

**Mill Valley Oral History Program**  
*A collaboration between the Mill Valley  
Historical Society and the Mill Valley  
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**David Getz**

**An Oral History Interview  
Conducted by Debra Schwartz in 2020**

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In this oral history, musician and artist David Getz discusses his life and musical career. Born in New York City in 1940, David grew up in a Jewish family in Brooklyn. David recounts how an interest in Native American cultures originally brought him to the drums and tells the story of how he acquired his first drum kit at the age of 15. David explains that as an adolescent he aspired to be an artist and consequently attended Cooper Union after graduating from high school. David recounts his decision to leave New York in 1960 and drive out to California, where he immediately enrolled at the San Francisco Art Institute and soon after started playing music with fellow artists. David explains how he became the drummer for Big Brother and the Holding Company in 1966 and reminisces about the legendary Monterey Pop Festival they performed at the following year. He shares numerous stories about Janis Joplin and speaks movingly about his grief upon hearing the news of her death. David discusses the various bands he played in after the dissolution of Big Brother and the Holding Company, as well as the many places he performed over the years in Marin County. He concludes his oral history with a discussion of his family: his daughters Alarza and Liz, both of whom are singer-songwriters, and his wife Joan Payne, an actress and singer.

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## Oral History of David Getz

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**Oral History of David Getz**  
**January 9, 2020**

**Editor's note:** This transcript is based on a recording and has been reviewed by David Getz, who made minor corrections and clarifications to the original.

**0:00:00 Debra Schwartz:** Today is January 9th, 2020. My name is Debra Schwartz, and I'm with the Mill Valley Historical Society. And today, I am sitting in the Mill Valley Library sound booth with artist, musician, teacher, and publisher, father and husband, and percussionist for one of the most famous of the Bay Area bands, Big Brother and the Holding Company, which featured lead singer Janis Joplin for quite some time. My guest today is David Getz. David, thank you so much for making the time to come into the library and to share your story with the Mill Valley Historical Society and Library.

**0:00:50 David Getz:** Thank you, Debra. Thank you for asking me to do this. I'm really honored to be asked. And I hope that what I say is meaningful and a contribution to the library here.

**0:01:07 Debra Schwartz:** Dave, Big Brother and the Holding Company's 1968 album *Cheap Thrills* is considered one of the masterpieces of the psychedelic sound of San Francisco and the Bay Area. It reached number one on the Billboard charts, and it has been ranked 338 by *Rolling Stone* of the 500 greatest albums of all time. The album is also included in *1001 Albums You Must Hear Before You Die*. Did you know that?

**0:01:43 David Getz:** I know that.

**0:01:47 Debra Schwartz:** I am a woman of the certain age, and I can tell you that it is a foundational album of my life. I think I must've listened to it over a thousand times. In the opening song of *Cheap Thrills*, in the intro of "Combination of the Two" — it's a live album first of all.

**0:02:14 David Getz:** It's not really a live album.

**0:02:16 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, no?

**0:02:16 David Getz:** I will talk about that.

**0:02:18 Debra Schwartz:** Good. I would like to hear that.

**0:02:19 David Getz:** Some of it is live.

**0:02:20 Debra Schwartz:** But in that introduction, I'd like to know who actually says it. The introduction of the band is so simple.

**0:02:28 David Getz:** Yeah.

**0:02:28 Debra Schwartz:** “Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome four gentlemen” — no, what does he say?

**0:02:35 David Getz:** Bill Graham says...

**0:02:36 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, it’s Bill Graham.

**0:02:37 David Getz:** “Four gentlemen and one great broad.”

**0:02:40 Debra Schwartz:** Great girl.

**0:02:42 David Getz:** No, I think he says “broad” unless they’ve edited it out.

**0:02:46 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, maybe.

**0:02:46 David Getz:** And changed it for political correctness.

[laughter]

**0:02:49 David Getz:** But he did say, “one great broad.”

**0:02:52 Debra Schwartz:** I was wondering if that was Bill Graham’s voice.

**0:02:54 David Getz:** It’s Bill Graham.

**0:02:55 Debra Schwartz:** Yes. And then, you know, I can remember the very first time I heard it. You feel the tension. You can hear the instruments starting to key up.

**0:03:08 David Getz:** It is tuning up.

**0:03:09 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah. And then, boom, boom — that rhythmic beat that really grabs you by the guts, disarms all emotional resistance. And Janis warns all the fans in that song with her boozy, pulsating voice, “Yeah, we’re gonna knock yeah.”

**0:03:35 David Getz:** Sock you, yeah. Rock it till you something.

**0:03:38 Debra Schwartz:** “We’re gonna knock you, rock you, and sock it to you now.” And you know, you really do.

[laughter]

**0:03:46 David Getz:** I think she stole that line from Otis Redding, but it’s okay.

**0:03:49 Debra Schwartz:** Well, remember “Sock it to you now” is in *Laugh In?*

**0:03:52 David Getz:** Yeah. I think Otis Redding sort of popularized the line.

**0:03:57 Debra Schwartz:** I mean that album just takes you by the neck and throws you on the ground. In this day, era of multitasking, it's hard to hard to remember that there were albums that affected you so much that you stopped everything and all you did was listen and savor. And that is the effect that album had on me and my friends, and most everybody I've ever known that's heard it.

**0:04:25 David Getz:** Yeah. It was definitely very successful. When we finished it, it shipped gold. We couldn't wait to get it out, and then it was number one on the Billboard charts for eight weeks. And over the years, it's continued to come out in every new format — when LPs became CDs, and CDs have become streaming — it just keeps moving. It keeps moving through the various formats, and it still stays alive somehow. So that is great, and it also means that I still get royalty checks.

**0:05:03 Debra Schwartz:** Sweet.

[laughter]

**0:05:06 Debra Schwartz:** There's a lot of life in that music. I'm not a music historian specifically, but you can't help but feel the life in the way that the dance between the instruments, the way volume is increased and decreased, and when Janis sings with music and without. It's alive. I'm not surprised to hear that it continues to evolve with every iteration of how music is released to us.

**0:05:38 David Getz:** You know, I think the main goal of the album was to record Big Brother and Janis in a way that would simulate what it was like in one of the dances in San Francisco at the time at the Fillmore, the Avalon. The other bands were making records and trying to record songs in the studio and get a whole different thing than what was going on in the live performances in the dance halls. So we tried to bring the two things together with the emphasis more on the live, but when we got into the studio, we had to record in the studio. We tried recording live, and there were too many actual mistakes when listening back to it. So we actually recorded in the studio, and then recorded live sound and added it like as a track to create the effect, and it was very effective. That was, I think, John Simon's biggest contribution as a producer to the record, that he understood that we wanted that. We wanted that feeling like it was a live album, but he knew we couldn't get it live, he knew we couldn't get it by actually recording live. So, we actually had to record in the studio and add live sound.

**0:07:00 Debra Schwartz:** It's so interesting to hear that. I listened to the album again in preparation for the interview today, and I thought, "How in the world did they get this?" Because in live performance there might be mistakes or someone might sing a little off-key, but this album is perfection. You're giving me a raised eyebrows. I suppose the father or the creators of the album will always think of the mistakes first, but those of us that have no idea hear it and hear perfection.

**0:07:42 David Getz:** Yeah, well, I love you for what you're saying, but — [laughs] I still have a cringe factor sometimes when I listen back. But I'm not in any way objective. I'm totally subjective about it.

**0:08:00 Debra Schwartz:** So, before we go on into your history as a musician and an artist, it would be great to hear a little bit about your family. I detect an accent, it seems rather East Coast-ish, and so if you could just share with us, in this oral history, a little bit about your family, just tell me a little bit about where your ancestors are from, and if you can include names, that'd be great, a little bit about your parents and if you have siblings.

**0:08:29 David Getz:** Well, I'll tell you that I only knew my grandmothers growing up. Both my grandfathers, on my mother's and father's side, had died before I was born, probably in their 40s or 50s, maybe. They came from Russia and Lithuania. My mother was one of seven children. She was the youngest of seven children, I think four girls and three boys. There was actually another one, an eighth but that one died as a child. She was the youngest. My father was the youngest of five brothers. That was an interesting family, and my father was a very interesting guy. They all grew up in like the Lower East Side, and then I think they moved to Brooklyn, like Bedford-Stuyvesant. I don't know really what their life was like. I was very removed from it. My parents could speak Yiddish to their parents, but they didn't teach us how to speak Yiddish. I picked up like little words as a kid growing up, but I didn't have much communication with my grandparents 'cause they never really learnt to speak English. They were really old world. They were still in Russia in a way.

**0:09:56 Debra Schwartz:** And your grandparent's name on both sides?

**0:09:58 David Getz:** It's funny. On my mother's side, my grandmother's name was Anna, Anna Dushaw, and her husband was Moishe Dushavitzky, so they changed their last name to Dushaw. And on my father's side, I'm not sure if it was Getz or had been Getzella or Getzel or something else, but they became Getz, a common Jewish name, as you know, Stan Getz and all of that. My father's mother was, Sarah which was my mother's name — my mother became Sally, but her Biblical name was Sarah — and my father was a Moses, Moishe. And so anyway, my mother's parents had the same name as my father's parents.

**0:11:08 Debra Schwartz:** How efficient.

**0:11:09 David Getz:** It got switched around, or juggled, but they had the same names. Moishe and Sarah and Anna were the names.

**0:11:18 Debra Schwartz:** Nice Jewish names.

**0:11:18 David Getz:** So anyway, my mother basically worked a little bit growing up and then wanted to get married. My father was just a really interesting guy and I tell his story a lot because it's an important story.

**0:11:35 Debra Schwartz:** His name?

**0:11:37 David Getz:** Morris Getz, Morris Spencer Getz. Moishe was his real name, his biblical name, in Yiddish. So, some of his brothers were into different food businesses together, catering and small restaurants and things like that. They had something in Manhattan during the '30s called the Seminole Grill that was very successful, and then they split up and one brother went into catering and one became a waiter at the Waldorf Astoria. And my father opened up a store on First Avenue at 42nd Street or 41st Street in Manhattan, called the Snack Food Shop, and it was fairly successful. And then at the end of the Second World War, they were gonna build the United Nations where my father's snack food shop was.

**0:12:35:** So he had to move. He didn't own the building, he was forced to move and he went to the United Nations, somebody in the United Nations and he got a permit to build a mobile restaurant on the building site of the United Nations, and he made it out of trolley cars, old trolley cars. With two trolley cars together, he made this thing that was a mobile restaurant. And his idea for the restaurant was to have international food, different things from different countries, and different ingredients that represented different countries. That kind of melting pot idea of America, they were really part of that.

**0:13:22:** And so, he did that. He opened that up, and he would become a celebrity for a while. He was in the daily news, there were spreads on him in all of the newspapers, and he went on a radio show where they took the whole family, "We the People," and he was interviewed on this radio show and talked about his dream of this restaurant. Anyway, long story short, he went bankrupt. It failed because something happened when they changed the building site or something, and he couldn't get to where the workers were, and he went bankrupt. He was in a long lawsuit with the United Nations for like about five years, which he eventually lost. And then he went to work in a diner near Roosevelt Raceway in New York, and he became really interested in horse racing, and he became like a gambler. And he started to do bookmaking on the sides.

**0:14:21:** So when I was a kid growing up, I would come home from school and my father would be there and I hated this. I hated it. I hated that he was so embarrassing to me. My father would be with all his racing forms and a cigar, studying all of the races of the day and making phone calls. And it was like my bedroom, it was my room that he had to use 'cause we lived in two-bedroom, one bath apartment with my two sisters, me, my mother and father, and my grandmother on a daybed in the living room.

**0:14:54 Debra Schwartz:** Wow.

**0:14:54 David Getz:** So that was the world we lived in. This was after my father went bankrupt.

**0:15:02 Debra Schwartz:** He sounds like a survivor though.



**0:15:04 David Getz:** Yeah, he was a survivor. So he got into this thing, and then in 1953, eight years after, or seven years after the United Nations thing, he got a big hit, he won a bunch of money [chuckles] and he bought this deli in Queens. He bought a deli that was freely falling apart, one that was really like a kind of loser, and he made it into this successful deli in Queens. Then he died one day, he was like 63 years old, and he dropped dead in the back of his deli, in the back of the store.

**0:15:40 Debra Schwartz:** Oh my God.

**0:15:40 David Getz:** But he was an interesting character, and I think I really didn't know him well enough because I was sort of embarrassed by him in a way. I didn't want my friends to see him. And now, when I think about it, what a guy.

**0:15:56 Debra Schwartz:** What a scrapper.

**0:15:57 David Getz:** Yeah, he was.

**0:15:58 Debra Schwartz:** He really had to be too.

**0:16:00 David Getz:** Yeah. And he supported me. This is interesting. When I first was asked to be a drummer in a band, I was 15, and these kids asked me to play the drums in a band. I'd never played the drums, but they knew I had rhythm from something else, which I'll talk about in a little while. But they asked me to play drums, and we said, "Yes, we would do it." Their parents called my parents — and one of the guys in the band, his dad was a music teacher, had a music studio — they called my parents up and said, "We want David to be in the band with Eric and Frank. He's gonna play the drums, so could you get him a set of drums? Can you buy him a set of drums?" And my parents didn't have a lot of money, but they said yes. My father said yes. And then he called up a friend of his, someone he knew from his days of being in the restaurant business in the '30s in New York, a sort of a Damon Runyan character in a way, who was a drummer.

**0:17:14 Debra Schwartz:** He knew a guy.

**0:17:15 David Getz:** He knew a drummer. He knew this drummer whose name was Harry Israel. Harry Israel had been the pit drummer at the New York Paramount, because in those days when they showed a movie they had an orchestra. Radio City Music Hall was the other place like that. So, he called up Harry Israel and he says, "Harry, can you get my son a set of drums, used drums?" And Harry said, "Yeah, Mo." Mo, my father's name is Morris. "How much can you spend?" My father says, "How about 50 bucks?" which was a good chunk of money.

**0:17:48 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, it was not nothing then.

**0:17:50 David Getz:** It was 1955. And Harry says, "Okay. Have him meet me down on Park Row," which is like Chinatown in Manhattan, but it's also where all the pawnshops were then. Anyway, he finds me this set of drums for 50 bucks, big bass drum, and a tom-

tom and a snare drum, and some stands and things like that. And that was my first set of drums, through my father, he knew this guy.

**0:18:17 Debra Schwartz:** Your “hot” drums.

**0:18:18 David Getz:** Yeah. [laughs] And they were great drums. If I had that set of drums now, it’d be worth a *lot* of money because they were this actually great set of collectible vintage drums. Now, they’re vintage drums; they were just old drums then. But now I know that they were like the most sought after vintage Gretsch drum set that was probably ever made. It was a Billy Gladstone, Billy Gladstone Gretsch set, which if you’re a drummer and you’re listening to this, you know what I’m talking about.

**0:18:50 Debra Schwartz:** I like your dad.

[laughter]

**0:18:53 David Getz:** I love my dad, but I didn’t. I was not a good son to him. The first I went to Europe when I was 19, playing on a boat with a Dixieland band called Rick Lundy and the Saints. We played on the Holland America Line. Then we played in Hamburg and Amsterdam, Hamburg and Rotterdam. And when I came back, my dad met me at the boat, which docked in New Jersey and my family lived in Queens, and he put me in a taxi cab with my drums and took me home. I know.

**0:19:42 Debra Schwartz:** I know.

**0:19:45 David Getz:** It’s stuff like that that you remember.

**0:19:47 Debra Schwartz:** Yes, that’s a good story.

**0:19:51 David Getz:** Yeah.

**0:19:52 Debra Schwartz:** So, let’s talk about how a guy can become a drummer, although he’s never played the drums, but looked promising. Sometimes, it’s that you’re at the right place at the right time and then that thing that happens kind of ends up defining you. What happened to you? Why were you good with rhythm? Was it obvious?

**0:20:14 David Getz:** Okay, so this is where I have to do a little bit of Big Bang and go back to the start of the universe. When I was in the third grade, we had a class called library, I’m in a library now, and it was one of my favorite classes because we just go down and find a book to read, you just look around, they didn’t tell you what to read. So, I found these books in the third grade by this guy named James Willard Schultz. He was a guy in the 1800s, late 1800s, who’d been born back East, but he went to the West and he lived with the Blackfoot Indians, and he wrote about stories about the Blackfoot Indians and became sort of a popular western writer in the later part of century. Then he was involved in a lot of other things, in helping Native American culture and bringing

consciousness about Native American culture to the world, to people like Teddy Roosevelt and stuff like that.

**0:21:13:** So from that, I became interested in Indians. I read all those books, and I wanted to be an Indian. I never wanted to be a cowboy. I wanted to be an Indian. So then I joined the Boy Scouts when I was 11, and somewhere in the Boy Scouts you have to make these lanyards out of this plastic stringy sort of stuff that you weave. And there was a place in my neighborhood — this is also a very odd coincidence kind of thing — it was a store called the Grey Owl Indian Crafts Supply Company on Nostrand Ave. in Brooklyn, about three or four blocks away from where I lived on New York Ave. The store was between the streets Tilden and Snyder on Nostrand Ave. and I lived on New York Ave., three blocks away between Tilden and Snyder.

**0:22:08:** So around the corner is this store, Grey Owl Indian Craft Supply Company, in the middle of Flatbush, Brooklyn, and this guy is one of two places in the whole country that make Indian costumes and sell materials and crafts supplies like beads and leather and buckskin and feathers to make Indian supplies. But what he also sells is lanyards because all the little Boy Scouts like me come in the store to buy their lanyards. So I'm going to the store to buy my lanyard, and I see this guy, Grey Owl, making these costumes, and it just took me. I was just captured by that.

**0:22:54:** I spent the next three years of my life with this other kid, Bruce Byrne, and we were like best friends. We were buddies and we both went into Indian Crafts and we would go to the Museum of the American Indian in Upper Manhattan and we would copy designs and things like that. Grey Owl, his American name was Don Miller, and he had this thing also called the Heyoka Indian dancers that was a sort of ethno-musical group that performed Native American dances, mostly Plains Indian Sioux, and Blackfeet was the thing, and that's the kind of costumes we made. We were into that style of Indian crafts. I was in that from the time I was maybe 13, 14, or 15.

**0:23:48:** We performed at different places. We would each dance. There were only four or five of us. Don Miller Grey Owl was one of them, and my friend Bruce Byrne was in it with me, and everybody got to play the drum. It was like a hoop drum, and it was a very simple beat. A boom, loud, soft, loud, soft, loud, so just like a pulse, and I was good at it. I could do it.

**0:24:18 Debra Schwartz:** Bom, bom, bom. How does it go?

[music]

**0:24:27 David Getz:** So that's kind of what it is. Sometimes it's a little faster, sometimes a little slower, but that's what most of the dancers danced to. So we performed one day at a school assembly where I was going to junior high school. And we all had another thing in common, all three of us, we loved EC comics. And I was starting to draw then, I was starting to copy pictures from these horror and science fiction comic books,

which also are now very, very collectible. They were some of the first great comic books in that period of time.

**0:25:15:** So, we were copying comic books, and Eric Bromley was one of them. His father owned a music studio, and Eric was learning the saxophone and the clarinet. And the other kid was named, Frank Leone, Italian kid, and he loved EC Comics. We all love EC Comics, but he was taking accordion lessons from Eric's father whose name was Buster Bromley. Buster Bromley was like a classic New York keyboard player, accordion player, club date musician of the '40s and '50s, and he knew like 2000, 3000, songs. He was like a walking fake book, what they call a fake book, which in those days that had all the songs.

**0:25:38:** He played the hotels, and he played weddings and bar mitzvahs and all of that, and that's what he was planning for his son, Eric. So, he was putting together this band, and Eric would be the leader of the band, and Frank would play accordion, and another kid named Hank Crystal would be piano, he was a piano student who was like a prodigy, and then I would be the drummer. They just said, "We don't have a drummer, but Dave has rhythm, Dave Getz. Listen to him play that Indian drum, that Indian thing that he does. So you're gonna be the drummer." Now backing up, Eric's father Buster and his mom Faye, call up my mom Sally and Morris, and get them on the phone. They say, "You know, we want David to be in the band, which is gonna be the Eric Bromley orchestra." [laughs] That's ridiculous.

**0:27:00 Debra Schwartz:** And this is — you were born 1940?

**0:27:03 David Getz:** '40, yeah.

**0:27:03 Debra Schwartz:** So this is —

**0:27:04 David Getz:** '55.

**0:27:05 Debra Schwartz:** 1955.

**0:27:05 David Getz:** Early '55, like winter of '55, or maybe even late '54. I'm not sure of the dates we actually started, but I started taking drum lessons around that time. They got me a teacher too, a teacher who was in Manhattan, and so every Wednesday afternoon, I think it was, I would get on the train from Brooklyn and ride to Times Square, basically the Times Square area in Manhattan, and I would go to the Henry Adler School of Music, which was a specialty kind of drum school, and take lessons. And my first teacher was a guy named Doug Allen.

**0:27:47 David Getz:** Doug was like a New York show drummer, one of those guys who worked shows, Broadway musicals and things like that, a very good drummer and a good reader. But it was all very slow for me. They were teaching me the very legitimate way to play, the rudiments of drumming, and things like that. And I already wanted to

learn the beats. I wanted to learn how to play a rumba, how to play a cha-cha, how to play swing, how to play jazz. I wanted to know the beats of those things.

**0:28:20 Debra Schwartz:** Give me an example of the beat of the rumba.

**0:28:24 David Getz:** The beat of the rumba is — let me see. [vocalization]

**0:28:36 Debra Schwartz:** How about the beat of the cha-cha?

**0:28:38 David Getz:** A cha-cha is more like [vocalization]. It's more straightforward. Cha-cha is really very straight forward, whereas a rumba has syncopation, more of a natural syncopation to it.

**0:29:02 Debra Schwartz:** What would be another very dominant beat?

**0:29:05 David Getz:** Well, swing beat. Everybody in those days had to learn that first, which is just like [vocalization]. That kind of thing.

**0:29:16 Debra Schwartz:** It sounds like somebody's going to come out onto the burlesque stage.

**0:29:18 David Getz:** Yeah, exactly. Well, there you go. And the burlesque is just that swing beat slowed down a little bit with a big back beat. [vocalization]

**0:29:35 Debra Schwartz:** Just hearing the beat, one's imagination is sparked.

**0:29:38 David Getz:** Yeah, I know. Anyway, so there I was: I was a drummer.

**0:29:42 Debra Schwartz:** Music is amazing like that. Yeah, you're a drummer. They said, "We want him to be the orchestra band." But they didn't say that later on you'd be a vanguard in the psychedelic sound in San Francisco on the other side of the country, fraternizing with some of the greatest rock 'n' roll musicians in the world.

**0:30:01 David Getz:** Yeah. Let me also just go backward for a second and say that I had two sisters, an older sister and a younger sister, who are still alive and whom I love very much.

**0:30:14 Debra Schwartz:** And their names.

**0:30:14 David Getz:** Alice is my older sister. Alice was very successful, she was a great student, an A student, good looking, had all of best friends, was popular, was like the president of the school general organizations, and all of that. I was a lousy student, I was good in art and reading and music and things like that, but I couldn't do math or science or history. So, all through school, I was hearing about my sister, teachers saying, "Oh, your sister was so wonderful."

**0:30:55 Debra Schwartz:** Oh dear.

**0:30:55 David Getz:** And I was like just barely getting through. I just barely got out of high school. I had to really finagle my way out of high school, 'cause one class in high school, my Spanish class, I cut like 55 times. I would go into New York, I would ride into Manhattan from Brooklyn, and go and hang out in radio studios and watch the bands and things like that, and not go to school in my senior year. So I had to take a special test and get a certain grade in Spanish in order to graduate, and I did it. I stayed up for like four days, and learned three years of Spanish. I didn't really learn three years of Spanish, but I got enough information to —

**0:31:46 Debra Schwartz:** Sling through.

**0:31:48 David Getz:** I got out, and I got into a very good art school. I got into the best art school in New York, which is Cooper Union. It was the hardest to get into.

**0:32:00 Debra Schwartz:** I would like to get the name of your other sister.

**0:32:04 David Getz:** Peggy.

**0:32:05 Debra Schwartz:** Peggy

**0:32:05 David Getz:** Peggy is my other sister, my younger sister. Both of them now are artists.

**0:32:14 Debra Schwartz:** When you talk about your truancy and you describe the difficulty you had at school, in reality you were living in the center of an incredibly cultured area, so I guess you just did a lot of field trips of your own design.

**0:32:22 David Getz:** I followed my own bliss most of the time, which is not always what —

**0:32:22 Debra Schwartz:** But you were able to, because of where you lived. You were exposed to things that you might not have been able to get in a classroom.

**0:32:22 David Getz:** That's totally true too.

**0:32:22 Debra Schwartz:** Yes. How fortuitous.

**0:32:22 David Getz:** There were just a lot things going on that were wonderful and that really influenced me happening in that time. The jazz that was happening in New York in the '50s has never been equaled. You're talking about Charlie Parker and Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Monk, Charlie Mingus, everybody. That was all happening in New York.

**0:32:22 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah.

**0:32:22 David Getz:** And at Cooper Union, I was right down at the center of that. But there were also other things. On the radio there was a guy in New York at that time who I listened to who was really big influence, Jean Shepherd. Do you know who he was?

**0:33:31 Debra Schwartz:** No.

**0:33:31 David Getz:** Jean Shepherd was a guy on the radio who basically just talked and rambled and told stories from his life and waxed poetic about things. It was radio art. It was, in some way, radio monologue as art, before anybody else did that. He was on late at night, once or twice a week, and as a kid, 14, 15, 16, I would stay up and listen to that.

**0:34:11 Debra Schwartz:** So, you proceed to art. We're going to keep moving along here, because we're gonna have to get you out to San Francisco at some point.

**0:34:26 David Getz:** Of course, yeah. That's where you need to direct me.

**0:34:29 Debra Schwartz:** Well, we're going to get there, and I think it was art that got you there, right?

**0:34:34 David Getz:** Art? Yes. Well, art and music have been back and forth in my life as the big players, as the big arenas that things happen to me in.

**0:34:48 Debra Schwartz:** So you go to art school. You get into a very good art school. What brought you to the West Coast?

**0:34:58 David Getz:** Well, that's art too. So, when I got out of Cooper Union, I won a scholarship to something called Skowhegan, which is a special summer school in Maine, and a lot of teachers from New York taught at it. It has a long history, and it's a wonderful art school in Maine, and about half the students are sort of scholarship students from the various top art schools in the country. So, it's like Pratt Institute gives a scholarship to somebody and Stanford gives a scholarship to somebody and the Minneapolis Art Institute and the Boston Museum School, and all of the good art schools get a scholarship, about 50 percent of the students and then the other 50 percent of people who pay for it who are mostly rich people who want to do art, paint. There were people from the Guggenheim, one of the Guggenheim sisters was there when I was there.

**0:35:58:** I went to Skowhegan and I was painting and I won an award. I won the second prize in painting there, and one of the guys there was the scholarship guy from the California School of Fine Arts, which became the San Francisco Art Institute. He and I became friends and I was going to go to Yale. I'd been accepted to Yale Art School to continue to get my degree, because Cooper Union did not give a degree. I wanted to get a Master's degree in art, so I was gonna go to Yale, and I'd been accepted to Yale. And I met this guy, Jim Massey, and he — basically, I'd been thinking about San Francisco. I'd read *On the Road*, I read maybe the *Dharma Bums*, I heard about the whole Beat scene. I started to see paintings by Richard Diebenkorn and Elmer Bischoff and David Park, and

it was this thing called the San Francisco Bay Area Figurative school that was getting a lot of attention in the art world. I was just drawn to it, and then when I met Jim Massey and he said, “Well, you come on out, you know it’s gonna be great, you can stay with me,” that kind of thing.

**0:37:08:** So, I just blew off Yale. I had a car, a ’49 Plymouth, and I got in that car, and I took a lot of speed. A woman that I had dated a little bit in high school became a nurse and she gave me a whole box of Dexamyls and Ritalin and Benzedrine and all kinds of stuff like that, and I got in this car and I drove 72 hours from New York to San Francisco.

**0:37:40 Debra Schwartz:** Don’t make me laugh. Gosh, you’re already a California guy. You don’t even know. [laughs]

**0:37:45 David Getz:** And the first thing I did was I went to North Beach and I said, “Where is it?” I couldn’t believe that it was so small, because it’s coming from New York, with its big buildings, I just couldn’t believe it.

**0:37:58 Debra Schwartz:** And this is what year exactly?

**0:38:00 David Getz:** This is 1960, September, August or September 1960, probably early September, 1960. So, I go up to the Art Institute, it’s about 3:00 a.m. in the morning, I go up to the Art Institute, and on the ground outside the Art Institute is a blanket, and I pick up the blanket and I drive around the back and I drive into the backyard. At that time, there was just a big area of overgrowth, trees and grass, in the back of the Art Institute. And I parked in there and I went to sleep. That was the first night I spent in San Francisco. And then the next day I went in and I registered for school. I had about \$250, I think, and I gave most of my money to go register for school. Maybe I gave them \$150 or something like that.

**0:38:53:** So, I started school, and I went to a few classes the first few weeks, maybe two weeks, and then someone from the administration called me and said, “You have to pay us more money. You can’t keep going here. We need more money for your thing.” And I didn’t have the money. So, I basically made the choice to drop out and get a job, just get a job, which I knew I had to do anyway.

**0:39:16 Debra Schwartz:** And where were you sleeping?

**0:39:17 David Getz:** I was sleeping the first week on Jim Massey’s couch, but he had a wife and two kids that he didn’t tell me about, so that was not gonna happen. I had to go get an apartment, and I found an apartment for \$40 a month on Steiner St., Steiner and Duboce in San Francisco, which was in the Fillmore District. I found this studio apartment for \$40 and I got in there and within a few days of getting to San Francisco and starting at the Art Institute. And maybe it was in the first or second week, I got into an accident with my car with a cable car. I was coming down on Hyde Street, and I didn’t know you had to get out of the way for the cable car. I was at the end there, and I didn’t understand, and the cable car came crashing down into me. I had to have my car hauled



up, and I put it in the back of the San Francisco Art Institute in the garden that I slept in the first night. I just hauled the car and left it there. And then, I started going to school. Anyway, I had to drop out of school, and then I went and I got a job. And I had taken the postal exam when I was like about maybe 19 in New York.

**0:40:31 Debra Schwartz:** And you're 20 now, right?

**0:40:32 David Getz:** I'm 20. And I think, "Well, I wonder if it's still good out here." So, I went and applied for a postal job, and they said, "Yeah, we actually need a lot of part-time workers now. They're called Blue Badges." So, I became a Blue Badge, and I worked at the post office for about 10 months part-time, and I didn't go to school. I tried to paint in my little studio, a two-room kind of set up, which was really tiny, and then I wanted to go back to school. I registered for school in January of '61. All of this time, I don't have drums.

**0:41:12 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, my next question was, "Where is your drum set?"

**0:41:14 David Getz:** I don't even have them. So, I finally go back to school. I have enough money to get back into school. And then, I get a job at the Art Institute, working in the cafeteria there. And I know how to do this because again, my father had a delicatessen, and I've worked for him on weekends and things like that. So, I know how to work in a restaurant and do food and serve food and make food and all of that. So that's what I did. I worked in the Art Institute while I went to school from 1961 to 1964, and I got a Master of Fine Art degree in painting. I went through their master's program, and the only time that I played the drums between 1960 and 1964 was when there were school parties.

**0:42:05:** There was a band, and the band was made up of other artists and teachers at the San Francisco Art Institute. The band had been started by two very, very famous painters, David Park and Elmer Bischoff, both of whom became very well known for their paintings. But David Park had died, suddenly died just when I arrived in San Francisco in September of 1960. So, Elmer was running the band, and then there was a person named Wally Hedrick, who also had some recognition at that time, had been at a show at the Whitney Museum in New York called *16 Americans*. Wally played banjo, and there was a guy named Charlie Clark who played the clarinet, and the trombone player John Sagan. These were all people who had either graduated from the Art Institute or were teaching at the Art Institute.

**0:43:02:** I sat in on something at one of the parties, and there was a drum set or someone else playing, and they immediately wanted me to be the drummer in the band. Wally Hedrick who played banjo, named me Baby Dave. He gave me this nickname Baby Dave, because the first drummer with Louis Armstrong, in Louis Armstrong's Hot Five, was a drummer named Baby Dodds, and Baby Dodds was one of the first jazz drummers of all time. So, he named me Baby Dave. I was Baby Dave from that point on.

**0:43:37 Debra Schwartz:** And you probably did look like a baby, because you were very young. Even now, you're so very youthful looking.

**0:43:42 David Getz:** I did, totally, I looked like a baby then. I mean, I looked like I was 16 or 17 when I was 20.

**0:43:48 Debra Schwartz:** Yes.

**0:43:49 David Getz:** So, I think I had my drums sent out. I'd say it was between 1960 and '64. That was the only time I played. And the parties would happen maybe four times a year. There would be big Art Institute parties, and they were crazy fucking parties. Crazy parties. Artists in those days would get really unruly and drunk and crazy. And this was before the psychedelics or anything, just wine and beer.

**0:44:18 Debra Schwartz:** I've interviewed some of the beatniks. They talk about their drunk and naked parties.

**0:44:24 David Getz:** Yeah, I remember, particularly, a couple of people who really used to get out of hand. But we would play at these parties Dixieland jazz, traditional jazz, and some of the guys in the band like Elmer were very good. Elmer Bischoff. Charlie Clark was very good. John Sagan was very, very good. They were good players. It was a lot of fun to play in this band, but that's the only music that I did as a drummer. I just really wanted to be a painter. I really aspired to be a painter and to make it in that world and galleries and be a professor and teaching and all of that.

**0:45:02 Debra Schwartz:** May I ask you what your impression was of California after you were there for a period of time in comparison to the East Coast?

**0:45:09 David Getz:** Yeah, the first year that I was here, when I worked at the post office, I could not accept it. I thought it was way too soft, because I had this idea, it seems so stupid now, but at the time I thought New York was harder, more hard-scrabble, and harder to make it there, and that it meant more, that it was more meaningful, and New York was more cutting edge. When I think about New York now, I think very differently. I think New York is over-hyped on itself. And I think there was something very substantial happening out here, but for the first year, I kind of rejected it. I didn't like the softness, and I thought something was missing. I thought I'd go back to New York, so I did. When the summer came, the summer of '61, I went back to New York, and I hated it. I couldn't do it anymore.

**0:45:44 Debra Schwartz:** Too hot? Too cold?

**0:45:44 David Getz:** I couldn't do it. I thought that I would maybe get a job in New York, and I went looking for jobs, and got out there with people who were looking for jobs, and it was horrible. And then going back into the world of my parents and my cousins and where their minds were at, all of a sudden I saw things in a different way. I

wanna say that I saw a little bit of their kind of Archie Bunker-ness. Not that they are totally racist, but that's part of the whole thing.

**0:46:48 Debra Schwartz:** So, California, the liberalness had through osmosis —

**0:46:56 David Getz:** I came back and then I decided, “No, I’m gonna go back.”

**0:47:00 Debra Schwartz:** No, I’m going to be one of those soft, free-spirited —

**0:47:01 David Getz:** And it really changed from that point on, my life in the early '60s from that point on was really a blast.

**0:47:10 Debra Schwartz:** What would have been a typical really satisfying evening for you in the early '60s?

**0:47:20 David Getz:** There might be an evening, for example, where a bunch of people would get together and draw like Richard Diebenkorn. I would be invited to this, Elmer Bischoff, maybe two or three other students with teachers who have like a private drawing thing, and we'd draw and then we'd go down afterwards to the San Remo or some bar in North Beach and drink and talk about art all night, and really believe that what we were doing was important and of the moment.

**0:48:17 Debra Schwartz:** To foster your passion.

**0:48:19 David Getz:** Yeah, that was a good time. A lot of good times at the Art Institute and in San Francisco in those days, a lot of great times that I had. During that time I also needed other jobs, and I got a job at a place in North Beach called the Old Spaghetti Factory which was a very, very well-known place run by a very eccentric man, a gay man named Freddy Kuh, K-U-H, Freddie Kuh, who's really a part of San Francisco history. Most of the waitstaff and the busboys there were gay, and all of the people who worked in the kitchen were straight. We were all painters, artists, working in the kitchen. I started out as a dishwasher and then I became a second cook. I worked in a lot of kitchens and restaurants at this time. I managed the San Francisco Art Institute cafeteria for three years while I was an undergraduate, and while I was in my master's program, and then I had this other part-time thing at the Spaghetti Factory as a cook.

**0:49:46:** The Spaghetti Factory was a wonderful place where all kinds of artists came and sat back in the kitchen. The front part was filled with crazy aberrant kind of art and antiques and stuff that a Freddy Kuh collected; it was just that trip. But these artists would come in the back, and that's how I met Bob Seidemann the photographer, in the back there. And one of the people that would come in the back was a guy named Hap Kliban who became later really famous for these cat cartoons. He would bring them back there in those days, Hap would show up with some of his latest cartoons and pictures, and we would just laugh our asses off, we would just crack up. It was hard work, keeping up with orders and things like that. Another thing we did sometimes was going and getting high, and then coming back —

**0:50:36 Debra Schwartz:** What kind of high did you get?

**0:50:37 David Getz:** Marijuana, pot. The only thing in those days that was happening was alcohol and pot. In the world that I inhabited, maybe some people might have been using speed like bennie's [i.e. Benzedrine] maybe, but not really. Cocaine was definitely not there or anything like that. Heroin definitely was not in that scene at all.

**0:51:03 Debra Schwartz:** And the pot was pretty weak.

**0:51:05 David Getz:** The pot was very weak compared to what they have now, oh my god!

**0:51:08 Debra Schwartz:** Right? You could actually smoke a whole joint or more and have the pleasure of the ceremony of it all, and still go back into kitchen and work.

**0:51:17 David Getz:** Exactly, and that's what we would do. Sometimes, we would go out in the alleyway and get high and come back in, and work, and listen to music and make food. It's kind of like when you're young and you're in the right place at the right time, and you're doing what you love, it's good.

**0:51:42 Debra Schwartz:** Yes, it's good.

**0:51:43 David Getz:** You can't knock that; you can't go back to it either. But those are the moments —

**0:51:47 Debra Schwartz:** Tell me about how you became the drummer for Big Brother and the Holding Company.

**0:51:53 David Getz:** So that, again, goes back to art. After I graduated, I won a Fulbright fellowship in painting, and Fulbright was a thing where you went to Europe, some country in Europe and painted for a year with their money, the money of that country. It was really all the countries that owed the United States money from the Second World War. That was a plan devised by Senator Fulbright, that's why it was called a Fulbright. So I went to Poland. Not a lot of people wanted to go to Poland, but I wanted to go to Poland because I thought there were a lot of cultural things happening in Poland — and it was somewhat idealistic — about socialism and communism, and that this would be like a place where there would be like a socialistic government, but a lot of artistic freedom. It turned out I was wrong, but I spent a year living in Kraków.

**0:52:50:** And then when I came back to the United States, I came back and I got hired by the San Francisco Art Institute to teach. This was not a totally unusual thing. It happened to a lot of people who had gotten out of the Master's program there, who were a particular kind of star, which I was. I wasn't the biggest star there, but a lot of teachers really liked what I had in my mind, and so I was hired to teach beginning and

intermediate painting, which was quite an honor, and I accepted it. But I still had to make enough money to live and so I had my job at the Spaghetti Factory too.

**0:53:31:** Anyway, I'm teaching at the Art Institute and I get this studio. I find this place in the Mission District on 18th and Bryant, just outside the Mission, a studio with a big loft for \$85 a month, and I get a guy to share it with me, one of the guys in the Studio 13 jazz band named Mike Fender, who played trombone and bass, and was a painter also. So, I'm working at the Spaghetti Factory to have an apartment in North Beach up on Kearny Street, a great one-bedroom apartment for \$65 a month, I think it was, and I'm making enough money. I'm between the Art Institute, teaching two classes, and working at the Spaghetti Factory, and I'm making enough money to have a car, a studio in the Mission District, and an apartment. This is when San Francisco is a fairly cheap place to live. So, I have a set of drums in the studio now, and every once in a while, when my painting is not going so great, I go and play the drums.

**0:54:51:** There's a small cafe right below the studio, and I go down there one day to get some lunch, and I see this guy with long hair, and it's Peter Albin. I think I approached him, and I think I was pretty blatant about saying, "Hey man, I dig your long hair," or something about his hair. And he said, "I'm in this rock and roll band." I said, "Oh, what band?" He said, "Big Brother and the Holding Company." I said, "You know, I've heard about you guys. There's actually an event that some people from the San Francisco Art Institute are putting on at the Fillmore. It's going to be called the Peace Rock." This was to raise money for the peace movement.

**0:55:32 Debra Schwartz:** And this is what year exactly?

**0:55:35 David Getz:** What's that?

**0:55:35 Debra Schwartz:** What year are we here?

**0:55:37 David Getz:** We're in 1966.

**0:55:38 Debra Schwartz:** 1966, okay.

**0:55:40 David Getz:** '66, late January, 1966. I meet Peter sometime in January. So, I'm also involved in the peace movement. I'm going on peace marches and things like that. That's a whole other thing, a whole other story. I was drafted, I failed my army physical intentionally because I didn't wanna go to Vietnam. Even then, I saw the absurdity of putting up my life up —

**0:56:15 Debra Schwartz:** Wait, wait, wait. We just have to stop here for a second, and we'll pick it up right when you're doing the performance, but, it's not so easy to fail intentionally. I know a lot of guys that tried to, not sleeping for five days, not eating. What was your strategy?

**0:56:32 David Getz:** My strategy was I stayed up for about three days painting in my underwear, and then when I went in, excuse the expression, I was fucked up really bad. I started to do the written test, and I was crossing things out and filling things in, and writing stuff in, and doing all of that.

**0:56:55 Debra Schwartz:** You were fucked up on drugs or just sleep deprived?

**0:56:58 David Getz:** Sleep. Just from speed and staying up.

**0:57:00 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, so you kept yourself up with speed.

**0:57:01 David Getz:** I stayed up three nights on speed.

**0:57:02 Debra Schwartz:** Okay, so you look like, “I’m a meth head.”

**0:57:04 David Getz:** Mostly Dexamyls, which I had left over still from my trip four years before. I didn’t use speed. I didn’t see any need for it, unless you wanted to stay up for three nights, which I did when I drove out to California, and then I did when I knew I was gonna go in for my draft physical. I knew I wanted to be really fucked up.

**0:57:28 Debra Schwartz:** So you looked like a deranged sort of psycho guy.

**0:57:29 David Getz:** It’s really self-destructive, but at the same time, I knew I could not go to Vietnam. I knew that, it was not something I could withstand whether from —

**0:57:42 Debra Schwartz:** What was your number?

**0:57:43 David Getz:** Weakness or cowardice or just not believing so much in the idea of it, just there was no way could it work. So, anyway, I did get pulled out. Before I even finished the psychological test, someone asked me to come with them. I was seated doing a written test, and someone came along and said, “Would you come with us?” And then they took me to a psychiatrist where I was interviewed, and the psychiatrist asked me a bunch of questions, and one of the questions he asked me was, “Have you ever had a homosexual experience?” And I said, “Yes,” which was true. In the Boy Scouts I’d had a homosexual experience, not that a lot of people don’t.

**0:58:26 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm.

**0:58:27 David Getz:** We can go anywhere. [laughs] We won’t go there.

**0:58:32 Debra Schwartz:** What better place to bring it up than in a draft board!

**0:58:34 David Getz:** It wasn’t a deep thing for me, but it was at this Boy Scout camp, where things like that happen. Anyway, then he said to me, “You don’t really don’t wanna be in the army do you?” I said, “No.” He said, “Okay look, we’ll call you back in about a year.” He wrote something down, and they never called me back. They just said,

“Go home.” But then they put me outside, and I was in Oakland somewhere, and I was literally lost. Someone finally came along and helped me, actually had to put me on a bus, and helped me get back to San Francisco. I didn’t know where I was anymore. I was so out of it.

**0:58:48 Debra Schwartz:** And then you went home.

**0:58:48 David Getz:** I was like crashing.

**0:58:48 Debra Schwartz:** And you slept.

**0:58:48 David Getz:** Yeah. I think I slept for two days.

**0:58:48 Debra Schwartz:** The sleep of relief.

[laughter]

**0:59:19 David Getz:** Yeah.

**0:59:20 Debra Schwartz:** Mission accomplished. Now, back to the performance.

**0:59:24 David Getz:** So, I meet Peter Albin in this cafe below my studio, and we strike up this friendship, and I say, “Well, I’m gonna go hear you guys at the Peace Rock at the Fillmore.” I was gonna go anyway, I think it was on my list, and I’d seen posters for Big Brother. One of the posters that I’d seen for Big brother was of a yogi sitting on a bed of nails and it said “Big Brother and Holding Company, Open Theater, Berkeley.” And I thought that was cool, a yogi on a bed of nails for a band, that’s fantastic. And so the name stayed with me. I hadn’t heard them, but I knew they were one of the bands.

**1:00:03:** And I had also gone to a few of the functions at the Longshoreman’s Hall, which were some of the first dances, ’cause I was in North Beach and I was close to that. I hadn’t gone to the Fillmore, or the Avalon, or anything like that yet. So I go to the Fillmore, and the first band on was The Great Society, and they were good. And then another band came on, it was like, The Wild Flower, and they were okay. Then the Quicksilver Messenger Service played, and they were pretty good. “Wow, these guys are okay.” Then the last band on was Big Brother and the Holding Company. They came on and it just blew my mind. The whole audience rushed to the stage. It was like this energy that was just tremendous, that kind of magnetic pull, that everybody rushed to the stage.

**1:00:53:** And the main thing about it was James Gurley, he was the featured artist. He played guitar, and he was playing like a million notes a minute. It sounded like John Coltrane or Ornette Coleman to me, against a rock ‘n’ roll beat. Peter is screaming and playing his bass like a mad man in front of the stage. Sam Andrew is sort of in an army, he’s like this pretty boy, he’s like this beautiful handsome guy, who just looks golden. And he’s in like an army jacket, and he’s jumping up and down like a kind of a mad college kid, frat boy, or something. And then behind them, way behind them, is this

drummer, who's kind of hunched over, and he's barely playing. He's like very lightweight, and all of the energy is coming from these three guys in front. But it's a fantastic energy, and the audience is just completely sucked in.

**1:01:55:** So I see Peter, I don't know, maybe the next day, or a few days later. I'm not sure when it was, but the next time we see each other is in this café, and I say to him something like, "You guys were great, I really loved it. But I have to tell you, the drummer is sort of like the weak link in your band, and I play the drums." [laughs] "I play the drums, and I'm pretty good. If you ever fire that drummer, give me a call." And he says, "You know, I've heard you play. I've heard you practicing upstairs, when I've been down here eating."

**1:02:39:** So anyway, the next week Big Brother's playing at this club called the Matrix, and sure enough they fired the drummer, and they've got this other drummer whose name is Fritz Kasten, who's kind of like a pretty good drummer, kind of jazz drummer, kind of light again, a little light, but he's a pretty good player. He wound up with a band called the Joy of Cooking, ultimately, and I know him now, he's still around, and he's still playing with small jazz groups in the Bay Area. So, I went to hear them at the Matrix and just listen.

**1:03:31 Debra Schwartz:** Is Matrix the bar that Marty Balin owned?

**1:03:33 David Getz:** That's right. It was a bar that Marty Balin and his father owned, and I think they had a partner.

**1:03:38 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah.

**1:03:39 David Getz:** A lot of bands played there. The Big Brother was playing there for either three nights or four nights straight. So, the next night I went to hear them, and they had another drummer. His name was Norman Mayall. And Norman, again, is a guy who's still around, a very good drummer, a good rock drummer, and actually quite adequate in some ways. I would say, adequate, not really driving the band, but playing solid and keeping everything together. I think they wanted Norman to be the drummer, they basically offered him the job, 'cause that's what I learned later. But I didn't know this at the time. I thought he was gonna be the drummer, but I guess he had another offer. Norman had another offer from a band called the Sopwith Camel.

**1:04:30 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, I remember them. [chuckles]

**1:04:31 David Getz:** Speaking of the Sopwith Camel, they had a big hit called "Hello, Hello." And in the song the line was, "Would you like some of my tangerine? You know I'd never treat you mean." [chuckles] They were kind of like the Lovin' Spoonful, that kind of folksy, nice, un-threatening kind of music. But they had a hit with the song "Hello, Hello." So Norman took their offer.



**1:05:26:** And I guess the next night was maybe the last night of their gig, and Peter calls me up and says, “Okay, we don’t have another drummer,” almost like desperation, “could you do it? But we can’t do it until we’ve played with you. We have to have a rehearsal.” So I say, “Okay, let’s have a rehearsal.” And they knew this guy, Sal Lombardi, who was a friend of James. James had come from Detroit with his wife. He was part of a whole Detroit group of people, Detroit hippies who all lived around Pine St., a really large group of people that started the Family Dog. They were mostly all from Detroit, about 20 people, who all came out to San Francisco around the same time in the early ’60s. So, he knew this guy from Detroit, Sal Lombardi, and Sal was managing this all-girl band, called Our Mother’s Children. And they all lived over on Pine St. Sal was like a Svengali, he had a big, black beard and long, black hair, and his four or five women living with him, who were this band, Our Mother’s Children. And they had no furniture at all, it was just an empty building. So we went over there, and I set up my drums and we played, and the first thing we ever played was “2120” by the Rolling Stones. It’s just basically blues rock, was like a boogie. [vocalization] That kinda thing. And we played, I believe, for 20 minutes. The energy was great, and it was like, “I’m the drummer.”

**1:07:06 Debra Schwartz:** Done, done, and done.

**1:07:07 David Getz:** So yes, I know I’m the drummer for this band, that was it.

**1:07:12 Debra Schwartz:** How did they get their name?

**1:07:13 David Getz:** No one ever said to me, “Oh, Dave, okay, you have the job.” It was just like, “Okay, we’re playing tonight at the Matrix, be there at six.”

**1:07:20 Debra Schwartz:** I guess it was just too obvious for words.

[laughter]

**1:07:25 David Getz:** Yeah.

**1:07:27 Debra Schwartz:** Where did the name come from, Big Brother and the Holding Company?

**1:07:29 David Getz:** It’s before I was in the band. My understanding is that Chet Helms, who was the manager of the band when I joined it, and before that, he was really the person responsible. Chet was responsible for everything, because Chet was running these jam sessions, this is in 1965, and he started running these jam sessions in a Victorian mansion in the Haight-Ashbury, called 1090 Page St. And the mansion was owned by Peter Albin’s uncle, and Peter Albin’s uncle Henry. He owned this big, old mansion that was a fantastic mansion, really an incredible place, from the 1800s, and he needed someone to manage it. They had made it into rooms, so there were maybe 12 people living in that building, in different rooms. Peter and his brother Rodney were managing it for the uncle. And they had a ballroom in the bottom, there was an actual ballroom in the bottom, so they started to have jam sessions. And Chet Helms came into

the picture and started to run these jam sessions, and charge 50 cents. Chet knew that Sam and Peter were jamming together, so he took Sam and Peter, and he brought James Gurley over.

**1:09:01:** And he basically named the band. He sat around with them, Chet did. Chet, Peter, and Sam, I believe, sat around, and they just thought of names, like “Tom Swift and His Electric Grandmother.” They hatched things like that. (I saw the list one time.) And then someone said, “Big Brother and The Holding Company.” At the time, they were looking at Chet Helms as being almost beyond the manager, almost the idea behind the band, the person who had put it together, so he was Big Brother and the band would be the Holding Company. There was that suggestion. But eventually, Chet was pushed out of the picture. We fired him, and we just went on with Big Brother and the Holding Company. And over the years, of course, a million people asked that question. Big Brother was 1984, which a lot of people from this generation don’t know, but the George Orwell novel was a big thing in the ’60s, people thinking that we were headed toward this kind of a —

**1:10:08 Debra Schwartz:** If you weren’t thinking about it in the ’60s, you’re certainly thinking about it now, because Big Brother is watching.

**1:10:14 David Getz:** Definitely. It’s become more and more real. It didn’t happen in 1984, but if we keep going in this direction it’ll be happening by 2050, for sure. Everybody’s gonna know where everybody is at any given moment, and maybe even what you’re thinking.

**1:10:31 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, scary. That was the worst thought ever. It still haunts me as the trajectory continues. But there were other aberrant and interesting names of bands. There was Sons of Champlin. Well, Bill Champlin had a son very young, and the band members were very young. And then Jefferson Airplane; I interviewed Marty Balin and he said that was a friend’s dog’s name.

**1:10:54 David Getz:** Jefferson Airplane was the first, I thought, really great name, and then I thought that Grateful Dead was, of course, brilliant.

**1:11:07 Debra Schwartz:** Right, right. So now you’re in the San Francisco music scene.

**1:11:10 David Getz:** Yeah, so now I’m still teaching, too. This is March of 1966, and it’s just four guys. Now, remember, there’s no Janis. And I’m working sometimes at the Spaghetti Factory, and maybe two nights a week, and I’m teaching two classes at the Art Institute, and once the band starts, I’m struggling to still paint and to go to my studio. The band’s rehearsing every day in a firehouse that Stanley Mouse, our poster artist, Mouse and Kelley are working in. Mouse is living in it, and we’re rehearsing there on Henry St., which is between the Castro and the Haight.

**1:12:03 David Getz:** And I'm trying to juggle this thing, and I'm thinking that this will only last for maybe a short time. "I'll have a lot of fun, play some music, maybe I'll meet some girls and get laid a lot." You know, stuff like that is in my mind. I'm a young guy, I'm 26, I'm still part of the art scene, and now I have a foot in this new very happening psychedelic rock scene that's happening. But at the same time, I'm very influenced by the ethos, or say the philosophy, of the people at the Art Institute that I've come up with, which is that you've gotta be totally committed to your painting. You've got a sort of work your way through these slumps, these downtimes. Temptations will come along to try to tempt you away from your art, your painting. You've gotta resist them.

**1:13:08:** All of that is going on in my mind too, and meanwhile, my painting is going nowhere because my mind is focused, and I'm thinking about what am I gonna do. So one day, it's at the end of the semester, it's probably in May. Fred Martin is the Director of the San Francisco Art Institute. He's the guy who's taken over the top posts there. And he's deciding whether I'm gonna be re-hired or not for next year, for '66 in the fall, to continue teaching two classes in painting. He wants to come to my studio and I said, "Of course," so he comes to my studio, and he's looking at my paintings, and he says to me — which is like this statement just changed my life — he says, "Would you be doing this if you were on the Moon?" And I thought, "Mmm, I don't know, probably not." I don't know what I said. I said, "I don't know." The question really hit me. It just shot right through me that it was the truth and that if I were on the moon, I would be playing the drums, and if I were on the moon, I wouldn't have been painted those paintings 'cause those paintings were painted for my teachers. They were painted for the art world that I was living in in order to gain their approval to that I was on the right track, that I was sort of following in a certain tradition of these painters that came before me, instead of going with a certain idea and not just sort of jumping ship for something else.

**1:15:02 Debra Schwartz:** I guess that they were looking for the kind of commitment where a person doesn't have a choice but to be an artist.

**1:15:08 David Getz:** Yeah, exactly.

**1:15:09 Debra Schwartz:** And that all of the sacrifices to be an artist would be made, but you weren't there.

**1:15:17 David Getz:** I wasn't there with painting.

**1:15:19 Debra Schwartz:** Did that help you to crystallize where you were in your mind's eye?

**1:15:23 David Getz:** That did. And then what happened is I took LSD one night. I was working at the Spaghetti Factory, and I met this guy, Bob Seidemann. We had just met, he was a photographer, and we sort of hit it off, we just started a repartee with each other. He was just hanging out in the kitchen as I was cleaning up late at night. We started talking, and I said to him, "Do you wanna drop some acid together?" I had this LSD at the time that was from some other thing. I have to go back a story. A gal that I had lived

with previously and broken up with had belonged to something called the League for Internal Freedom which was before LSD was made illegal. You could join this and you could get pharmaceutical LSD and take it in a very controlled atmosphere. She had done that, and then when I came back from Poland she did it for me. She had given me the LSD and supervised my trip, and the whole nine yards of reading *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. I'm really going through a spiritual level with it.

**1:16:34:** And maybe I'd done it one of time since then, but I had this acid, the Sandoz acid, and I said to Bob, "Do you wanna take it?" So we went up to my apartment on Kearney St., and we took it and we started walking through North Beach together. This is late at night, maybe it's 12:30, I don't know what time. It's after midnight and we walk all the way down Columbus Ave. to the foot of toward Fisherman's Wharf and we see a car sitting in the drive-in. There was a red Mustang and in the front seat was a gal and a guy with long hair and another gal, two blonde girls and this guy with long hair. And I said to Bob, I said, "Oh man, we should go with them," jokingly. "I wish we could go with them." It just looked like a scene of some American fantasy, you know, California. And Bob said, "Okay." And he walks over to the car, and then talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. He walks back to me and says, "Okay, let's go."

**1:17:51:** So we get into this red Mustang and now we're really coming on hard to this acid and we start to drive and the in front is driving and the guy is sitting next to her, he's in the passenger seat, and one of the other girls is in the back seat with us. Bob and I are in the back seat and they're going to Berkeley. So, okay, we'll go to Berkeley with you, and we get on the Embarcadero freeway, winding over to get onto the Bay Bridge. It's not there anymore now, they tore it down, but you're about 50 feet up off the ground and you're curving left, and at this point, the girl is getting some kind of contact high and she completely loses control of the car and we're headed for the lower wall, and then someone grabs the steering wheel and the back of the car hits the upper wall, the upper wall of the sidewalls of the freeway and bounces back and we hit the lower wall with the front of the car, and the car is squashed like an accordion. Anyway, I'm okay, except I've dislocated my thumb in the door handle. We're all okay except the guy in the front seat, the passenger seat.

**1:19:02:** He didn't go all the way through the windshield, but he went through the windshield enough to crack the windshield open and come back, and his head's all covered with blood. I'm not gonna tell you the whole story, but I'll skip ahead. The next eight, nine hours were like really an incredible acid trip. One of the most incredible acid trips that anyone on Earth ever probably had, but we survived. And somewhere in the early morning, he and I were walking from the San Francisco General Hospital, which is where we wound up.

**1:19:43 Debra Schwartz:** Not the chap that had the head injury but your friend?

**1:19:47 David Getz:** We had to go with the guy who had the head injury. We all went together to the hospital eventually. But when it's all over, he and I left the two girls and the guy and said goodbye. We're way out in the Mission District now, and we're gonna

walk back to North Beach, which is across the whole city. And somewhere in that moment, that's when I knew.

**1:20:16 Debra Schwartz:** You knew?

**1:20:17 David Getz:** That I was gonna be in the band.

**1:20:21 Debra Schwartz:** That that was your path.

**1:20:22 David Getz:** Yeah.

**1:20:24 Debra Schwartz:** After all the schism and the disorientation and the unexpected everything, somehow as you're heading back by yourself, going through the city, you realize your path is actually to be in the band.

**1:20:36 David Getz:** I was gonna be in that band.

**1:20:37 Debra Schwartz:** You know your place.

**1:20:37 David Getz:** That was my destiny in a certain way or what I had to play out. The chords I had to play out.

**1:20:44 Debra Schwartz:** You had what might be thought of as a *knowing* that can happen while you're on psychedelics.

**1:20:49 David Getz:** Yeah.

**1:20:49 Debra Schwartz:** A rooted knowing.

**1:20:51 David Getz:** Or coming down from it anyway.

**1:20:52 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah.

**1:20:53 David Getz:** I know we were coming down at that point, but I remember the moment of revelation where I said to him, "I'm gonna be in this band. I'm probably not gonna paint for a while. I'm gonna try to paint, but the band is gonna be it." Essentially, that was May. The next month Chet Helms said, "Well, I know this singer in Texas, and I wanna bring her out. I think she could be the singer with the band."

**1:21:26 Debra Schwartz:** Now, I interviewed David Freiberg from Quicksilver Messenger Service, and he talks about meeting Janis Joplin after he and his friends are expelled from Mexico and sent on a plane to, I forget where it was in Texas, but that's where they meet her, and she's singing in some bar. And then, she comes to stay with them in San Francisco, and is now performing in San Francisco.

**1:21:58 David Getz:** But that was before she joined. She went back to Texas. David knows her and Peter Albin also knew her, because they were both participating in these hootenannies and open mic nights at the Fox and Hound and the Coffee Gallery, which were the clubs then in North Beach, where people did that kind of thing. So, they'd heard her and they'd met her. Peter didn't really know her, but I think David got to know her a little bit. He was doing the same thing, singing and playing guitar. So they knew of her. I had no knowledge of her at all. James Gurley knew of her, had heard her at one of these things. Sam didn't know of her at all.

**1:22:45 Debra Schwartz:** And so, she's how old when you meet her?

**1:22:47 David Getz:** How old was I?

**1:22:49 Debra Schwartz:** No, Janis Joplin.

**1:22:51 David Getz:** I think she was 23.

**1:22:54 Debra Schwartz:** So, do you think things really changed when she joined the band?

**1:23:00 David Getz:** Oh, absolutely.

**1:23:00 Debra Schwartz:** What happened?

**1:23:01 David Getz:** It started to change. It didn't change instantaneously.

**1:23:06 Debra Schwartz:** How did it happen? How was she invited into the band?

**1:23:14 David Getz:** It's the same kind of thing as me in a way. I think that when she showed up, Chet brought her to a rehearsal on Henry St. at the firehouse that we had. And we just talked for a while. She was very funky looking, which was not what I'd imagined. I had a soul fantasy about her, which actually was the truth, that she was very beautiful, and that I fell in love with her. It was not a wet dream. It was not like that. It was just the love, real pure love. So anyway, she sang. She sang something with us. We figured out what she knew and what Peter knew, what Sam knew, one of those folk songs, basically, maybe it was "I Know You Rider."

**1:24:10 Debra Schwartz:** Gosh, what a beautiful song that is.

**1:24:13 David Getz:** So maybe it was that.

**1:24:14 Debra Schwartz:** You guys performed "I Know You Rider"?

**1:24:16 David Getz:** We did. Janis was one of the first —

**1:24:17 Debra Schwartz:** I don't know that I've ever heard it performed.

**1:24:22 David Getz:** I produced a record in the early '80s of early Big Brother stuff of the tapes that I found that was called *Cheaper Thrills*, and it's on that.

**1:24:34 Debra Schwartz:** Such a deal.

**1:24:36 David Getz:** Yeah.

**1:24:37 Debra Schwartz:** So maybe, you could just —

**1:24:39 David Getz:** Actually, I'll MP3 you a copy of it.

**1:24:42 Debra Schwartz:** Thank you, I'd appreciate it. That's one of my favorite songs.

**1:24:44 David Getz:** Okay.

**1:24:44 Debra Schwartz:** For those that don't know "I Know You Rider," maybe you could just sing a little bit.

**1:24:49 David Getz:** I know you rider gonna miss me when I'm gone.

**1:24:56 Debra Schwartz:** That is a haunting song.

**1:25:00 David Getz:** Yeah.

**1:25:00 Debra Schwartz:** I think it was originally written in the '30s.

**1:25:04 David Getz:** I don't know. It's definitely in the public domain. It's out there.

**1:25:04 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah.

**1:25:12 David Getz:** And so many bands have done it. The Grateful Dead really did it with a lot of the right attitude, the right spirit. Jerry was part of that whole scene, too, then. So, there was a whole folk scene that started on the peninsula with Peter and his brother Rodney, and Jerry and Bob Weir, and then Bill Kreutzmann and Robert Hunter. They all came out of that same scene, and they would come up to San Francisco. I'm not sure if David Freiberg was from that particular time. He might have been from somewhere else.

**1:26:00 Debra Schwartz:** It's a kind of bonding that happens.

**1:26:02 David Getz:** Yeah. It was just instant bonding. She was the singer. It was apparent to everyone.

**1:26:08 Debra Schwartz:** People call her the queen of rock ‘n’ roll. She certainly had panache. One thing I admire is just her style. I’m not a clothes person, but Janis Joplin had some really cool clothes. She really knew how to put something together. And so, how more fetching a lead singer? You mentioned to me in our pre-interview discussions that so many of your interviews are really just talking about Janis, and I can see why. I mean, she’s legendary. She won’t take over this interview, I assure you, but I would like to hear about your experiences of working with Janis, and how it was for you to be with her on stage. Big Brother and the Holding Company, with Janis, to be a part of creating something like that, what was that like for you?

**1:27:04 David Getz:** It’s such a big question, Debra. It’s a book. It really is a book, and it’s a big book in my life. I was the first person in Big Brother to get close to Janis. The accident of that was, as I mentioned, I lived in North Beach and we rehearsed in a place that was between the Castro and the Haight. And Janis, when she first came to San Francisco, she was put up by Chet, her and Travis, who was her partner then, Travis Rivers, they had a one-room, furnished apartment on Pine St., which is about halfway between where I had to travel, so I became like the guy who picked her up every day, and then took her back from rehearsals.

**1:27:57:** We hit it off right away because we both loved North Beach, and we both liked to drink. I would pick her up, and after we’d finish rehearsal, we would go to North Beach, we would drink, sometimes we would hang out, we would make out in my car. I had a Chevy, I had a really beautiful little Chevy. You know, it never went all the way. It’s like we were brother and sister. It was some kind of thing like that, I can’t even describe it, but for her, it was a very natural thing. And for me at the time too, it was very natural that we could sort of sit in the back seat of my car and make out, and at the same time be talking —

**1:28:43 Debra Schwartz:** Maybe you just loved each other.

**1:28:45 David Getz:** Yeah. But when I would want to sort of proceed, she would stop me and say, “It’s not that kind of a thing,” and I accepted it. I knew she was right, in a way. We weren’t gonna fuck. We weren’t gonna have sex, which she was into very, very much. It wasn’t that with me at all, and that was okay. But anyway, we got close and we drank together. We had some strange experiences together. So, I always loved her like a sister, and then I always admired her and I always thought that she was just a wonderful singer. Playing with her was like a kind of a real confidence builder.

**1:29:31:** I’ve said this many times in many interviews, but it was like having a really great weapon. When you go on stage, if you’re playing with people who are shaky or don’t know the parts, and it affects you, it’s hard to make up for it. You become a little shaky too. Whereas when you go on stage, where you know someone is like a really strong, aggressive, performer who really is gonna put out 100 percent and really give her all, you have to live up to it, you have to reach up for that in yourself. Everybody did that. She brought the band always to a higher level in some way. Although there are exceptions to that. What happened in Big Brother is that she began to increase in her



charisma and her skill and her general largeness in the part that she played in the band. James, who was the original sort of featured performer of the band diminished, he began to wane and he began to sort of use more drugs and become more incompetent in a way.

**1:30:45:** There were points of time where for her she would be thinking, “I’m putting out all this energy and this guy is falling off the stage. He can’t play. He’s playing really wrong notes, and he can’t get in tune.” So, there was a lot that started to happen. But she got better and better. She just got bigger and bigger in the scheme of things, in the whole big picture of the band. When she started out, she started out naturally as being supportive of playing percussion, of singing backup on songs that she didn’t sing. Peter would sing maybe, as many if not more songs than her. Sam didn’t sing too much. Sam sang backup. James had a couple of songs that he sang. He sang “All is Loneliness,” and he sang “Easy Rider” and “Coo-Coo.”

**1:31:36:** So James was singing three songs, and he was very much the featured artist in the band. As an instrumentalist, he had a unique style of playing that you either hated or you loved. Some people thought he was the father of psychedelic guitar. I have a hard time listening to him now. I have a hard time listening to his playing because it just sounds like there’s just too many wrong notes, but I understand the importance, in some way, of what he did, what he was going for. He was really going for something 100 percent, which really influenced Janis in a huge way. Janis really got a tremendous amount, not only from the whole attitude of Big Brother that we were all sort of going for it 100 percent, but that James himself was out there on the edge, that he wasn’t afraid to sort of walk this edge musically, be almost non-musical sometimes, just noise and sound coming out of the amplifiers and feedback, going to those lengths of really stretching the envelope. And Janis got that. Because I’ll say this: early on she got an offer from Paul Rothchild, the producer, to leave Big Brother and join another band — and she was tempted — which would have been an all-star band, with Taj Mahal and several good LA blues players.

**1:33:20:** If she had joined that band, she would have probably not become the Janis that she became. I really believe in my heart that she became the particular Janis that she became through the experience with Big Brother, what our vibe was, what our persona was about as a band, and that if she had joined that other band, she would have become a very excellent blues singer, sort of like a Tracy Nelson or like a Bonnie Bramlett or Bonnie Raitt. But she wouldn’t have been Janis, going a little more extreme and falling over the edge sometimes, but that’s what makes her great. That’s the greatness.

**1:34:19 Debra Schwartz:** I’ve heard it said that Frank Sinatra said about Judy Garland that every time she sings, she dies a little.

**1:34:25 David Getz:** Yeah.

**1:34:25 Debra Schwartz:** And listening to Janis Joplin singing, it seems that she gives so much of herself. You wonder if she does die a little.

**1:34:36 David Getz:** Yeah. But we all did, believe me. I didn't have the natural genius talent that Janis had. Singing is a certain thing. Of all the instruments, it's the one that you most have to be born with a good axe. If you don't have a good axe, if you don't have a great axe, meaning a kind of expressive voice, you can become a very good singer, you can train and you can learn to sing every note on perfect pitch and you can become an excellent singer — and a lot of singers do, they work in the studios and they do commercials, they work in Broadway shows, they can even sing light opera and everything like that — but there's only certain Billy Holidays and Janises and Judy Garlands and Édith Piafs, and people that have a voice that's like —

**1:35:35 Debra Schwartz:** That original axe.

**1:35:36 David Getz:** It's an original voice, and it's immediately identifiable.

**1:35:43 Debra Schwartz:** How much did psychedelics influence your music and your performances?

**1:35:52 David Getz:** When you do psychedelics, it totally changes your life. If you're an artist, there's just no way you can not be influenced by it. I never was tempted to do pseudo-psychedelic art, where you have like 27 Buddhas echoing each other into the distance or something like that. I've done that. I actually did a poster. I did a piece about Janis, where I did a lot of echoing and kind of reverberation and rhythm, but I see that as just an option. It's just like, to me, I've never wanted to be a psychedelic artist, it's not my vision. I like too many other kinds of art. I came out of abstract expressionism had a huge effect on me, and the West Coast painting of Clifford Still and those guys always had a huge effect on me as an artist.

**1:36:53:** So psychedelics, in terms of music, it influenced Big Brother. It definitely influenced James and his guitar playing. James went down to Mexico in the very early '60s and he and his wife Nancy ate the mushrooms or ayahuasca. They did all of that stuff very early on and it definitely affected his vision. And at the same time, he never did it again. He was totally afraid, just petrified, that he would be dosed or that someone would put him on psychedelics. James was totally about alcohol, heroin, Seconal, downers, he wanted to get down all the time.

**1:37:44:** Janis did acid maybe three times that I know of, and she tried to always do it in a very controlled situation with another woman who she trusted. The first time she did it, she did it with Ellen Harmon who was one of the original Family Dog people, the Detroit people, and they went somewhere on a hill somewhere and did it. I don't think she did it more than a couple of other times. I'm not sure exactly when. Sam and I probably did it. Peter did it once or twice. Peter was also not a drug person at all. Peter Albin was not into drugs of any kind. He was a naturally crazy person who was trying to be straight — inherently an artist who, in some ways, thought he could just be a regular person and [laughs] it hasn't quite worked out. But it does work out in some way: Peter still has a job. For the last 30 years he has had a job, nine to five, or eight to four job,

whatever it is, for a record company, record distributor, and he can live like that, having a job. I am not a job person. [laughs]

**1:39:06 Debra Schwartz:** How about you?

**1:39:07 David Getz:** And James could never hold down a job.

**1:39:12 Debra Schwartz:** Did you ever do psychedelics and perform?

**1:39:15 David Getz:** I only performed on psychedelics, I'm gonna say, actually, a few times, but one time in particular that I remember was I had taken mescaline, and I got into a fight with Janis 'cause something happened, and there was really a strange situation. I don't even think I wanna go there. I've written about it. But anyway, we were playing at Hunter College, and I had taken mescaline, and we got into a big fight backstage because of something she did on stage to me and —

**1:39:54 Debra Schwartz:** And you were sensitive.

**1:39:55 David Getz:** Yeah, it wasn't good. Anyway, the other time, I think, was I was dosed, and that's in recent memory, probably the '70s or later on with other bands or things like that.

**1:40:11 Debra Schwartz:** I interviewed Terry Haggerty, and he described how he and Bill Champlin did it together the first time and then they had the deliberate intention to translate that psychedelic experience into music to create a kind of "creative anarchy." Now, your band is on stage, you've got this powerful lead singer who is affecting people, listening to her sing is an emotional experience.

**1:40:43 David Getz:** Yes.

**1:40:43 Debra Schwartz:** I don't know if anybody has enough fortitude to resist the power of the motion that comes through her music.

**1:40:51 David Getz:** Well, some people don't like to hear her. My wife's mother probably would have thought she's the most awful thing in the world.

**1:41:00 Debra Schwartz:** Uh-huh. Well, then, for those that are affected by her —

**1:41:04 David Getz:** Yeah.

**1:41:05 Debra Schwartz:** Did you ever sense that you had a kind of power on stage to transform the world? Did you feel that?

**1:41:16 David Getz:** Yeah, we felt it. Definitely.

**1:41:17 Debra Schwartz:** The responsibility.

**1:41:18 David Getz:** I felt power. I felt connected to power on stage a couple of times. That was really kind of an amazing, sort of mystical experience, the power of music, of feeling so completely connected. We had a name for it in a spiritual discipline that I once studied. We called it the level 24. To be in 24 is to be completely in the moment, in the now, in the present, and connected to the energy so that it's completely flowing. You're in the flow of it, and there's no resistance.

**1:42:08 Debra Schwartz:** As a musician on stage, you're in that flow with all these other people in the audience who are in the flow too. So, this is the ultimate dance here.

**1:42:15 David Getz:** Yeah. Everybody is on certain different levels of the flow. I guess you could say that. But you're asking me sort of what I felt. And it's like the void thing they talk about in meditation, where all of the chatter is gone. There's no chatter.

**1:42:40 Debra Schwartz:** I see.

**1:42:40 David Getz:** Silence.

**1:42:43 Debra Schwartz:** The Monterey Pop Festival, shall we talk about that?

**1:42:46 David Getz:** Sure.

**1:42:47 Debra Schwartz:** So, for those that don't know about the Monterey Pop Festival, I've got some basic information about it. It was a pop festival that occurred between June 16th and June 18th of 1967. The festival was planned in seven weeks by John Phillips from the Mamas and the Papas and record producer Lou Adler, Alan Par —

**1:43:15 David Getz:** Pariser.

**1:43:15 Debra Schwartz:** Pariser, thank you for helping me, and publicist Derek Taylor.

**1:43:20 David Getz:** Derek Taylor worked for the Beatles. He was the Beatles publicist.

**1:43:25 Debra Schwartz:** And most of the artists performed for free, with the revenue going to charity?

**1:43:34 David Getz:** All of the artists performed for free except for Ravi Shankar. He was the only one who was paid.

**1:43:41 Debra Schwartz:** Yes, and not that much either, although I understand travel expenses were covered.

**1:43:43 David Getz:** I don't know what it was. Travel expenses were covered for everybody and hotels and all expenses. I'll talk about it in a minute. I'll tell you more about it.

**1:43:53 Debra Schwartz:** And artists were invited?

**1:43:55 David Getz:** Yes.

**1:43:56 Debra Schwartz:** I have a list of the performers, because there'll be many people listening to this who won't know exactly the extent. So, we've got Jefferson Airplane, the Who, Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix Experience, Eric Burdon and the Animals, Otis Redding with Booker T and the MG's, Ravi —

**1:44:26 David Getz:** Shankar.

**1:44:26 Debra Schwartz:** Shankar, the Mamas and the Papas, of course, the Association, Lou Rawls, Johnny Rivers, Simon & Garfunkel, Canned Heat, Country Joe and the Fish, Al Kooper, Quicksilver Messenger Service, the Butterfield Blues Band, the Electric Flag, Steve Miller Band, Moby Grape, the Byrds, Hugh Masekela.

**1:44:31 David Getz:** Masekela.

**1:44:31 Debra Schwartz:** Laura Niro.

**1:44:31 David Getz:** Laura Nyro. Niro or Nyro?

**1:44:31 Debra Schwartz:** Niro.

**1:44:31 David Getz:** I don't know. I never knew. It was hard to pronounce her name.

**1:44:31 Debra Schwartz:** Okay. I said Niro.

**1:44:31 David Getz:** But people say Laura Nyro. Whatever, it's okay.

**1:44:31 Debra Schwartz:** Anyway, fabulous performer. The Markees.

**1:45:16 David Getz:** Don't remember the Marques, but yeah.

**1:45:18 Debra Schwartz:** Otis Redding.

**1:45:20 David Getz:** Well, with Booker T.

**1:45:21 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah. And the Paupers.

**1:45:24 David Getz:** The Paupers, yes.

**1:45:25 Debra Schwartz:** The Electric Flag.

**1:45:27 David Getz:** You said them already, but yeah.

**1:45:28 Debra Schwartz:** I might have a little redundancy here. And Beverly — in my print out, I cut off her last name. Do you know who she is?

**1:45:36 David Getz:** Beverly. I think, it was just Beverly.

**1:45:38 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, Beverly.

**1:45:39 David Getz:** Yeah, I think that was her name.

**1:45:41 Debra Schwartz:** What a line-up. Oh my gosh, I mean to be invited with this kind of people. These are the elite, mostly.

**1:45:48 David Getz:** Well, it was the pop music at the time. That was the popular music of the time. Except for some of the San Francisco bands, it wasn't really underground music. This was what was on the charts, so it was a pop festival, and it was the first festival to have all of the different kinds of music. You had jazz, you had soul, you had psychedelic rock, you had blues, you had quite a variety of music as opposed to most festivals now, you just have a rock festival, you wouldn't have someone like Ravi Shankar at a rock festival. Say, what's the big one down in Southern California? Anyway, I can't think of the name.

**1:46:38 Debra Schwartz:** First of all, how long had Big Brother been together before you're invited to perform in this?

**1:46:47 David Getz:** Big Brother started in 1965. I joined it in early March of 1966. It started in the fall of 1965. The first gig they played was at the Open Theater in Berkeley sometime in maybe November or December of 1965. Then they played the Acid Test or the Trips Festival, excuse me, the Trips Festival, and then they were playing at the Matrix in early '66, and that's when I first joined the band. I met Peter Albin, in early 1966, and joined in March was my first performance with them. And then Janis joined in June of 1966, but the band really had formed in the fall of 1965, and then June 1967 was the Monterey Pop Festival.

**1:48:00 Debra Schwartz:** I'm impressed with your recollection, by the way.

**1:48:02 David Getz:** Well, I've done so many interviews over the years. A lot of the things I've forgotten, but things that I've talked about get kind of ingrained in your mind.

**1:48:18 Debra Schwartz:** Coachella. Is that the name of the —

**1:48:20 David Getz:** Coachella, that's it.

**1:48:21 Debra Schwartz:** Time release, remember.

**1:48:22 David Getz:** Yeah, you wouldn't have Ravi Shankar at Coachella.

**1:48:24 Debra Schwartz:** So really, the group is a very young group, with Janis now.

**1:48:30 David Getz:** Yeah.

**1:48:31 Debra Schwartz:** And you're in a pop festival, three-day festival, with these greats, how did that feel for you?

**1:48:39 David Getz:** Well, it's felt normal. It felt very natural. We didn't see it in retrospect. You're saying all of these names and a lot of them are legendary now, like Jimi Hendrix. But nobody knew who Jimi Hendrix was at the Monterey Pop Festival. The Who was popular. I know they tried to get other bands from England to come over, and the Animals were fairly well-known. Simon & Garfunkel were of course well known. But nobody knew who Big Brother was, nobody really knew who the Grateful Dead was. The [Jefferson] Airplane had maybe traveled a little bit outside of the Bay Area, so they were a little more known. They'd had a record, they'd made an album, their first album in '66. But Steve Miller, wasn't known. Canned Heat wasn't known. So, a lot of bands like that.

**1:49:39:** The Association had some stuff on the radio. They were actually the first band to open the show, and they were very different from a lot of the San Francisco crowd. They were very out of place because they all wore suits and they were really tight, they were really like tight, almost like a Las Vegas act in some way. They were very precise, kind of like a record. In retrospect, looking back on it now, they were just a great group, but the thing that people were looking for was something else at the time. Same thing with Laura Nyro. Laura Nyro kind of bombed at Monterey because her act and her appearance was very much like a cabaret kind of thing. She had backup singers and she wore like some kind of sheer chiffon kind of gown and came out.

**1:50:30:** And it was out of keeping with the vibe, even though listening to her music now, she was a brilliant song writer and singer. But the vibe of the festival was really geared toward San Francisco, Northern California, and a kind of hippie vibe, flower children kind of vibe. The Mamas and Papas, of course, were big stars. They were the headliners of the festival with Simon & Garfunkel. But about half the groups that you named were not known, really. The one that's really stand out of course was Jimi Hendrix. Nobody knew what to expect from Jimi Hendrix. No one in this country knew who he was. And no one in this country had seen the Who perform, which was again something else when they got up there and started smashing their instruments and throwing mics around. It's great stuff. So, to answer your question, we didn't know what to expect. We knew it was gonna be a great party, which is what it was.

**1:51:41:** There was a backstage area, and a lot of people hanging out backstage. There was a big buffet, and an open bar. And the food was just beautiful food for that time, vegetables and salads and roasts and turkeys, just really great food, really upscale buffet,

and then open bar. So everybody was just partying and having a great time with that. There was a lot of grass being smoked openly backstage, and even on the fairgrounds. The actual fairgrounds, people forget this now, I think the capacity was about 20,000 to 25,000 at the most. But there were probably another 5,000 or 10,000 people outside the fairgrounds that camped out there. It wasn't like one of these festivals now where you see 50,000 to 100,000 people. It wasn't like Woodstock in any way at all. It was very well run, it was very organized, there were toilets, the weather was beautiful, it didn't rain. They were seating, everyone inside the festival was seated. And sometimes people got up. I saw people getting up and dancing, but mostly it was a sit-down show, which was also unusual for that time.

**1:53:06:** So what happened at Monterey, and what was unexpected, was that the San Francisco bands had been approached, the management of the San Francisco bands, and there was a lot of skepticism about playing for free. All of these slick LA people like Lou Adler and John Phillips, people like that, there was suspicion that we were gonna get ripped off. I think that a lot of the bands were hesitant or wary about them. But it was like, "Okay, we're gonna play for free and everybody's gonna play for free, so it's great and it's gonna be a great party and we're gonna come to your party, and we're gonna be part of it and it's gonna be great. We're gonna bring our vibe and our people down to it and really in some way, blow everybody's minds." All these LA people who we looked upon as slightly plastic hippies, which they weren't, but that was the prevailing idea at the time.

**1:54:08:** What happened that was a surprise was that nobody knew it was gonna be a film. And this is something that was happening behind the scenes that wasn't really disclosed to the bands, particularly the San Francisco bands. I don't know even about the other acts but I know the San Francisco bands were taken by surprise. The people putting it on, which was John Phillips and Lou Adler and those people, they had made a deal with ABC Television to make a movie for television. They'd gotten some money to back it up, and they had hired Don Pennebaker, D.W. Pennebaker, the filmmaker who had made the movie *Don't Look Back* about Bob Dylan. He already had good reputation. And they had hired this whole film crew to film it. But the film was gonna make a lot of money, it was gonna generate a lot of money. And what they did was every act before they went on stage, they said, "Okay, we're filming this, and if you wanna be in the movie, we'd like you to be in the movie, you have to sign this release." And the release basically gave them all the rights to the movie, to exploit the movie and to sell it to the television and all of that.

**1:55:23:** It was actually listed on the release form. I still have one of the copies of the release form as a movie for TV. And what happened was that a lot of the San Francisco bands, the managers were directing the people in the band saying, "Don't sign this, we're not gonna sign it. We came to play for free, and we're happy it's a great party, and everything's fine. It's covering the expenses, but we're not gonna be in your movie and help you make a million dollars now off of us."

**1:56:01 Debra Schwartz:** So this was a surprise.



**1:56:02 David Getz:** It was a surprise.

**1:56:02 Debra Schwartz:** And this is before going on stage.

**1:56:04 David Getz:** Right before going on stage.

**1:56:06 Debra Schwartz:** This is like getting married to somebody rich, and right when you're about to go down the altar, have a prenup.

**1:56:13 David Getz:** Well, I tell you what, there are a lot of bands are not in the movie, the Monterey Pop movie. You named all these people, and a lot of them are in the movie, but the Grateful Dead is not in the movie, Steve Miller is not in the movie, Moby Grape is not in the movie, and Country Joe isn't the movie. There's someone else who I'm not thinking of, but anyway, mainly it was the San Francisco bands and their management that said, "No, we came to play for free and we're not gonna let you exploit it." So, what happened was that Big Brother performed and we didn't sign the release and they said, "Turn the cameras, aim the cameras down at the ground. We don't want the cameras on us." We performed, not a prime-time spot, it was Saturday afternoon, and it was such a sensation. Of course, Janis blew everybody's minds.

**1:57:13 Debra Schwartz:** We'll talk about that in a minute.

**1:57:15 David Getz:** But they came back — Lou Adler and John Phillips, and Pennebaker, Donn Pennebaker — and said, "We have to have her in the movie. Without her there's no movie." And so they got to Janis, they basically isolated Janis, they got to her and they said, "We gotta have you in the movie, you're incredible. We're looking at what you're doing, it's just amazing. If you agree to be in the movie, we'll put you on again on Sunday night in prime time, we'll give you a second slot. So Big Brother was the only band to perform twice at Monterey for that reason. What ensued was that after Janis came back to the band and said, "I wanna be in this movie, I wanna be in this movie. They've talked to me, they'll put us on again, and I've gotta be in this movie." And the guy who was our manager then, Julius, he was a real hard nose guy from Chicago, and he was adamant that we were not gonna be in the movie.

**1:58:22:** So it became this big squabble between Janis and Julius with the guys in the band — Peter, James, Sam and myself — kind of in the middle and not really knowing what to do. Finally, of course, it's obvious Janis won the day. And they put us on again, they brought us on only for two songs. The first time we played, Chet Helms introduced us. The second time we played, on prime time, the prime spot, Tommy Smothers was brought on to introduce us, and he was a big star at the time. Everybody knew the Smothers Brothers; I think they had a TV show then. So, we performed and, of course, we did "Ball and Chain" again, which is what's in the movie. We did "Combination of the Two," which if you see the Monterey Pop movie, that's the song under all of the credits at the beginning of the movie. What happened subsequently was that when we

went to see a preview of the movie, they basically had made the song “Ball and Chain,” the whole thing, without the guitar solos.

**1:59:32:** They took out two guitar solos, which were James Gurley’s guitar solos, and which were a kind of an important part of the song. The song began with a guitar solo, and then there was a James Gurley guitar solo in the middle. And if you know anything about James Gurley’s playing, it was very unique. Some people hated it. I have a hard time listening to it nowadays; it was very edgy. It was really out there. It wasn’t like an Eric Clapton or a Jimi Hendrix or anything like that. It was really more like noise and sound and really emotional and sometimes very brutal, a brutal kind of sound. And they just didn’t want to hear that, so they cut out those solos without our permission and basically made the whole thing in the movie, it’s all Janis. I’m in it for a moment in the beginning, I think.

**2:00:21 Debra Schwartz:** You’re the first band member who is visible.

**2:00:23 David Getz:** Yeah, I’m the first person you see.

**2:00:25 Debra Schwartz:** For “Ball and Chain.”

**2:00:25 David Getz:** I’m in it for three or four seconds, and then I think Peter, and then there’s a little bit of Sam, maybe a second or two of James, and then the rest of it is all Janis. It went from being more like a cooperative family kind of thing where everybody was important to being more like just Janis and the band. We became known as her backup band. And that was good and bad. It was good in the sense that we became famous, and we got to get out of a bad record contract with Mainstream Records. By the way, Mainstream Records recorded all of the singles that we had done in Chicago. We had signed a record contract in Chicago in 1966 when we were broke.

**2:01:30:** We were playing in a club in Chicago in the summer of 1966 and we didn’t get paid. We were literally down and out in Chicago, away from home, and someone came along and offered us a record contract. Because we were union musicians, he wouldn’t give us any advance. But because we were union musicians, we knew we could get paid union scale for recording. So we recorded a bunch of singles, which weren’t ever put out as an album until after Monterey, right after Monterey. The guy who owned those singles, Bobby Shad, who owned a company called Mainstream Records, small company, immediately put out an album, and that was our first album. We were very unhappy with that, and we really wanted to get out of this record contract, but someone was gonna have to buy him out. And the only people who came along at the time was Columbia, CBS, and CBS had to pay him \$250,000, which was a lot of money in 1967, what now would be about \$10 million to get us out of that contract and get us to sign with CBS.

**2:02:29:** A lot of this was engineered. What happened also was that we eventually fired Julius. Janis didn’t want to work with Julius as the manager anymore, and we got the most famous manager in the United States to manage us, Albert Grossman, who was Bob Dylan’s manager, Peter, Paul and Mary’s manager, Gordon Lightfoot, Electric Flag,

Mike Bloomfield, Paul Butterfield on and on. He was the top manager in the world that we wanted to get into, and he took us on as a band. And it became a whole different thing than what it was. We made a lot of money. We had to buy out the Mainstream contract from our first royalties on the album *Cheap Thrills*, which we immediately started to record in 1968.

**2:03:28:** We had to pay back, I think, 100 or \$150,000 of our royalties right off the top. So we never saw any royalties from it until the record really sold a lot. Of course, we did make a bunch of money at that time from it. And we went on to make five or six times more than we were making, and got to go east and travel around. We never went to Europe, but it was doomed. From Monterey on, the band was doomed to basically fall apart, and that Janis was going to become a star on her own, a solo act, and the band was gonna have to sort of like, find its own way, which it didn't for a while, it fell apart.

**2:04:15:** James Gurley got very heavily into drugs. Sam got very heavily into drugs. Eventually, when the band did break up, Peter Albin and I, who were not so much into drugs, were asked to play with Country Joe and the Fish. So we went on to another kind of number one band as a rhythm section, and we've worked that way since then, Peter and I, we've worked in other bands as a rhythm section. But James had to go out and sort of dry out in the desert. Sam went with Janis in her new band after she quit Big Brother. And that didn't work out. Eventually, after about seven or eight months in that band, she fired him. And they were both using a lot of heroin at the time, so that was part of the whole thing that didn't work out.

**2:04:21 Debra Schwartz:** So, back to the festival itself, did you participate as attendee and performer? Did you enjoy —

**2:05:17 David Getz:** For sure. What I've just talked about, people always kind of say, "Well, that's a negative viewpoint on the Monterey Festival." But it's like the truth that was underneath the festival. There was like a nest [chuckles] of stuff's going on and deals being made, and deals not being made and people trying to make money and seeing how they were exploited. So, it wasn't all peace and love. At the same time, it was the greatest thing ever because it was such a great festival and the idea that everybody played for free was a great idea. It was the first festival that really opened people up to the music that we were all listening to. We had all come up. When we were younger and just starting out, we'd all listen to Indian music, people like Ravi Shankar, but the idea of having him on the same stage with us was just far out, and people like Hugh Masekela, who like African jazz, and Lou Rawls, who was a great, great singer.

**2:06:32 Debra Schwartz:** Amazing singer.

**2:06:33 David Getz:** Amazing singer. And Otis Redding, putting Otis Redding in the same bill as Country Joe and the Fish, who were like Berkeley political rock, a crazy rock band. And Simon & Garfunkel. So, from Simon & Garfunkel to the Association or Big Brother and the Holding Company or Canned Heat, you just you have every variety of music all together, thrown together. A lot of times I wasn't in the audience, but

sometimes I went out and sat in the audience. I heard everybody, but for all the performers, we could stay on stage. We could sit on the side of the stage and watch up close. I saw both the Who and Jimi Hendrix from literally like 20 feet away on the stage, and that was really something I'll never forget, you know?

**2:07:30 Debra Schwartz:** What people can't see right now, because this is an audio recording, but I can see clearly I that you are smiling, and your eyes are twinkling.

**2:07:36 David Getz:** Yeah, I know. That's my point.

**2:07:39 Debra Schwartz:** So, any stand-out performances for you, did anything really rock your world?

**2:07:45 David Getz:** Jimi Hendrix was for sure one of the great ones. And I loved seeing Hugh Masekela. I think Simon & Garfunkel were great. Laura Nyro is something I'll always remember because it was such a strange thing. I remember seeing her from the audience, and hearing her was kind of amazing, yet at the same time, I was kind of repulsed by her act, the way she presented herself, so it made a strong impression on me. And then listening to her records many years later, I realized how good she was. Country Joe was great at the festival. I think, they all took acid, Joe and those guys. [laughs] I'm trying to think of some of the others that I remember. I remember the Association also 'cause they were the first thing. I remember these guys coming out in really tailored suits, matching suits, and they're like slick, they're like tight, and their vocal harmonies are perfect, and I said, "Wow, this is like listening to a record."

**2:09:06 Debra Schwartz:** But I don't think they were in the movie, were they?

**2:09:09 David Getz:** Are they in the movie? Probably not.

**2:09:11 Debra Schwartz:** I don't know.

**2:09:12 David Getz:** I don't think they are in the movie either.

**2:09:13 Debra Schwartz:** That was a great band. "Cherish" was one of their songs.

**2:09:16 David Getz:** "Cherish" and "Along Came Mary."

**2:09:17 Debra Schwartz:** "Along Came Mary," great song.

**2:09:18 David Getz:** Yeah, sure.

**2:09:19 Debra Schwartz:** Okay, about your performance —

**2:09:23 David Getz:** For Big Brother's first performance, we played five songs and it was a great performance. We played a couple of things that Peter sang; it wasn't all Janis. The whole thing that people don't know, and probably a lot of people don't care about,

but Big Brother, when we first started it out, up until Monterey and even after Monterey, we tried to be a band that was like a family, where everybody gets the spotlight at some point. There were songs that featured James Gurley. There were a lot of things that Peter sang. Peter was kind of the leader of the band, for a long time, up until Monterey when Janis really began to ascend and take control more and see herself as the driving force in the band because she was getting all the attention. But up until that time, the guy who signed all the contracts, who talked to people and club owners and talked the most on stage and introduced the songs was Peter.

**2:10:33:** Peter had started the band, and he felt like it was more his band with Sam, who became more of a lead guitarist. But anyway, it was a band where everybody was featured and it wasn't all about Janis, although we all totally understood that she was like the biggest weapon. She was the main weapon and there was no question about that. No one was denying that. No one was denying that she was the greatest talent, but the idea of the band was different. It wasn't like a back-up band, with a lead singer; it was a group. It was a group that had a persona of kind of this zaniness, this craziness, each person being some kind of unique individual, his own character, his own kind of like artist in a way. And that changed after Monterey.

**2:11:35 Debra Schwartz:** So, your first performance was five songs.

**2:11:38 David Getz:** Our first performance was five songs.

**2:11:40 Debra Schwartz:** And then you get two more songs on the final day.

**2:11:43 David Getz:** On the final day, at night.

**2:11:45 Debra Schwartz:** And the first is "Combination of the Two."

**2:11:48 David Getz:** Right, and then "Ball and Chain."

**2:11:49 Debra Schwartz:** "Ball and Chain," the infamous "Ball and Chain."

**2:11:51 David Getz:** The one that's in the movie.

**2:11:55 Debra Schwartz:** Yes. I was watching the videos on YouTube, and in "Combination of the Two" there's a lightness and a joy in Janis's face as she's singing — and it's not just her — and there's the excitement. She seemed so young, and —

**2:12:11 David Getz:** And that's the one where Sam is singing the lead.

**2:12:13 Debra Schwartz:** Yes, Sam is singing and it's just great. And then comes the next performance, "Ball and Chain," and it's almost the poster for Monterey. It opens with you, you're very, very young, you look like you're about 17, and then she goes at it, and you see Mama Cass and the look of awe on her face.

**2:12:42 David Getz:** Mama Cass says, “Wow, that was heavy.” You could read her lips.

**2:12:44 Debra Schwartz:** But her face.

**2:12:45 David Getz:** She says “heavy,” a ’60s word.

**2:12:54 Debra Schwartz:** And then the rest is history. Really, what can I say about it? It’s an unbelievable performance.

**2:13:00 David Getz:** It is.

**2:13:01 Debra Schwartz:** Did you know at the time, could you feel the vibe, that people were so receptive to what was happening?

**2:13:07 David Getz:** Not exactly, no. I think that’s more in retrospect. You see Mama Cass digging it and everything, but it wasn’t like the audience got up on their feet and started screaming for more. That was it. We finished the song and we went off and that was next act.

**2:13:40 Debra Schwartz:** And who was the next act?

**2:13:42 David Getz:** I don’t remember.

**2:13:44 Debra Schwartz:** So much has been said about Janis Joplin. Is there anything that’s been missed that you think it’s important. Do you feel in your soul that there’s some parts that of her that haven’t been brought to light that are important?

**2:14:04 David Getz:** Yeah, I mean, some of it is kind of her humor. Maybe a lot has been written about her, I don’t know, five books, six books, whatever it is already. I’ve written a lot that I haven’t published about Janis, but pretty much everybody’s written that she was very smart, and everybody’s pointed out that she liked to read that she read books, and everybody’s pointed out that she started out wanting to be a painter, that she had artistic ability. What some of people don’t kinda know is this zany side of her, this kind of playful side of her. One day, I don’t know where we were hanging out, maybe we were at the house at Lagunitas and she made up this poem. Someone, maybe I, was eating an apple, and it was a mealy apple and I said something like this apple is a bummer.

**2:15:05:** And she made up a poem she says, “Fall, winter, spring, summer. There’s nothing worse than a mealy bummer.” [laughs] Janis made me a card, which I still have, a Christmas card with a drawing of me, a caricature, and which said something like, “The drummer otherwise known as ‘Mama,’” and that was because one day we were talking about having nicknames, and when I was in junior high school, some kid — I remember the kid’s name was Ronny Block — called me Getzalla Mama, and then everybody started calling me Mama after that. They dropped the Getzalla and it just became Mama. That was my first nickname, so she wrote on this card “otherwise known as Mama.” She

had a zany side to her that was really playful. You could kid around and we had a lot of fun with that.

**2:16:29:** A lot of the interviews that you see with Janis, she was really being serious. Once in a while she'll say something that's kind of sarcastic. When she's on the Dick Cavett show, she gets kind of funny like that, and starts to be more playful. She was a little self-conscious, but when around her friends, there was no self-consciousness. She was very playful and kind of could be zany and kind of just silly, which was great. But everything else, her intelligence, her seriousness or her abilities as a singer, her working and her craft, that's all been written about, and it's all true. You know, she wasn't the most stupid image that people have of her. The most kind of cliched image is of this sort of hard-drinking, you know, sexually promiscuous red-hot mama who just sleeps with everybody and takes drugs 100 percent of the time, 24/7, not true.

**2:17:40:** She did, she had that side too. That was a facet of her personality, but I wouldn't say that's what she showed her friends. She asked me one day — we were flying back from San Diego, this was after she left Big Brother and she asked us to do a show with her in San Diego, summer of 1970, to open for her new band, which was really hot at that time, the full-tilt boogie band. And so we rode back on the plane together, I was sitting with her on the plane, and she starts to tell me about that she wants me to call her Pearl from now on. And it just made me sick because everybody who knew her for a long time was starting to see this thing happen with her where she was starting to kind of become a caricature of what she was supposed to be. It was becoming like a cartoon. It was becoming not real. She was losing sight of just being the solid person that she could be. And I said to her, "I don't think I can do that. I'm just gonna call you Janis." But she said, "I want people to start calling me Pearl. I'm gonna call myself Pearl from now on."

**2:19:27:** This was symptomatic of what a lot of us were seeing. It's not a good sign. She's starting to believe her own myth.

**2:19:39 Debra Schwartz:** Become the brand.

**2:19:40 David Getz:** Yeah. She's starting to buy into the persona that's been given to her by the media.

**2:19:51 Debra Schwartz:** Yes. Do you remember the day she died?

**2:19:56 David Getz:** Very much. I heard about it in the evening. The band, Big Brother, had played in the city, we had a gig. I don't know what night of the week it was, but I think it was a gig at a place called Keystone Corners in North Beach. This lady who was a bartender there had gone back to my house with me, and we decided to "hook up" as they say nowadays. So I was with this gal, we hadn't done anything yet. And in my house was also my best friend at the time, the photographer Bob Seidemann. Bob was staying at my house at the time, so he was there. And the phone rings, it was very late at night, and it was David Richards, who was a roadie, he was Big Brother's original roadie, and he had stayed on with Janis, and he told me, he said, "Janis is dead, she just died."

**2:21:16:** I don't know if it just happened, or if it happened the day before, but the news hadn't gotten out yet. And I just broke up. I fell apart. The gal who I was with, whose name I don't even remember, she didn't know what to do. She was left on her own. My friend Bob Seidemann, I remember he was saying at one point, "Get it together, man," or something, 'cause I was crying so hard. I was lying on a bed, just crying my eyes out. And I had never — even when my father died I didn't — other people in my family had passed away, and I had had no feelings like that.

**2:22:02:** I remember going to my grandmother's funeral. I had gone to my father's funeral, and my father, who I had been close to at certain times in life, and who I think of now with much love, I didn't cry at his funeral. I remember a whole different thing. I remember how we had to deal with my family, and they were critical of my long hair. I had my hair in a ponytail, and people in my family and my father's brothers, all coming down on me for long hair. And looking at my father, my father was laying in his coffin, and he was all made up with makeup, it didn't even look like him. I remember just a whole different kind of emotion, not dealing with it at all. Whatever emotion was there was just way buried. But this was a situation where it just took me completely by surprise, and it was like losing someone that was like a sister, your closest sister, or not even knowing, not even knowing what it was, why I was taken emotionally so hard. I don't think other people in Big Brother had that same reaction. I think they were upset and sad, but I just fell apart, I just fell apart for about two, three hours. I couldn't stop weeping, lying on a bed, just trying to control my emotions and not being able to. Very difficult.

**2:23:47 Debra Schwartz:** If you could see Janis tomorrow, after all these years, what would you say to her?

**2:23:54 David Getz:** Well, there's a lot of things that I would say to her if I could see her again, and a lot of them are things that we know now that we didn't know then. One of the most important things you would wanna say to somebody like that is, "Do you know that you're gonna kill yourself if you keep doing what you're doing? Do you know that you can die?" Which she probably did, because just a couple of months before this someone that she was very close to OD'd, which was Nancy Gurley, James's wife. But she didn't think she would, she poo-pooed, she just thought she was above it. And I just think I would say, "If you had lived, just think of all the other music you could have done, just think of all of the different kind of albums you could have made, you could have made a blues album, you could have sung standards, you could have sung country." So, all kinds of things that she could have developed into as a singer, and what a shame to have to kill yourself this way. But the main thing was that we were all enabling her. So I would say, "I'm sorry that I was one of the people that didn't say anything, that was just all like, 'Oh, it's so cool, let me do some of that heroin, too,'" which I did, a couple of times with her, and she thinking that she's bulletproof, buying into her own idea of herself as bulletproof.



**2:25:35:** And now, in retrospect, knowing that none of us were bulletproof — I wasn't the biggest enabler, but I was definitely someone who thought it was okay, that it wasn't my place ever to be critical of her drug use, or alcoholism, or any of that, and just thinking it was cool and groovy and all that. It was either cool or groovy, or it was kind annoying, but I was never thinking to myself, "If she kills herself, it's gonna hurt me so much." So in retrospect, I would say that. The other thing is also saying to her how much she meant to me in my life that I didn't know that until, again, you don't know what you got until it's gone, you don't know. With a person like Janis, you don't even know until 50 years go by, and each year, you realize even more and more the impact that someone like that, who only lived 27 years, had in your life, more impact than probably anybody else.

**2:27:00:** I've had other people, I've had other women that I've known in my life who have been great teachers to me, who I've learned a lot from, but Janis is probably right at the top there in some way, her influence, her effect and her impact on my life is immeasurable. So, I would tell her that, and maybe thanks, and at the same time, I wish sometimes, sometimes I feel, I wish I'd never joined that band and that I'd gone a whole other direction. There are days like that because of what happened to her and how that affected everything after that, the years after she died, mostly in the '70s, when we really lost all control. Big Brother lost all its control over the music because her family rather than she became the person who controlled it, who ran the estate. And I'd say, for the first maybe 10 years after her death, they hated us. They really had a resentment. They considered Big Brother in some way responsible for her death. Her mother even told me that on a phone call, she said, "If it weren't for you people, my daughter would be alive getting straight As today in college." This was in about 1971, '72.

**2:28:47 Debra Schwartz:** What was your response to that?

**2:28:50 David Getz:** I was just shocked. I didn't say anything. The first movie being made about Janis was by a guy, a Canadian film maker named Budge Crawley, and it was just called *Janis*. It was in the early '70s, not a great movie. But they wanted to use a lot of the Big Brother footage, about 19-20 minutes of Big Brother footage, and we always felt that we owned that footage. And in fact, when Janis had left Big Brother she signed a release, a termination agreement, which gave control of all unreleased masters and all material that was Big Brother to Big Brother, free and clear of any claims. That was her gift to the band in saying goodbye. She said, "I'm gonna make a whole new career," which looked like would last many, many years. And so, in order to make us feel in some way okay with it, she gave up everything that was previously recorded with her on it so that it would be ours to control, but that's not what happened. What happened was that her family then took control and established a separate relationship with Sony and cut us out of everything. It went on and on for years, lawsuits, and just a lot of terrible stuff happened for probably the next 10-15 years.

**2:30:23:** We're closer now to her sister and brother, we have a better relationship, but for many, many years after her death, our relationship with her family and her sister, mainly her sister, but her brother a little bit too, wasn't good. It was her younger sister

Laura who took control. The mother and the father, I forget when they died, but basically they wanted Laura to control the estate, and we just had a very bad relationship with Laura for many, many years. There was an album that she put out where she actually went into Sony and erased the tracks and had studio musicians record some of the tracks, the Big Brother tracks. There was a lawsuit, and we got into all kinds of bad stuff, but it was because we felt we had a right to control of the music that we created, and they didn't, but they had the power. Because really, what Sony really wanted was Janis Joplin albums. They didn't want Big Brother and the Holding Company albums. They wanted to be able to market it as Janis Joplin and the estate-owned the rights to her name and her trademark essentially. So they gained control of everything. Anyway, this was a huge impact.

**2:31:33:** And if she had lived, that wouldn't have happened because we all loved each other. We had a lot of love for each other, like brothers and sisters. She knew the shortcomings and there was no question. That's another thing I would say to Janis, too. I would say, "You were great. You went from being sort of an equal with us in terms of talent and skill, but you grew in the course of two and a half years. You were able to evolve to a level that you had to evolve to, because you didn't have that much time in some way. Some destiny, some angel of destiny, knew that you had to get there in that much time." But the band couldn't evolve that fast, and that was our shortcoming. So she outgrew us quite quickly. I understand that now. There's no denial about that.

**2:32:56:** When I read criticisms of Big Brother and the Holding Company from some of the critics, I agree with a lot of it. At the same time, I know that there was something great about Big Brother, and she did too. Janis understood that there was something really great that she got from Big Brother and the Holding Company, despite these certain shortcomings, musical skills, and things like that, there was something special about Big Brother, the vibe and the persona, what the band was about, the creativity that we sort of wanted to express. She understood that, but at the same time, she grew so fast that she had to go on to something else. I don't resent that. I would tell her that too, that I have no resentment and that I understand why she had to leave, and that was okay. As the band grew, and as we became better musicians, if she had lived, I feel, there would have been a reunion. There would have been something down the line somewhere, five, 10 years down the line, when we could have really made something great, together again. But that was not to be.

**2:34:09 Debra Schwartz:** Did you grow into your art after her death, did it propel you into that?

**2:34:14 David Getz:** It didn't, it didn't. It took me 13 years, it took me till the late '70s. What happened after her death was that Big Brother got back together. Sam Andrew was fired. Well, she fired Sam Andrew, and Sam Andrew came back to Marin. I was playing in a band with a singer name Kathy McDonald, and Nick Gravenites was also hanging out at my house, and we sort of came together again as Big Brother. And what happened to make it work was that James moved away from guitar, James became the bass player, and Peter became another guitar player, along with a guy named David

Schallock, who was from the Sons of Champlin and who was also in a band that I was in at the time, in the early '70s, called the Nu Boogaloo Express, David Schallock, Geoff Palmer, and other people, who were around the Sons.

**2:35:17:** Anyway, we put together Big Brother and the Holding Company with this mixed group of people, with James playing bass, and we lasted until 1972, when it fell apart. Mostly it fell apart because of Sam Andrew being addicted to heroin. It just became impossible to work with him. I quit, and James quit, and Peter eventually quit, so it was like rats leaving a sinking ship. And then we didn't play again. I played with different people, I played with Country Joe again, in 1972, I toured Europe with him, again, a band called Country Joe and the All Stars. I played with a lot of bands. I played with Banana from the Youngbloods, we had a band called Banana and the Bunch. I was just basically a Marin drummer who was in about four different bands. From 1969 to 1974, I was probably in six or seven different bands, including Big Brother and the Holding Company.

**2:36:14:** So I became a much better drummer. I worked at it, I practiced, and I got much, much better as a musician. I really knew I had to do that. And then in '74, I left Marin and I joined a spiritual group called Arica. They called it a mystical school, I don't know if we'd call it a cult now, but it was a spiritual group. The leader of it was a guy from Chile named Oscar Ichazo, and there were four of us in that group who were really skilled musicians. One was Bruce Langhorne, who had worked with Bob Dylan, and Mimi and Richard Farina. And another guy was Al Schackman, who was Nina Simone's musical director and had been Harry Belafonte's musical director. And another percussionist who was a student of Olatunji, named Gordy Ryan. And we became the musical arm, the musical group of this school, the Arica School.

**2:37:21 Debra Schwartz:** Before we go into that, I would like to ask you about the art for the album *Cheap Thrills*. I did some research on it, and of course the cartoonist R. Crumb did the work. Would you tell me a little bit about that?

**2:37:47 David Getz:** Well, I had a lot to do with that happening, which I haven't gotten the recognition, or the credit for. It's just the way things are. I'd like to get recognized for it, because I had a huge amount to do with that happening. The way that happened was we signed with Columbia, and we were gonna be big stars, rock stars, and it was like, "Okay, what's this album gonna be?" So Janis, I think, was the first one to suggest, "Let's all get naked in bed together." So we did that, which was kind of uncomfortable. Columbia set this room up, which was completely wrong, the way it was decorated. It was decorated like some gay interior decorator, would think a hippy room should look like. [chuckles]

**2:38:43:** But we did it, and it didn't work out. Then they said, "We'll have Richard Avedon photograph you." So we went and we did a whole session with Richard Avedon. The fan blowing, and everybody looking —

**2:38:56 Debra Schwartz:** All sexy and rock star beautiful.

**2:39:00 David Getz:** And that didn't work out. Although, I have some pictures from it that now I look at and say, "They're great," but it wasn't right. So, we're sitting around, we had this rehearsal loft on Golden Gate Avenue, where Opera Plaza is now, it's Golden Gate, between Van Ness and Franklin. We had our own big rehearsal studios, a whole second-floor loft that was about 2000 square feet. And we're sitting around in it, and I'm the guy who said, "Boy, it would be great if we could get somebody like Robert Crumb to do the cover." Everybody I knew loved his stuff, we all followed his stuff, and everybody said, "That would be really great." I said, "Well, I have a really good friend who knows him, who came out from Cleveland with him."

**2:39:54:** My ex-wife, Nancy, her best friend was this gal, Marcy, and this guy, who was a doctor, his name was Shelly Rosen, and he was doing his internship at the time. Shelly Rosen was going out with Marcy, and Shelly Rosen had come from Cleveland with Robert Crumb. So I knew that I could get Crumb's number, and I said, "I'll get his number from Shelly Rosen, my friend." And I did. And then Janis said, "Let me call him. I wanna call him. Please let me call him." And I said, "Okay, sure." I mean, you couldn't say no to that. So that's how it happened. And then he said yes, and then he came to one of our shows, and we knew he didn't like rock 'n' roll, we already knew that about him, but we just thought he was a genius.

**2:40:45 Debra Schwartz:** What was he like?

**2:40:46 David Getz:** He was a genius, very eccentric. He's talks gawky, and he doesn't tell you anything.

**2:40:56 Debra Schwartz:** You're giving me a furtive look right now, eyes slide shut, like you're pulling away.

**2:41:02 David Getz:** He's funny, he's funny, but he's not a guy who's gonna start asking you about you, or find out, unless there's some quirky thing, unless you told him you were into sadomasochism or something like that, then he might start talking about it with you. So, he just came to one of our gigs, it was at the Carousel Ballroom, which became the Fillmore West. He came to it and he just hung out in the dressing room, and didn't say anything, didn't talk to anybody. And then he called Janis a few days later, maybe even the next day, I mean it was really fast, and he said, "Okay, I have it. Come and get it." So she went over to his house and picked it up, and she came to the warehouse with it.

**2:41:56:** She said "You won't believe this." So what he had for the front cover was like these stick figures with our — he took pictures of everybody, I forgot to tell you. He asked everybody if he could take a picture of them. So he took these pictures and he cut out the heads and he put them on the stick figures, and he drew this stage with some people in front, an audience. It was a stage and I'm playing the drums with my stick figure body, and my face is a head, and the back cover is all of the information. And

we're looking at the stick figure thing, and it's great, it's funny, but the back cover is so fucking great that it's like, "Are you kidding? This has to be the front."

**2:42:44 Debra Schwartz:** He says about this, I've got a quote here, he says, regarding this particular kind of visual, especially with the females, he says, "My comics appealed to the hard-drinking, hard-fucking end of the hippie spectrum, as opposed to the spiritualist, Eastern religious, lighter-than-air type hippy."

[laughter]

**2:43:05:** "Janis asked me to do an album cover. I like Janis okay, and I did her cover. I took speed and did it on an all-nighter. The front cover I designed wasn't used at all, they used the back cover for the front. I got paid \$600. The album cover impressed the hell out of the girls much more so than the comics. I got a lot of mileage out of that over the years."

[laughter]

**2:43:31 David Getz:** I know, I've read that. And he makes up shit, too.

**2:43:35 Debra Schwartz:** But you've gotta say, the "hard-drinking, hard-fucking end of the hippie spectrum," that's a —

**2:43:40 David Getz:** I know, I love that. I love it. I have correspondence with him. I have two really great postcards from him that I've saved forever, and I'll never give them up. [laughs] It's different. The whole postcard is —

**2:43:56 Debra Schwartz:** In his particular penmanship, he has a particular — do you remember the psychedelic Mr. Natural?

**2:44:02 David Getz:** Of course.

**2:44:03 Debra Schwartz:** With his characteristic, "Keep on Trucking"?

**2:44:06 David Getz:** I have every *Zap* comic, and I have every *Jiz* comic, and I have every *Snatch* comic, and every *Arcade* funnies, and I have all of the other subsequent ones that he put out, *Despair*, there are so many.

**2:44:22 Debra Schwartz:** I mean, you have to feel, as a musician, don't let me speak for you, but to have R. Crumb do your album cover in San Francisco, with this incredible woman singing, you've landed, this is real, this is not practice, you are it.

**2:44:40 David Getz:** You mentioned *Rolling Stone* lists of best of and all of that junk. To me, I don't believe in lists like that. I know they had *Cheap Thrills* as 338, then they had it as 572, then at one point, they had it as 67 or 160.

**2:44:40 Debra Schwartz:** So arbitrary.

**2:44:40 David Getz:** Yes. In terms of album covers, is in the top ten. I'm not gonna say the best, but in the top ten. There's no question about it.

**2:44:40 Debra Schwartz:** That's a father's pride there.

**2:44:40 David Getz:** Yeah, but I think a lot of people would agree with me. I wouldn't have that much of an argument about that.

**2:44:40 Debra Schwartz:** [chuckles] I agree with you. Okay, so now it's 2020, can you believe it? Your birthday is coming up.

**2:44:40 David Getz:** It is, yeah.

**2:44:40 Debra Schwartz:** You're going to be 80 years old.

**2:44:40 David Getz:** I'm gonna be 80 years old.

**2:44:40 Debra Schwartz:** You don't look it. You look fabulous, by the way.

**2:45:42 David Getz:** Thank you. Under my baseball cap, there's no hair, and what there is is grey. And the entropy — a nephew of mine, or cousin of mine, is head of the Physics Department at the University of Maryland. He's a brain, and I said something to him about entropy and my body falling apart, and he wrote me a page and a half of the real physics definition of entropy. [chuckles]

**2:46:20 Debra Schwartz:** Did it resonate with how you're feeling?

**2:46:21 David Getz:** My definition resonates more with what I'm feeling. His is like physics.

**2:46:29 Debra Schwartz:** Yes, I understand.

**2:46:31 David Getz:** My idea of entropy is that everything living, everything that's alive is growing. When it's young it's growing more cells, but cells are dying all the time too. Things are dying. There's always death and life that's going on. But life, the life force is stronger than what's decaying, what's falling apart. And then you get to a certain age and it starts changing, which of course is what getting old is about. The body is starting to fall apart, but the mind, if you can keep your mind going, it is really great. And if you keep your body going — lifting weights, walking, doing exercise is so important to keeping your body together. I've been lucky in that way in that drumming. And I live in a house with 90 steps to get up to it, so I have certain things that fortunately — 'cause I'm lazy ass person. I don't like to do work, [chuckles] but I love drumming, and drumming is work. Drumming is very physical, and I keep doing a lot of physical things so, that keeps you young, I think.

**2:47:48 Debra Schwartz:** A lot of the musicians that I've interviewed, and others who I've read about, are starting to have real hearing issues.

**2:47:55 David Getz:** Hearing issues, yeah. You can't do anything about that. That's probably hereditary. But it's also rock 'n' roll.

**2:48:02 Debra Schwartz:** Yes. How's that? I remember meeting Ray Charles once, and he told me that all of his charitable donations went to the helping the deaf.

**2:48:14 David Getz:** The deaf?

**2:48:14 Debra Schwartz:** Yes, because, he had a fine life with —

**2:48:18 David Getz:** Being blind.

**2:48:18 Debra Schwartz:** Not seeing. But his life would be over if he couldn't hear.

**2:48:21 David Getz:** Yeah, that would be true. I think of so many blind musicians. There are so many great blind musicians.

**2:48:29 Debra Schwartz:** Yes.

**2:48:29 David Getz:** But my sister has this too, my older sister, and she's never been into rock 'n' roll or anything like that.

**2:48:35 Debra Schwartz:** Well, we're talking about you have hearing loss in one of your ears.

**2:48:38 David Getz:** That's right.

**2:48:38 Debra Schwartz:** So, does that worry you?

**2:48:41 David Getz:** Does it worry me?

**2:48:43 Debra Schwartz:** Yes, as a musician?

**2:48:45 David Getz:** It's something I have to deal with all the time. I wouldn't say it worries me. It worries me that I could lose my other ear, the good ear. That worries me. If that goes out, I don't know what I would do. But, there are so many things out now. When I watch TV, I have a device that I put on that gets the signal direct from the internal sound of the TV, so it's really clean, it's pretty clear.

**2:49:14 Debra Schwartz:** You know, before I go on to the final stages of this interview, I do have to ask you this: the whole being the "rock god" guy and the life that

opened up for you, you know, groupies, women at your feet, the fame of it, how was that for you?

**2:49:36 David Getz:** That was such a big part of it for me. It's another subject that's complicated, 'cause my first marriage definitely fell apart because of my ideas of what I could get away with being a rock 'n' roll musician, and what my wife at that time would tolerate. And I was wrong, I miscalculated, and then I suffered through a long time, and then I made up for my suffering by being extremely promiscuous and having a zillion relationships, which then I regretted later, and then got into very monogamous relationships, and then couldn't keep them, because the rock 'n' roll thing was still there and the temptation was still there.

**2:50:31:** And the only thing that's really tempered it I would say is age. I still have a very strong libido in my brain, except your body doesn't do it anymore like it did. So, that's good in a way for me. I'm not gonna get in trouble. [laughs] But it's definitely a thing, and I'm not being specific, I'm trying to just be general, I don't wanna talk about specific affairs I had, or the specific things I did, but definitely, it caused a lot of damage. And at the same time, it was a lot of fun. I got a lot of pleasure, and I got to process a lot of my sexual fantasy and energy in ways that I'm glad — now that I'm older and can't do it anymore — I got to do.

**2:51:29 Debra Schwartz:** Mm-hmm.

**2:51:30 David Getz:** It's weird to say that. I probably could not say that to my wife because it would still be hurtful to her. But the truth is that I have regrets that I hurt people and regrets that I did certain things about it and regrets also that sex became so empty sometimes, just kind of this thing. But, at the same time, there were other things and other people in it, people who might be called groupies that I really loved as women, really loved, and still do.

**2:52:07 Debra Schwartz:** Did you ever feel that you were being used?

**2:52:10 David Getz:** Totally, totally. I think it works both ways. And I've brought that up to certain women since the Me-Too thing happened. Because I've see the other side of it. I've been in show business a long time, and I know that there are women who use sex basically to get ahead, and it works. It definitely works in certain cases. They know they're gonna be exploited, so they'll exploit back. It's the way that works.

**2:52:52:** I've been put down sometimes for bringing that up, so I hesitate to get into that, but I think there's definitely a truth there. A lot of groupies have written books. Pamela Des Barres has a book that's very successful. A gal named Sally Dryden, she was married to Spencer Dryden, but she doesn't use that name anymore. I love Sally, and Sally wrote a book. Sally is a killer writer, she is a fucking brilliant writer. She's brilliant writer, great writer, and all her writing is about all the groupie things she did, who she lived with, who she left that person to be with this person, then that person, that person. It's like, she just hopped around, but she's brilliant.



**2:53:46 Debra Schwartz:** Well, I guess, there's kind of a dichotomy with the groupie: is she a muse or an appendage, an accoutrement? Many things. Okay, we're getting closer to the end of the interview here. First of all, I'm gonna ask you what you would want to tell your younger self, looking back, as you are walking back after that incredible acid trip, and the car crash, and the night in the hospital, and now you're walking across the city, you're post-psychedelic trip, and you know you're going to be a musician. If you could say anything to that guy in his tenderest state, what would you say to him?

**2:54:39 David Getz:** Well, I don't know about advice, giving people advice, there's really no advice. The best advice that Joseph Campbell gave was "Follow your bliss and doors will open where there are no doors." I believe that's true, although it sometimes seems that it's hard. In the arts, not everybody who is great makes it. I know this from my own experience, 'cause I've worked with people. I've had sort of like this Forrest Gump life in a way. I've been an artist, and I've produced a lot of work, but I never feel like I've really gotten recognition as a great artist, or a printmaker, or a great drummer, or anything like that, but I've gotten a lot of accolades, a lot of people think I'm good at what I do, and that I contributed something.

**2:55:37:** But I think that I did a lot more. I contributed a lot more to Big Brother than I'm recognized for. And that has to do with what happened in the music, the arrangements, the internal things in the music that created the tracks, suggestions that were made, and the way my aesthetic affected the other people in Big Brother. I've worked with a lot of people, and played with people, not like Janis, but people who were very excellent, who could have made it, or should have made it, who didn't make it.

**2:56:24:** I did a record with the guy named Herman Lee Montgomery when I lived in LA, who is a great country rock singer, as good as anybody that I've ever heard, and he didn't make it. He is unknown, basically, for a lot of reasons that I could write an essay about — bad management, bad decisions, certain things like that. Both my daughters are singer-songwriters, my older daughter, is a wonderful singer-songwriter, but my younger daughter is particularly brilliant. She's written some really great material, and she's won awards. She almost won the grand prize in the John Lennon Songwriting Contest about four years ago. She was one of the two last people, but she didn't win the grand prize. She was given \$10,000, and all kinds of stuff. And about two years ago, she was given an award by Spotify. All the producers, a lot of producers and songwriters who are in LA, big name producers, got together, and they suggested this award called Secret Genius Award, and they gave it to Liz, my daughter.

**2:57:45 Debra Schwartz:** The names of both your daughters are?

**2:57:46 David Getz:** Alzara is the oldest one, she's 51. She has a band called Brother Spellbinder, and sings and writes wonderful, just fabulous songs. My younger daughter is Elizabeth, Liz Getz. She goes by the name Dezi, and she's been in LA now for 12, 13 years, writing. She has had some little tiny successes, songs and a movie, songs she co-wrote, things that have gotten done. She's written some songs that are just awesome to

my taste. As a critic, I don't like to say, "Everything my kid does is great," I try to be critical. Sometimes she's done some things that I don't like. But anyway, she's not making it. Having lived in LA and San Francisco for so long, I've seen and worked with at least a half dozen artists that I thought were great, that didn't make it, or didn't get known for one reason or another.

**2:58:49:** So, that's the thing about art that you have to know when you get into it. You have to love doing it, you have to love doing it in some way that's satisfying, or where if you didn't do it, you would get sick, some part of you would atrophy and hurt. That's the way I feel about drumming, and to a certain extent, it's also like that with art for me. If you don't have that, you don't have to do art because it's not fair, it's not really fair. You can make it in two ways: you can get huge recognition for your artistry, which is very satisfying, but also, there's the potential to become very wealthy, and that's great, everybody wants that. You want recognition, you want fame and fortune. The fame part is harder to deal with; the fortune part you can have secretly. You can go live in France, basically, if you have enough money to, and get out of it. The way I feel about myself is that I've been very lucky, and I've worked at my craft both in art and music, though not to the extent of obsession. In my life, I've been obsessed with certain things, of getting a skill, acquiring a skill. When I first started going back into art, when I was in LA and I was learning print-making, there was a period of time where I worked a job almost eight to 10 hours a day, cutting stencils and screen printing, and doing editions.

**3:00:29:** There were times in my drumming career, after Big Brother broke up, where I realized I have to get better if I'm gonna be a drummer, and not just the drummer in Big Brother and the Holding Company, if I'm gonna be playing with other bands, I have to get better. So there was a time when I really practiced a lot, I'd really worked at it.

**3:00:47 Debra Schwartz:** And you went on to play with Country Joe and the Fish, right?

**3:00:49 David Getz:** I went on to play with Country Joe and the Fish. You mentioned Terry Haggerty before. I played with Terry Haggerty and David Schallock and Geoff Palmer. At one point, in fact, Bill Champlin and David Schallock came into my house in 1973, and wanted me to join that Sons of Champlin, when Jim Preston, who was the drummer in the Sons of Champlin had to go to jail. They asked me and I declined because I didn't think I was good enough. It was something I regret to this day. If I ever see Bill Champlin, which I haven't in a million years, but if I see Bill Champlin, that's probably the first thing I would tell him.

**3:01:27 Debra Schwartz:** Well, why don't you come see him with me on the 31st of this month. He's playing at the Throckmorton.

**3:01:32 David Getz:** Okay. Can you get tickets?

**3:01:34 Debra Schwartz:** Oh, we'll get in, don't you worry about that.

**3:01:36 David Getz:** Can you get me in?

**3:01:37 Debra Schwartz:** Yes.

**3:01:37 David Getz:** Okay, you got it. It's a date. I wanna tell Bill Champlin that I felt like I made a mistake for many years after that. I felt I should have rose to the challenge. It was a challenge, 'cause their music was a lot more complicated than Big Brother or Country Joe or any of the bands I was with, whether Nu Boogaloo Express, which was a band with Geoff Palmer, Terry Haggerty, David Schallock, and a guy named Danny Nudelman, who was in that same world, part of that whole Sons of Champlin scene. And it was a great band, but we just played funk, we didn't play songs with complicated arrangements. And Sons of Champlin to me was like, "This is complicated music, this is very sophisticated sometimes."

**3:02:28 Debra Schwartz:** Yes.

**3:02:28 David Getz:** And I didn't think I was up to it. [chuckles] Actually, I was, but I had low self-esteem at that moment.

**3:02:37 Debra Schwartz:** Well, that'll be a fun conversation.

**3:02:39 David Getz:** And I was also doing heroin, too, at that time.

**3:02:41 Debra Schwartz:** We haven't talked about one very important component. I've been swept away, honestly, in hearing your story, and I've almost forgotten this, but we're recording this interview here in Mill Valley, and Mill Valley is an important part of your life. I know your daughter went to school here.

**3:02:58 David Getz:** Yeah. My older daughter, Alzara, was born in San Francisco. Her first year and a half, her mother and I were together, and we bought this house in Fairfax. Then her mom moved out, and her mom lived in a bunch of different places, but eventually wound up in Sonoma. And at that time, Alzara went to the first Waldorf School in the Bay Area, which was in Santa Rosa, and then they moved back to Mill Valley, when she was about, I guess, 11 or something like that.

**3:03:35 Debra Schwartz:** Do you remember where in Mill Valley they were?

**3:03:38 David Getz:** I don't remember the name of the street, but it was like, when you go to Blithedale, instead of turning into town, if you keep going straight.

**3:03:47 Debra Schwartz:** West Blithedale.

**3:03:47 David Getz:** Yeah, West Blithedale, it's out there, that way.

**3:03:49 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, in Blithedale Canyon. And did you perform here in Mill Valley? You must have spent time here, there were so many musicians living here.

**3:03:57 David Getz:** Yeah, I performed in Mill Valley at the Sweetwater several times. The last time I performed at the Sweetwater was with a gal named Lynn Asher, and she had a singing partner, Alison Paige. Anyway, they put something together, and it was different, it was cover material, and they asked me to play drums. Rob Fordyce was the bass player, Michael LaMacchia was the guitar player — good people, all good Marin people, and we played Sweetwater. Before that, I played it with Country Joe. I played it with Nick Gravenitas, early times. And there are other places in Mill Valley. I think we played at a school here once in the '60s. We also played, of course, on the mountain.

**3:05:06 Debra Schwartz:** The Mountain Theater, the Cushing Theater

**3:05:08 David Getz:** Of course, the Mountain Theater.

**3:05:09 Debra Schwartz:** You mean Big Brother played?

**3:05:10 David Getz:** Oh, of course.

**3:05:11 Debra Schwartz:** Tell me about that.

**3:05:12 David Getz:** Well, there was a big festival, a rock festival —

**3:05:15 Debra Schwartz:** Is that when Marty Balin played, too?

**3:05:17 David Getz:** Marty Balin was in that. I don't have the poster. The poster's very well-known. I think it might have been called Magic Mountain or Marin —

**3:05:26 Debra Schwartz:** Yeah, I'm embarrassed to say, but I forget myself.

**3:05:29 David Getz:** A lot of bands were in it, including national bands, maybe.

**3:05:34 Debra Schwartz:** Were the Doors there, too?

**3:05:36 David Getz:** I think the Doors were there.

**3:05:37 Debra Schwartz:** Yes, right. We have a lot of those photos in the history room.

**3:05:41 David Getz:** Anyway, we did a couple of things like that on Mt. Tamalpais. And we have played many other places in Marin County, of course, every place from Santa Venetia Armory to McNears Beach, to McClures Beach, to Muir Beach, to Pepperland, Litchfields. [chuckles]

**3:06:08 Debra Schwartz:** Keep going.

**3:06:09 David Getz:** Fairfax Pavilion, everywhere in Marin, the Lion's Share — there were a million places like that.

**3:06:19 Debra Schwartz:** You've pollinated many places with your music. Do you think of yourself as a Californian now?

**3:06:31 David Getz:** Very much so, but I also feel I'm still part New Yorker, I'm still a Brooklyn boy. That never goes away. You're always gonna have that. I'll never be 100 percent Californian because of that, but I'm definitely, I think, more Californian in my way than New York.

**3:06:53 Debra Schwartz:** Okay, last couple of questions. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you wanna mention? Any people that matter especially to you, influences, mentors, inspiration? Or anything at all that we haven't touched on that's important to you?

**3:07:14 David Getz:** Yeah. I'm gonna talk about my wife a little bit. She was an influence in my life when I first met her. When I first met Joan, she was performing in a production in LA called *El Grande de Coca-Cola*, but her background was mostly theater and she starred in a production of *Funny Girl*. She played in something with William Shatner, and she'd done some theater, a bunch of theater things. She'd had a few television roles, she had a *Gunsmoke* that she'd done. She was like a Hollywood actress of the sort of C-Group you might say, making it, but not really. But she was out there as an actress and a singer, and I heard her sing. She was in a band that didn't have a name. It was her and a partner and a piano player, and I knew the piano player very well.

**3:08:22:** They were doing original material, but it was show music. And eventually when I met Joan, I had moved to LA, I had my own apartment, but eventually I became part of this band. I wanted to produce this band, I wanted to produce her and her partner, and I wound up playing drums and producing and being in this band with her for five years. And it changed me musically, because Joan was very into things like Stephen Sondheim, and music that had more than three chords. We started to play around in LA, and the people that became interested in the music, a lot of them were jazz musicians, and some Brazilian musicians. She was the catalyst that brought all of this other music into my life. I was coming from blues and Big Brother and some jazz, but I got back into it, and I started to play the piano again, and I started to really learn different kinds of chords and things like that.

**3:09:25:** And then Big Brother got together back in '87, and my life moves way back into rock 'n' roll again, from about '87 through the '90s. That's all I was doing, was rock 'n' roll and blues. I was in a country band for a while. But I wasn't playing any jazz. And at some point in 2002, Joan was the one who convinced me to go to this place, Jazz Camp.

**3:09:55:** We went to Jazz Camp and I connected with all of these San Francisco, Oakland, East Bay jazz people. And I have a certain amount of credibility with them.

They respect me because I'm a professional musician and I've been a professional musician since I was 15. I've been in the union. So I've been able to make all these connections and get back into jazz. And, again, it's through Joan. For many years, after Jazz camp, she started to perform again and she started to get into jazz as opposed to show music, to move into jazz and jazz singing and jazz standards. She's great. She's a really great singer. That's influenced me, and that's taken me into a lot of other musical directions, and I think people really don't know that about me.

**3:10:47:** And what I said to you when we first started this interview is like no matter what I do, I've played all kinds of music. In the last 15 years, I've had my own jazz group. I've been in many, many other jazz groups, but plus I played in Big Brother. And I backed other people and played a lot of different kinds of dates, despite the fact that before that, I was like a print maker in LA for eight years, and chairman of the Los Angeles print-making society, exhibition chairman. In the mid-90s, I went back to Sonoma State and wound up teaching high school in Novato for three years at San Marin and Novato High School. I've had so many lives, but on my tombstone, it will say, "Dave Getz, drummer with Janis Joplin." [chuckles]

**3:11:46:** And I accept that. I accept that that's sort of the way it works, but that was only like three or four years in my life that have colored everything else, and have some way have dominated everything else. It hasn't stopped me. It hasn't stopped me from going in other directions. I'm proud of that I've grown as an artist in hundreds of ways. Maybe a lot of artists who came out of the '60s, I think, are still there musically, which I don't respect. I don't say the music is bad, but I don't wanna play just "Piece of My Heart" forever and ever. I wanna be able to do other things and other kinds of music. And I think when I see some of the bands, some guys in the bands from the '60s going out and still doing the same thing all the time that they did 50 years ago, it's like how can you do that? I don't wanna be too critical. I don't wanna be a judgemental, but I can't help it. I'm proud of that fact that I've done a lot of things, that I've gone in a lot of directions and learned a lot of new shit, and expanded myself as a person, as a human being, and as an artist. But at the same time, I understand that the way history works, the tombstone is gonna say, "Dave Getz, drummer with Big Brother and Holding Company, Janis Joplin."

**3:13:16 Debra Schwartz:** Well, there's gonna be a lot of people of a certain age that are gonna read that and go, "Wow."

**3:13:20 David Getz:** Yeah.

**3:13:22 Debra Schwartz:** Well, I think that does it.

**3:13:23 David Getz:** That's good.

**3:13:24 Debra Schwartz:** I think that's a good closing observation. I want to say thank you so much for sharing your story. On behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Library, thank you for your story, Dave.

**3:13:38 David Getz:** Thanks for letting me do this, for turning me on to it, and letting me rant, and put it out there who I am and what I do.

**3:13:49 Debra Schwartz:** Well, that's our privileged.

**3:13:51 David Getz:** Thank you.

**3:13:51 Debra Schwartz:** All right. I think that's a wrap.

**3:13:54 David Getz:** Okay.