. We went out to the beach. One memorable time there were some Chinese from the middle of China. They had never been anywhere, outside of China. They had their own interpreter. We were on a minibus, and there were about six of them. We were going down Clement Street to go to the Legion of Honor. We passed a Chinese café, of which there are many on Clement. There was something in the window, and they got so excited. The interpreter, who was caucasian, said, "Oh, that's a certain kind of bread that they have where they come from. Could you stop the car?" I said to the driver, "Yes, stop the car." They got out, and he said, "We'll be back in a half an hour or forty-five minutes," after showing them the Legion, for this delicious treat. So I went in not knowing what I was going to be faced with. They were so excited. It was a dinner plate and a large loaf of sourdough, only fried, and falling off the plate on either side. They were munching it ... it was all deep-fat fried, and I don't really like fried food, it doesn't agree with me. But they were scarfing it down ... they cut mine up. Then we got out to the beach, and were along the drive ... they said, "Stop the car! Stop the car!" It was the first time they had ever seen the ocean. They got out, and I said to the driver, "I hope they get back, because there could be a rogue wave!" They came running back screaming – they were so happy. Of course they brought all of that sand in, on their wet feet, and their pant cuffs had been turned up. That was a memorable trip, I must say!

UPDIKE Could you tell me about your folk singing duo?

GETZ I was going up to a birthday party at Tahoe on a bus with the friends of the honoree, and somebody up in the front had brought her guitar and she started singing. I knew all those songs from Tucson days, and so I went up and sat next to her. Our voices were just the most remarkable blend. I could do harmony to anything she was singing. Sometimes you find somebody whose voice is a great blend, so I said, "We ought to practice this." I went over to her house, she lived in West Portal, and we made up song sheets. She had some friends ... a school wanted a program. I said, "We'll do it!" So we were a middle-aged folk-singing duo. We did

Christmas songs around the world, we did labor songs another time, we did something for the ... her husband was an engineer so the wives of the engineers were going to have a luncheon and asked us to do that. The only thing we turned down was ... they wanted us to a parody ala-Gilbert and Sullivan. I said, "Do you realize how difficult that is? I'm not doing that. I can't do it – they have very special techniques in Gilbert and Sullivan." That was the only thing we turned down. But we sang everywhere we could! Old people's homes – we went out to Silver Avenue and once a month they gave a lunch party for everybody whose birthday is in that month. At each place there was a little glass of wine. I drank the wine, and said, "We should have a glass of wine before each recital, because I'm so relaxed now, I don't have any stage fright!" [laughter] I'll never forget that. It went off without a hitch. Then she got sick, and subsequently died. Anyway, that was a nice segment of my life.

We lived just a block and a half from Alamo School, and one of the people that I knew had a Brownie, but they didn't have a Brownie leader, so we used the back of the auditorium which had a room of its own. We would do things like overnight camping at the zoo, which was really hysterical. They don't allow that anymore, but the animals at night make their sounds ... we had sleeping bags and these little girls ... oh, it was something. [laughter] The next year I couldn't get the mothers to help me, and my husband finally put his foot down. He said, "You realize you're just being a babysitter for those twenty-five girls." I couldn't get anybody to be an assistant. But we did things like employ mothers with their cars, and we went to a cookie factory – fortune cookies – the girls loved that. A lot of things, but that overnight at the zoo was the pinnacle.

I worked at the photo lab at Fort Miley. Also, I taught crafts – clay and leather and weaving at Langley Porter, which is part of UC up on Parnassus. They had psychiatric patients. There was one gal that was there for a while. I saw her later on at a cocktail party, and said hello, but she didn't remember me. I thought, "Oh, dear." She'd been under some kind of medication. But it was marvelous, because I had the chance to do a lot of crafts.

The AIDS health project. I went down there with a friend ... she was afraid she was going to catch it. I said, "Oh, no. That's not it at all!" I worked in the publicity ... at the annual parade ... the gay parade ... I was on this float throwing out condoms and dental dams. People would say to my kids, "I saw your mother!" They would said, "I know...." I had a lot of fun experiences there too! [laughter] I worked there for a long time. In fact last night I was at dinner with a public health nurse and I asked her if she had seen Jim Dilley, who is the head of the AIDS health project. She said no, she had retired from being a public health nurse. I said, "Oh, those were the days, weren't they? At the very beginning." The very first AIDS walk, I counted the money with a bunch of people, and my hands got black. I realized how dirty money is. There's a saying, something about Filthy Lucre, do you know that saying? Lucre is the Latin word for money, it's filthy. After that I think people started wearing gloves ... you had to wash your hands because

the stuff from the coins or the bills just came off on your fingers. Or they had automatic counting machines, which were great.

I was a food runner. Do you know what they are? They would pick up – this woman who is a caterer – realized that there was a lot of good day-old food (which isn't really bad, especially breads) and the markets and small specialty shops just throw this stuff out when it's a day old. So she organized food runners, and I had Fillmore Street. I had X number of stores to go to and ask if they had anything for food runners. I didn't really like it, I felt it was a demeaning thing, begging for food. But it was for a good cause, so I would do that. And then I had single SRO hotels, that's single room occupancy hotels in the Tenderloin. Many of them didn't have individual kitchens, but they had a large kitchen in the back that everyone could make use of. So I would take my stuff to these SROs, and that was really heart-warming. They got to know me – I was big mama in my red car. [laughter] I remember a lot of them wanted collards – that's what they had in the south. I was bringing broccolini ... they didn't know what broccolini was ... well a couple of years earlier I didn't know what broccolini was either. It's a form of broccoli, I guess. I said, "Well, steam it or fry it. Just wash it and fry it." Anyway, we had a lot of sweets; donuts and so forth. So that was an interesting part of my life, being a food runner.

UPDIKE And you still volunteer today.

GETZ I still volunteer for VNA and Hospice. I used to transport patients who were ambulatory, they could lean on me ... when I was whole. I would take them to whatever they had to do ... private, or if they were going in for dialysis or whatever. I was working out of Coming Home Hospice, which is in the Mission. Now I go down to the office, which is across from the Cannery now, and I make these kits up for the nurses to go to people who have called for hospice for their loved ones. When they get this folder, they don't realize that it takes upwards of twenty or thirty different pieces of paper and inserts and so forth to collate. So it's a time-consuming thing. I do mouth syringes for the nurses to pass out in packets. I will do automobile pickups and so forth, but they have to have somebody to lean on. I cannot be responsible, with my knee. But I'm still doing that.

UPDIKE That's a lot of work.

GETZ Yeah. And it's depressing too, unfortunately.

UPDIKE Kris, could you tell me how the Conservatory is different today from when you first became associated?

GETZ Well, I think I've said something before about ... I don't feel that there's as much openness. It's just the structure ... we're a vertical structure here and I just don't know

what they do to emphasize more ... familiarity or friendliness. I know one of the things, when we had a hard-hat tour, one of the ladies of the architecture team said that they didn't have straight walls. They had slightly curved walls. I really don't understand the reason ... did you realize that, when you see the walls going down the hall, that they're curved?

UPDIKE I didn't realize that, no.

GETZ One thing that they did do – they wanted to have each room soundproofed from one another, but to have some leakage coming out of the door leading to the hall. Are you aware that there's music coming out, or is it completely soundproof?

UPDIKE Sometimes I hear music coming out when the doors are closed.

GETZ They did that for a reason, they wanted some leakage to let people know that it wasn't completely contained and silent. I think it's a plus to have the Café Crème, because I think that kind of leads to friendliness – “Let's sit down and have a cup of coffee or a sweet or tea.” I think that's enjoyable. But it's a downtown location, and one of the minuses is the housing situation, which they're trying to do something about. What happened out in the Sunset, is that many householders rented their houses out to Conservatory students ... supposedly four people, but who knows how many were living there. They could walk. Here, walking at night, especially for some of these tiny little Asian women, with their instruments on their back ... I just shudder when I think ... if anybody was really interested in stealing the stuff or whatever, it could be dangerous. So far nothing like that has happened, I don't think. Or if it has, they haven't publicized it. I think it will be better once they have better housing. There will be a feeling of downtown conviviality, or something. But that remains to be seen, and there's a lot of money to be raised for that.

UPDIKE Looking back on your life, both your personal life and your time at the Conservatory – and I certainly don't mind if you repeat anything – what are some of the things that have meant the most to you?

GETZ Oh, my. [laughter] I really was very touched by the Kris Getz Composition Award project, that was wonderful. I was disappointed that there was not going to be a bookstore, or a gift-shop; there just wasn't space. Because we did a lot of original printing of t-shirts and sweatshirts and tote-bags ... you name it, we made it, or had it available. Some of that with the music ... I guess you can get so much online it's become an electronic sort of a situation. It's just been a wonderful sense of knowing so many professors and personalities. It's been great.

As I said, I have three children and they're all doing well. And five grandchildren. One is graduating from NYU in June, and one is finishing her second year at NYU. Now, why they couldn't go to the University of California, I don't know. [laughter]

UPDIKE Do you think they'll come back?

GETZ I don't know. The one that's graduating has a part-time job doing something in music. All of them are very musical. When I saw Mack [McCray] at a birthday party I was having he asked about my grandchildren. I pointed them out, and said, "She plays the viola, the violin, and the piano. And she played with the Sacramento Youth Symphony." She's my youngest granddaughter. He said, "Is she any good?" I said, "I think so, with those qualifications." So he gets up from the table, and he goes over there and says, "Do you want a job? Are you any good?" She said, "I think so." She was concertmaster, and so he hired her to go to the summer camp in Switzerland. And so off she went! She was there and became friendly with Jodi [Levitz] and Bettina [Mussumeli], and she's at NYU now. She's teamed up with some boy ... not romantic, but they have busked in New York. They made thirty dollars one time. I said, "Do you realize Joshua Bell played, and he didn't get any money one time? People walked right by him." I said, "You must have made a good impression on people where you were busking." In fact, my first granddaughter had a friend who was Carey Perloff's son, who played the guitar. So she played the guitar with him, and they were busking on Haight Street, until they were busted and were told to move on. But they made some money too. I said to [Carrie], "You realize your son and my granddaughter were busted for busking?" [laughter] What a small world San Francisco is. Anyway, my grandson – there is one boy and four girls – he plays the bass and when he found out that his sister was paying seventy-five dollars for a bass player he said, "I'll play for you!" But they've never been in the same city at the same time. He's picked up a lot of the piano. Music plays a big part in all of their lives, which is wonderful. It's played a big part in my life too. I keep up with it with the Symphony, and the Opera, the Conservatory. And [Akimi], downstairs. And that's it! [laughter]

UPDIKE Well, thank you so much for doing this, it's been really wonderful.

GETZ You're welcome. It's been taxing on my memory, I have to tell you. Going back how many years, good lord. But as I said, you've been very gentle about leading me backwards. [laughter]

UPDIKE I'm really so grateful that you did this for us.

GETZ You're welcome.