

Mill Valley Oral History Program
*A collaboration between the Mill Valley
Historical Society and the Mill Valley
Public Library*

Phil Fath

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Debra Schwartz in 2019**

TITLE: Oral History of Phil Fath
INTERVIEWER: Debra Schwartz
DESCRIPTION: Transcript, 28 pages
INTERVIEW DATE: March 7th, 2019

In this oral history, musician, husband, father, and long-time Mill Valley resident Phil Fath discusses his musical career, family, and community. Born in 1929 in Brooklyn, New York, Phil grew up in an Eastern European Jewish family. Phil recounts how he was introduced to music through a working class political organization his father belonged to and started playing the clarinet at the age of 10. Phil attended the renowned High School of Music & Art, followed by the Manhattan School of Music. Phil recalls first visiting California in 1950 while on tour with the American Ballet Theatre. He was drafted during the Korean War, but was given a position in the Army band and fortunately never sent overseas. In 1954 he got a position with the Cleveland Orchestra, and two years later moved west to join the San Francisco Symphony. Phil and his wife Iris moved to Mill Valley in 1961, where they raised their two daughters, Mara and Josepha. In addition to his career as a performer, Phil taught music at Stanford, U.C. Berkeley, and other schools around the Bay Area. As his oral history draws to a close, Phil expresses his continuing love for Mill Valley after having lived there for 58 years, for his wife to whom he was married for 62 years, and for his two daughters to whom he is devoted.

© All materials copyright Mill Valley Public Library. Transcript made available for research purposes only. All rights are reserved to the Mill Valley Library. Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the:

Lucretia Little History Room
Mill Valley Public Library
375 Throckmorton Avenue
Mill Valley, CA 94941

Oral History of Phil Fath

Index

- American Ballet Theatre...p.9
Angiulo, Joe...p.28
Borscht Belt...p.18
Brooklyn, New York...p.2
Carnegie Recital Hall solo
performance...p.12
Cleveland Orchestra...p.11, 13
Fat, Irving (brother)...p.4
Fat, Louis (father)...p.2, 4
Fat, Rose (mother)...p.4
Fat, Ruth (sister)...p.4
Fat, Samuel (brother)...p.4
Fath, Iris (wife)...p.12, 26
Fath, Josepha (daughter)...p.16
Fath, Mara (daughter)...p.16
Great Depression...p.2
High School of Music & Art...p.7
Korean War...p.9, 11
Kovar, Simon...p.21
Kozak, Mrs...p.7, 21
Lifschey, Marc...p.21
Manhattan School of Music...p.9
McGinnis, Robert...p.21
Milley Award...p.27
Mitchell, Lucien...p.17
Modell, Carl...p.17
Renzi, Paul...p.21
Roosevelt, Franklin Delano...p.10
Russianoff, Leon...p.21
Sahl, Mort...p.19
San Domenico School...p.22
San Francisco Conservatory of
Music...p.22
San Francisco State University...p.22
Spanish Civil War...p.5
San Francisco Symphony...p.14
Smiley, David...p.17
Stanford University...p.19, 22
Szell, George...p.11, 13
Taylor, Ross...p.13, 21
Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire...p.6
University of California, Berkeley...p.19
World War II...p.8, 10

Oral History of Phil Fath
March 7th, 2019

Editor's note: This transcript has been reviewed by Phil Fath, who made minor corrections and clarifications to the original.

0:00:00 Debra Schwartz: Today is March 7th, 2019. My name is Debra Schwartz, and I'm sitting in the Mill Valley Public Library sound booth on behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Public Library, and I am honored and pleased, and having a lot of fun, with today's interviewee. Today, I'm speaking with Phil Fath — musician, clarinetist. You were a principal clarinetist at the San Francisco Symphony and the San Francisco Opera, and you were assistant principal clarinetist for the Cleveland Orchestra. Phil, you were on the music faculty at Stanford, U.C. Berkeley, San Francisco State University, and the San Francisco Conservancy of Music.

0:00:58 Phil Fath: Stanford.

0:01:00 Debra Schwartz: Stanford, yes. And San Domenico in Marin. My goodness, welcome.

0:01:07 Phil Fath: Thank you.

0:01:08 Debra Schwartz: I'm very pleased to have you here to talk with you about your amazing career Phil.

0:01:13 Phil Fath: I don't know if it was amazing, but it was a long career — 50 years and still going.

0:01:17 Debra Schwartz: You might have had a couple of amazing moments.

0:01:20 Phil Fath: Lots.

0:01:22 Debra Schwartz: And you've been a long-time Mill Valley resident as well.

0:01:28 Phil Fath: 58 years in Mill Valley — since 1961. In 1961, we paid \$25,000 for the house.

0:01:47 Debra Schwartz: On Lovell Avenue?

0:01:48 Phil Fath: On Lovell Avenue, a beautiful spot. And now God knows what a house costs in 2019.

0:01:53 Debra Schwartz: Unbelievable difference now. You have a bit of an accent, Phil. You don't sound like you're a California boy.

0:02:02 Phil Fath: No, I was born in Brooklyn, New York.

0:02:07 Debra Schwartz: Well, let's start at the beginning. If you don't mind. I'd love to learn a little bit about your family and your life as you grew up, and a short bit about the life you had before you came to Mill Valley. So, let's start with Brooklyn, New York. You were born what year?

0:02:24 Phil Fath: 1929, the year of the Depression.

0:02:29 Debra Schwartz: And you've been depressed ever since.

0:02:34 Phil Fath: [laughs] No. Thank God for psychiatry.

0:02:35 Debra Schwartz: And your family, tell me about your parents and your grandparents, just a little bit so we can understand where your people are from, and the life you grew up in.

0:02:47 Phil Fath: My parents came to America from Russia and the reason they left Russia, around the time of the First World War — we're talking 1912 — was that, at that time, the tsar of Russia carried out a policy of anti-Semitism. And as a result, millions of Jewish Russian people escaped from Russia and came to America.

0:03:37 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember what part of Russia your family was from?

0:03:40 Phil Fath: Well, I think there was a Jewish part of Poland, I guess at that time it was owned by Russia, but it was an area near Warsaw, where there was a huge Jewish population.

0:04:02 Debra Schwartz: What was your grandfather's name and your grandmother's name, on both sides? Do you remember?

0:04:08 Phil Fath: I only remember one of them. I think it was my father's parents. They used the name Fet, F-E-T, which is quite common in Russia. And there's a funny story, or not so funny, when my father came to Ellis Island and the authority questioned every immigrant. When he asked my father his name, my father said Louis Fet, and he wrote down Louis Fat.

0:05:01 Debra Schwartz: And that's how you have F-A-T. That's how your name was spelled.

0:05:06 Phil Fath: F-A-T-H. I added an H in 1956.

0:05:11 Debra Schwartz: Spell it again.

0:05:13 Phil Fath: I changed it from Fat to F-A-T-H.

0:05:19 Debra Schwartz: F-A-T-H?

0:05:21 Phil Fath: Yes. My parents had a very hard time with the name of Fat, which of course anyone could see was quite humorous. [chuckles] But even more funny was that they lived in a house, a two-family house, where my father's name was Fat, Louis Fat, and a Chinese couple underneath was also called Fat, Gum Fat. [laughs]

0:05:57 Debra Schwartz: How old was your father Louis he when he came to Ellis Island?

0:06:03 Phil Fath: Well, he was old enough to be drafted into the U.S. Army. He was about 17. Then World World War I was on, and in 1917 Mr. Wilson got us into that war, and my father was drafted. So, he became Americanized very quickly.

0:06:28 Debra Schwartz: So, when he came through Ellis Island, they changed the spelling of his name to literally F-A-T like "fat"?

0:06:34 Phil Fath: Yes, from Fet.

0:06:36 Debra Schwartz: From Fet. What does that mean in Russian, Fet?

0:06:40 Phil Fath: I don't know what it means, but it was a common name in Russian.

0:06:43 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, so Fat, F-A-T?

0:06:46 Phil Fath: They changed it to Fat from Fet.

0:06:48 Debra Schwartz: "There's that fat guy. There's Louis Fat."

0:06:51 Phil Fath: My brother, many years later, couldn't take the joking about the name Fat, so he legally added a T. I don't know what that did to it, but it was more acceptable than F-A-T. Then when I went to the Cleveland Orchestra, and I was leaving to go to the San Francisco Symphony, the conductor of the orchestra called me in to his office and he said, "Phil, you're a classical musician, high-class. You cannot be in the world of classical music with a name like Fat." [chuckles] So he suggested instead of Fat, I add an *h*, either to make it Fath or add an I, F-A-I-T-H. I didn't like Faith 'cause it sounded too religious, so I chose Fath, F-A-T-H, and I've been happy ever since. I no longer had to explain Fat, F-A-T. So, now I'm more accepted into society.

0:08:23 Debra Schwartz: [laughs] So when your dad came and your mother — did they come from the same area?

0:08:29 Phil Fath: I think so, yeah.

0:08:31 Debra Schwartz: Your dad was Louis? How about your mother, what was her name?

0:08:34 Phil Fath: Rose.

0:08:35 Debra Schwartz: Rose.

0:08:36 Phil Fath: She was a wonderful, loving kind of Russian-Jewish lady. They don't come like that anymore. My father was a little tougher. After he was in the United States Army and was let out of the army, he became involved in working in a shoe factory, as many Jewish immigrants did. New York City was divided; most were working class Jewish immigrants. Many, many Jewish immigrants knew how to work the system better and they became the employers of the factories. So, there were two types of Jews in New York City, the working class Jews and the Jews who owned the factories.

0:09:54: My father was a true Leninist or Marxist, like many Jews were at that time. They believed in achieving a better world through socialism and were followers of Lenin and Karl Marx. My father worked in a shoe factory and he became a union organizer. A union organizer was to get all the workers in the factory together and try to earn better wages. The conditions that they worked under were very bad, very bad, like 16 hours a day, no time off, hardly could go out to have lunch, tied to the machines all day long. So, my father tried to get the workers to work for higher wages and better conditions.

0:11:23 Debra Schwartz: He was a socialist.

0:11:24 Phil Fath: He was a socialist, then later on he became a very strong follower of Franklin D. Roosevelt. He liked Roosevelt. Well, that's it.

0:11:37 Debra Schwartz: Tell me about the kind of household you were raised in.

0:11:45 Phil Fath: Music was important, very important.

0:11:48 Debra Schwartz: Tell me about that.

0:11:49 Phil Fath: There were three boys and a girl.

0:11:52 Debra Schwartz: And the names?

0:11:53 Phil Fath: Samuel, Irving, Phil, and Ruth. All the boys played musical instruments. My father belonged — is this gonna go to the un-American Committee?¹ [laughs] As many immigrant Jews at that time, my father belonged to a left-wing worker's organization. They were working people who were dedicated to making life better for workers, and this organization had a branch in each borough — one in the Bronx, one in Manhattan, one in Brooklyn, one in Queens — and each one had a band. So, all three of us were introduced to music.

¹ Phil is referring to the House Un-American Activities Committee, which conducted anti-communist investigations after its formation in 1938.—Editor.

0:13:09 Debra Schwartz: What about your sister?

0:13:10 Phil Fath: No, she was in another era. She was more Americanized. She wasn't political at all.

0:13:23 Debra Schwartz: But your brothers and you were?

0:13:25 Phil Fath: Very political. My oldest brother in 1937, when the Spanish Civil War broke out — there was a civil war in Spain. This man Franco, who was like a Nazi sympathizer, tried to take over Spain in 1937. There was a very liberal government there, and he tried to overthrow that liberal government. He was an outright fascist. And in the United States, when the war broke out between the liberals and the fascist Franco, in America they organized the Lincoln Brigade. They asked men to volunteer to go to Spain and fight on the side of the liberals against the fascist Franco, and thousands of American men went to Spain.

0:14:42 Debra Schwartz: Hemingway wrote about it.

0:14:44 Phil Fath: And my oldest brother, who was 17 at the time, comes into the house one day and he announces to my mother that he's going to Spain. [chuckles] She collapsed on the spot, and it changed his mind. So, he didn't go to Spain.

0:15:07 Debra Schwartz: Oh.

0:15:09 Phil Fath: I was alive during the '30s.

0:15:14 Debra Schwartz: You were born in 1929.

0:15:16 Phil Fath: '29. During the '30s it was a very, very, very bad time for the American people. The Depression hit in 1929, the year I was born, and it was very difficult. We lived in apartment house, like 20 families to an apartment house, mostly working class in Brooklyn.

0:15:45 Debra Schwartz: 20 families in an apartment building?

0:15:47 Phil Fath: In one apartment building.

0:15:48 Debra Schwartz: So, you each had your own apartment?

0:15:50 Phil Fath: Yeah, we had our own apartment, but it was very difficult financially.

0:16:01 Debra Schwartz: Was your father in any way involved with the Triangle Shirt Factory?

0:16:05 Phil Fath: No, that came quite before in 1912.²

0:16:07 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

0:16:08 Phil Fath: No, he was not involved with that. That's when about 100 women worked in that factory.

0:16:16 Debra Schwartz: It was a shirt factory.

0:16:18 Phil Fath: Lady's dresses and skirts. 100 people, 100 women, worked in the factory there, and the employer in the factory closed all the doors.

0:16:30 Debra Schwartz: He locked them.

0:16:31 Phil Fath: He locked all the doors so that the ladies would not take too much time off from the sewing machines.

0:16:32 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

0:16:33 Phil Fath: And a fire started in the factory.

0:16:34 Debra Schwartz: And many jumped from the upper floors.

0:16:35 Phil Fath: Poor women couldn't get out.

0:16:37 Debra Schwartz: Yes, they jumped, and then that was a pivotal event that brought to light the terrible working conditions, and probably sparked the resistance that your father became a part of.

0:16:46 Phil Fath: Exactly.

0:16:49 Debra Schwartz: When you were growing up in Brooklyn, what was the neighborhood like?

0:16:56 Phil Fath: It was the Depression.

0:16:57 Debra Schwartz: In your neighborhood.

0:16:58 Phil Fath: Yeah.

0:17:00 Debra Schwartz: How about the kids you played with and the kind of life you had?

² In 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, which was the worst industrial fire in the history of New York City, killed 146 workers, most of whom were women.—Editor.

0:17:03 Phil Fath: Well, we were all in the same boat. Most people worked, but wages were quite low. The kids never got involved in what the parents were doing. We were busy playing ball in the streets.

0:17:30 Debra Schwartz: And what high school did you go to?

0:17:33 Phil Fath: Well, that's an interesting story. I was attending one of the New York City public schools, and I already had started to play the clarinet when I was about 10 years old. About the age of 13, I was in the seventh grade, and I played in the school orchestra. And Mrs. Kozak, K-O-Z-A-K, she was the English teacher and the orchestra conductor, so she kind of recognized that I had talent. When I was in the seventh grade she said, "Phil, why don't you try out for the High School of Music & Art?" The High School of Music & Art was in upper Manhattan. It was a specialty school where they catered to talented artists and musicians. New York had a few of those special schools. There was a school called, the High School of Science, which catered to children who are very scientifically talented. When she said I should try for the High School of Music & Art, I said, "Forget it. I'll never get in." And she said, "Try." So, I went up to Music & Art High School, way up in Manhattan, and I took the test, and a week later they said, "You're in."

0:19:18 Debra Schwartz: Were you surprised?

0:19:19 Phil Fath: Yes.

0:19:20 Debra Schwartz: Were you afraid?

0:19:20 Phil Fath: Yes.

0:19:21 Debra Schwartz: Were you happy?

0:19:23 Phil Fath: Yes. [chuckles]

0:19:26 Debra Schwartz: How did your parents feel?

0:19:27 Phil Fath: They didn't really know the difference.

0:19:30 Debra Schwartz: And your parents had Russian accents?

0:19:33 Phil Fath: Well, they spoke Yiddish.

0:19:34 Debra Schwartz: They spoke Yiddish.

0:19:35 Phil Fath: Always they spoke Yiddish, and we answered in English. I can't speak Yiddish, but I understand it perfectly.

0:19:44 Debra Schwartz: So, they didn't quite understand English, but you knew Yiddish.

0:19:49 Phil Fath: Oh yeah, I knew.

0:19:52 Debra Schwartz: How about your brothers and sister, did they know it?

0:19:56 Phil Fath: Yes. So, wait a minute. I started to go to High School of Music & Art during the Second World War. Pearl Harbor was bombed in 1941. In 1943, in the midst of the war, I started to go to the High school of Music & Art, and both my brothers were drafted. One went to the Pacific, to fight the Japanese. And one went to Europe to fight the Germans. So, that was a very complex time for me. I was going to this unbelievable school where music and art and literature were the focus. And coming from a tough neighborhood in Brooklyn, it was a shock to me. [chuckles]

0:21:09 Debra Schwartz: The word is what, "shack"?

0:21:12 Phil Fath: A shock.

0:21:12 Debra Schwartz: A shock, okay.

0:21:13 Phil Fath: It was a shock to go to a place like this, it was amazing. To make a long story short, that changed my life completely from physical poverty to mental and emotional greatness.

0:21:40 Debra Schwartz: You could see yourself in another world in the future because of the world that you had entered.

0:21:45 Phil Fath: I got into the world of art, music, and literature, and then I began to become serious about music.

0:21:57 Debra Schwartz: Were you thinking to yourself, "Oh yes, I could get used to this"?

0:22:02 Phil Fath: Very easily. [laughs]

0:22:06 Debra Schwartz: And then where did you go to college after that?

0:22:10 Phil Fath: Well, I had music in our high school, which was an amazing place, amazing. They gave awards at graduation, and I won the instrumental award.

0:22:27 Debra Schwartz: Oh really? That must have been quite an accomplishment for you, who felt that you wouldn't —

0:22:34 Phil Fath: Yeah.

0:22:34 Debra Schwartz: For a boy who didn't even want to try, because you felt you wouldn't become an award-winning musician —

0:22:43 Phil Fath: My inferiority complex got better.

0:22:45 Debra Schwartz: [laughs] That's quite an honor.

0:22:49 Phil Fath: So, I then started to attend — should I go on?

0:22:55 Debra Schwartz: Yes, please.

0:22:56 Phil Fath: Then I started to attend a conservatory in Manhattan called the Manhattan School of Music. And while I was doing that, I was good enough to start playing professionally, so I got involved with the American Ballet Theatre. They have an orchestra with the ballet. So, I went on tour through the United States with the American Ballet Theatre orchestra, and in 1950 was the first time I ever came to California.

0:23:43 Debra Schwartz: How old were you then?

0:23:46 Phil Fath: 21.

0:23:49 Debra Schwartz: You didn't have to worry about being drafted?

0:23:52 Phil Fath: Not yet.

0:23:53 Debra Schwartz: That's coming.

0:23:55 Phil Fath: The Korean War hadn't started yet. So, I was playing with the American Ballet Theatre Orchestra, and I was playing on a Jewish radio station. [laughs] That's very funny.

0:24:09 Debra Schwartz: In New York?

0:24:10 Phil Fath: In New York. They had a Jewish radio station.

0:24:12 Debra Schwartz: What was the name of the radio station?

0:24:14 Phil Fath: WEVD. I don't know what it stands for, but it was a Jewish radio station. So, I played in the Jewish radio station. And then in 1951, I was drafted into the army 'cause of the Korean War. I took my clarinets under my arm, and they shipped me out to Massachusetts. They shipped me out for basic training in Massachusetts in 1951. We had to go through eight weeks of basic training. They interview you before basic training when you're first drafted. An Army psychiatrist interviews you and he said, "Well, what are we gonna do with you, Private Fath?" And I told him, "I will not kill a Korean. I will not go to Korea and kill Koreans." And he said, "I see you're a musician. Would you go into a band?" "Fine." So, of all the things, I cannot tell you how lucky —

some people, sometimes, get lucky, not often, but occasionally. Guess where I ended up in the United States Army band? Governors Island, right next to the Statue of Liberty, which was 15 minutes from my house.

0:26:24 Debra Schwartz: [laughs] How convenient for you! It's hardly like you were even in the military at all.

0:26:32 Phil Fath: A lot of my colleagues, friends, were going to Korea.

0:26:37 Debra Schwartz: And you were taking the street car.

0:26:40 Phil Fath: I was taking the subway to my house.

0:26:45 Debra Schwartz: How about your brother's experience? Were you a little worried? 'Cause they were both in the Army during World War II.

0:26:50 Phil Fath: My brother was in Italy, and one day in 1944, we were at home. Can we talk about all this?

0:27:06 Debra Schwartz: Sure. Yes, you can.

0:27:07 Phil Fath: In the 1944 presidential election, Roosevelt was running for the fourth time. Imagine the fourth time he's running for president, and he was going to speak at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn, which was the home of the Brooklyn Dodgers at that time. They've since moved to Los Angeles, but that was the home of the Brooklyn Dodgers. And Saturday morning, Roosevelt with his motorcade was gonna speak at Ebbets Field, and I went, took a trolley car right to Ebbets Field. And Roosevelt passed me by. He was soaking wet from the rain when he spoke at Ebbets Field. And then when I got home, there was a telegram from the State Department: "Your son Irving is missing in action in Italy." And then few weeks later: "Your son has been found, he's okay."

0:28:28 Debra Schwartz: Oh my. Your poor mother.

0:28:32 Phil Fath: My other brother went to the Pacific. He trained for two years, imagine. He trained for two years to invade Japan. Never happened. So both came back.

0:28:47 Debra Schwartz: Oh good.

0:28:49 Phil Fath: So where am I?

0:28:50 Debra Schwartz: You're —

0:28:51 Phil Fath: I'm in the Army.

0:28:52 Debra Schwartz: You're in the Army now. You're not behind the plow.

0:28:55 Phil Fath: I'm in the army. Where am I going every night? To Carnegie Hall. [laughs] Every night I'm going to concerts, the theater, and I'm in the Army.

0:29:10 Debra Schwartz: Did you feel a little guilty?

0:29:12 Phil Fath: Yes. But I told them, "I won't go to Korea. I'm not gonna kill Koreans." That came from my family political background, 'cause we already knew at that time that we shouldn't be in Korea, we shouldn't be fighting the Koreans. I had that from family politics. Okay, so 1951 to 1953, I'm drafted, I'm in the Army and —

0:29:46 Debra Schwartz: Having the time of your life?

0:29:47 Phil Fath: I'm having the time — I'm ashamed. [laughs] So, in 1953 I'm working a lot around Manhattan, New York, with the clarinet. I have two friends in the New York Philharmonic, two people who I know well. George Szell, the conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra, is conducting the New York Philharmonic that week, so they both said to me, "We'll talk to Szell and see if he would be interested in hearing you." So, imagine.

0:30:43 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

0:30:43 Phil Fath: Both those people went up to Szell and said, "Mr Szell, we know there's an opening in the Cleveland Orchestra, and we have this young man who we feel would be perfect for the job. He's very gifted and we would like you to hear him." That same night Szell calls me: "Hello, Mr Fath." "Yes?" "This is Mr Szell. "Oh my God." He says, "Come and play for me tomorrow." [laughs]

0:31:24: He was big stuff; he was one of the greats. And I went up to his apartment on Park Avenue, and played for half an hour. He had two other people from the orchestra in addition to hear me, and I played, and he said, "Okay, you've got the job."

0:31:51 Debra Schwartz: Woah.

0:31:53 Phil Fath: So, at that time I felt brave enough to get married. [laughs]

0:32:03 Debra Schwartz: You foresaw plausible success?

0:32:06 Phil Fath: I felt, I have a job.

0:32:08 Debra Schwartz: You have a job.

0:32:09 Phil Fath: I can get married. I could support my wife.

0:32:12 Debra Schwartz: Was she your girlfriend at the time?

0:32:14 Phil Fath: Yeah.

0:32:15 Debra Schwartz: And her name?

0:32:16 Phil Fath: Iris.

0:32:18 Debra Schwartz: And she was in Brooklyn. Was she a neighbor?

0:32:21 Phil Fath: It's involved. You wanna hear the involvement?

0:32:24 Debra Schwartz: Well, let's do the quick version.

0:32:26 Phil Fath: Yeah, well, her sister was married to a great violinist, Stuart Canin, and that's how I got to know Iris, through Stuart. Stuart eventually became the concertmaster of the San Francisco Symphony. You know what the concertmaster is?

0:32:48 Debra Schwartz: No.

0:32:48 Phil Fath: The chief violinist. The number one. So, in 1954 two things happened. Oh yeah, coming from Brooklyn, from the tenements of Brooklyn, I wanted to get married in a nice place. Now, in Manhattan, Riverside Drive is like Pacific Heights here or West End Avenue. It's the really one of the nicest — well, Fifth Avenue is great, but so is West End Avenue and Riverside Drive. I wanted to get married there on West End Avenue, so we looked for a synagogue, and there was a beautiful synagogue on 72nd Street and West End Avenue, and that's where I got married. I was very proud of myself. And then, what else?

0:33:58 Debra Schwartz: It's interesting that your mom's a Rose and your wife's an Iris.

0:34:01 Phil Fath: Yeah.

0:34:04 Debra Schwartz: So then, you're married.

0:34:05 Phil Fath: Oh wait. Then I gave a recital. There was Carnegie Hall, the big hall, and Carnegie Recital Hall, a little smaller. I was the first clarinetist in New York history to give a solo recital at the Carnegie Recital Hall.

0:34:29 Debra Schwartz: Congratulations.

0:34:30 Phil Fath: And the next day in the New York Times, they didn't do a big deal, but they said, "Philip Fath gave a clarinet recital at Carnegie Recital Hall. He is a musician of great promise."

0:34:46 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember what you played?

0:34:47 Phil Fath: Oh, a lot of stuff: a Brahms sonata, a Mozart trio — clarinet, viola, piano — Béla Bartók’s *Contrasts*. It’s called *Contrasts* for violin, clarinet and piano.

0:35:13 Debra Schwartz: Did you make any mistakes?

0:35:16 Phil Fath: I don’t think so.

0:35:18 Debra Schwartz: Wow.

0:35:18 Phil Fath: I was very good at that time, really great.

0:35:20 Debra Schwartz: Right up out of the tenements, this is very impressive, Phil.

0:35:27 Phil Fath: Then in 1954, Szell said, “Come to Cleveland.” So, in 1954 we went to the Cleveland Orchestra.

0:35:39 Debra Schwartz: And when you say you went to the Cleveland Orchestra, does that mean you moved?

0:35:44 Phil Fath: Yeah.

0:35:45 Debra Schwartz: You moved to Cleveland.

0:35:46 Phil Fath: Yeah.

0:35:47 Debra Schwartz: Did you have children yet?

0:35:50 Phil Fath: Not yet. Oh, and on the train going from New York to Cleveland, I had never been on a farm, never.

0:35:58 Debra Schwartz: Total city boy.

0:36:00 Phil Fath: City boy. I was on the train with other people, and I was looking out the window, and there was something moving, and I said, “What’s that?” And the guy says, “That’s a cow.” [laughs]

0:36:18 Debra Schwartz: You really were a city boy. No cows in Brooklyn, huh? Not even pictures? [laughs]

0:36:26 Phil Fath: I had a friend in Cleveland, who was the first horn, the French horn player, in the Cleveland orchestra. He and George Szell did not get along. They hated each other. Ross Taylor, the first horn, whose home was San Francisco, decided to quit Cleveland, ’cause Szell was driving him crazy, and he came back home to San Francisco as first horn in the San Francisco Symphony. Then around that time, 1955, he calls me up, and he says, “Phil, this is Ross.” You know who his mother was? The very famous woman photographer of the ’30s, Dorothy Lang, who took pictures of people during the

Depression. The world-famous woman photographer of the '30s, that was his mother. But anyway, he calls me up and he says, "Phil come out." So, I called San Francisco Symphony, and they said, "Yes, there's an opening for principal clarinet, and the maestro will be in Chicago at this and this day, so you go to Chicago from Cleveland and you play for the Maestro."

0:38:14: So I get to Chicago — oh, Iris gave me \$20. That was a lot of money in 1955. She gives me \$20, I get to Chicago, and he's conducting the Chicago Symphony, our conductor. So she says, "But he's not in Chicago, he's in the summer home. Where the Chicago Symphony plays in the summer, way out, you have to take a train." So it's late afternoon already, I'm in Chicago, I have dinner and it's getting towards the evening, and I have to take a train in the evening to their summer home.

0:39:00 Debra Schwartz: This is a San Francisco conductor who's there conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

0:39:04 Phil Fath: He's guest conducting.

0:39:05 Debra Schwartz: Guest conducting. And he's at a symphony summer location.

0:39:09 Phil Fath: The Chicago Symphony.

0:39:10 Debra Schwartz: Yes, okay.

0:39:12 Phil Fath: So, I have to go out where the summer season is. I finally get on another train to go out there. I forgot the name, what they call it in Chicago, but anyway I get out to the summer place, and he's at a hotel. And I go up to the hotel room and I play for him, and he says, "Mr. Fath, wonderful, very good. Mr. Szell from Cleveland highly recommends you. You can have the job of principal clarinet in San Francisco Symphony, if you want it." I say, "Certainly, maestro, certainly I would love to go to San Francisco." And he says, "Is there anything I could do for you?" I had been running around Chicago, dinners, hotels. I said, "Maestro, could you lend me \$20?" [chuckles]

0:40:14 Debra Schwartz: You were tapped out. [chuckles]

0:40:17 Phil Fath: I ran out of money. I said, "Could you lend me \$20?" He gave me \$40, and I sent it back to him right away. So, I left Cleveland in 1956 — Oh my God — and came to San Francisco as principal clarinet with the San Francisco Symphony.

0:40:40 Debra Schwartz: Had you been to San Francisco?

0:40:43 Phil Fath: I had been to San Francisco. When I went on tour with the American Ballet Theater, they toured the United States. In January 1950, it was 70 degrees in San Francisco. I could not believe it.

0:41:02 Debra Schwartz: So, you thought San Francisco looked promising. When you were thinking about relocating, you were remembering those sunny days?

0:41:08 Phil Fath: Well, I never thought I'd come out here, but I was shocked. What's going on in January in New York compared to 70 degrees in San Francisco? I couldn't believe it. So, I came to San Francisco in 1956.

0:41:23 Debra Schwartz: And did you live in the city at first?

0:41:24 Phil Fath: We lived in the Marina section.

0:41:27 Debra Schwartz: My goodness.

0:41:28 Phil Fath: Two-family house.

0:41:29 Debra Schwartz: Nice.

0:41:32 Phil Fath: We lived there for five years, and in the fifth year, when the symphony resigned me again — I wasn't fired.

0:41:43 Debra Schwartz: Okay. There's a little security.

0:41:46 Phil Fath: They resigned me. We used to run out to Marin automatically after a symphony rehearsal, one o'clock, right out to Marin, right to Mill Valley. I don't know why I was drawn to it. After we had been in San Francisco for five years, we had our first child, a girl. We came out to Mill Valley. I bought a house.

0:42:27 Debra Schwartz: Is this the house that I visited you in on Lovell Avenue?

0:42:32 Phil Fath: Yes, \$25,000 in 1961.

0:42:37 Debra Schwartz: I don't think you could even buy —

0:42:39 Phil Fath: A corner of a house.

0:42:41 Debra Schwartz: A single car that's in front of a house on Lovell Avenue now for \$25,000.

0:42:46 Phil Fath: My wife was a school teacher, she used to teach, but then when we had a kid. We loved Mill Valley. We had another child, another girl, a few years later, and I thrived, we thrived, in San Francisco and Mill Valley. I was wonderfully received here. I had a great life, a musical life. The press was wonderful to me. I used to get rave reviews. Some wonderful conductors, Seiji Ozawa. Wonderful. Let's see.

0:43:47 Debra Schwartz: But tell me this when —

0:43:48 Phil Fath: Well, I have a few little stories. When I was in the symphony, I remember once we were playing the Brahms Third Symphony, Sir Thomas Beecham was the conductor at that time. He was a very famous British conductor, and we were playing the Brahms Third Symphony, and we came to rehearse on Wednesday for the third time. There were three rehearsals usually. At the last rehearsal, Sir Thomas gets up on the podium. We're there to rehearse and he says, "Gentlemen, we're gonna play the Brahms Third Symphony. You know the Brahms Third Symphony?" "I know the Brahms Third Symphony." "Go home. No rehearsal." And we all started to cheer. One guy, a new horn player, he raises his hand. He says, "Maestro, maestro. I never played the Brahms Third Symphony." And Beecham said, "Oh, you'll love it." [laughs]

0:45:09 Debra Schwartz: But you still went home?

0:45:11 Phil Fath: But we still went home.

0:45:13 Debra Schwartz: Who were some of the people you remember in Mill Valley at that time, raising your family? I'd also love to hear your daughters' names.

0:45:21 Phil Fath: My oldest daughter is Mara, M-A-R-A, and my youngest daughter is Josepha, J-O-S-E-P-H-A, which is honor of Joseph, who was a relative, so we added an A.

0:45:39 Debra Schwartz: I was asking about your time in Mill Valley. Actually, when was the first time you actually saw Mill Valley? I mean, you were in the Marina.

0:45:46 Phil Fath: It was my first days with the San Francisco Symphony, about 1958.

0:45:55 Debra Schwartz: In the '50s.

0:45:56 Phil Fath: Late '50s.

0:45:57 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

0:45:57 Phil Fath: In the late '50s. What a town, it was so beautiful. The nature of it was — I can't describe. Coming from Brooklyn or Cleveland, I mean, no such place exists in my life as Mill Valley. My God, the nature. You cannot beat the nature. I was overwhelmed. And to buy a house up on a hill overlooking some green, I mean wow!

0:46:32 Debra Schwartz: Very meaningful.

0:46:32 Phil Fath: Night and day from my previous life.

0:46:36 Debra Schwartz: And did you have musician friends here in Mill Valley?

0:46:39 Phil Fath: Many.

0:46:40 Debra Schwartz: Names?

0:46:41 Phil Fath: Many friends. In an orchestra of a hundred people, we used to have a car pool of five Mill Valley musicians from the symphony. Everybody shared. Carl Modell, bass player. Lucien Mitchell, a viola player. David Smiley, whose son Dan and his daughter both are in the San Francisco Symphony now. Se would go in every morning to the opera house with this group.

0:48:00 Debra Schwartz: So that was your working commute, and these were your working buddies?

0:48:03 Phil Fath: Yeah.

0:48:05 Debra Schwartz: Did you play locally here in Mill Valley? Did your local musicians put on performances?

0:48:13 Phil Fath: The Methodist Church, we always played concerts there, we always played chamber music concerts there. We started to play at “142.”

0:48:29 Debra Schwartz: Throckmorton Theatre.

0:48:31 Phil Fath: My daughter is a violinist, a wonderful violinist, so we started a group called the Fath Chamber Players, and we always give concerts at the 142 Throckmorton Theatre for many years.

0:48:51 Debra Schwartz: Well, there’s rumor going around the jungle that you’re gonna be having a concert there soon enough for your 90th birthday.

0:49:00 Phil Fath: Yeah, we’re going to have a concert there for my 90th birthday, a chamber music concert at 142. We haven’t decided on a date, ’cause six musicians are involved. It’s very hard to get everybody together, but we’re aiming for April or May. I’m gonna have a party and lots of refreshments, and it will be nice.

0:49:32 Debra Schwartz: Now, I’m looking at you, Phil, and I’ve noticed that you have long hair, kinda hippie long hair, but you tell me that’s not the case, that you’re a “long hair,” and that means something musically.

0:49:47 Phil Fath: Well, I don’t know how it started, but if you were a “long hair” musician, a long hair musician was a classical musician, as opposed to jazz musicians.

0:50:06 Debra Schwartz: That’s the slang, a long hair musician.

0:50:08 Phil Fath: Long hair, you’re a classical musician.

0:50:10 Debra Schwartz: And that’s you, you’re classical.

0:50:11 Phil Fath: That's it.

0:50:12 Debra Schwartz: Have you ever played anything but classical?

0:50:14 Phil Fath: Yes, in New York when I was a youngster, when I was in high school. There's a place in upstate New York called the Borscht Belt.

0:50:31 Debra Schwartz: The Borscht Belt. [chuckles]

0:50:33 Phil Fath: That's in a town about 80 miles north of New York City, it's called South Fallsburg. That's the Jewish Miami Beach. Jews from New York who didn't go to Miami in the summer, went to the hotels in South Fallsburg. So, it's called the "Jewish Alps."

0:51:02 Debra Schwartz: The Borscht Belt.

0:51:03 Phil Fath: That was the Borscht Belt, the Jewish Alps.

0:51:05 Debra Schwartz: I interviewed musician Jesse Barish, and he said they called the beach Bagel Beach.

0:51:10 Phil Fath: Oh, that too, I guess. [laughs] That's funny.

0:51:20 Debra Schwartz: Tell me more about your time in Mill Valley. What was Mill Valley like when you moved here in the '50s?

0:51:26 Phil Fath: People were nicer to each other. People were kinder to each other. It's become not so nice. People were friendlier, I feel. People were friendlier in those days.

0:51:52 Debra Schwartz: Do you remember some of the stores you shopped in?

0:51:56 Phil Fath: Well, now they're gone. My memory is fading. A lot of the stores that I used to go to are not there anymore. But to put it in 58 years of living in Mill Valley, I am still in love with this town. I love this town. The nature of it, you cannot take away the nature of Mill Valley. I still love Mill Valley, very, very much.

0:52:42 Debra Schwartz: I guess a few years in the city has set you up for a lifetime of appreciation of all this green.

0:52:51 Phil Fath: Yes.

0:52:52 Debra Schwartz: I come from an area that's very hot, and I never get over the cool breezes. You have something opposite, and then you come to a place like this and it's always refreshing.

0:53:04 Phil Fath: Yes.

0:53:05 Debra Schwartz: It's something that you just always appreciate. It never goes away. I can see that experience. It seems that's what you're describing.

0:53:14 Phil Fath: One of the best things I ever did was move to Mill Valley.

0:53:19 Debra Schwartz: Who were there characters that you can remember, people that stood out from those early years in Mill Valley?

0:53:25 Phil Fath: I used to go into Book Depot with Mort Sahl. [chuckles] He was quite a guy.

0:53:35 Debra Schwartz: Yeah, you don't see him much. He doesn't get out so much anymore.

0:53:41 Phil Fath: No, no, no. What did you ask about?

0:53:42 Debra Schwartz: People that you remember from back in the day, maybe in the '60s, '70s, '80s.

0:53:48 Phil Fath: Lots of people. Somehow a lot of people in Mill Valley are quite unique, but I'm at an age now where I can remember 20 years ago, but I can't remember yesterday.

0:54:17 Debra Schwartz: I think you're entitled. Do you remember when the rock 'n' roll musicians moved to town? You're a classical musician, but then suddenly there was a different kind of music all about.

0:54:27 Phil Fath: Well, I ignored them.

0:54:29 Debra Schwartz: Did you? [chuckles]

0:54:30 Phil Fath: I was too busy. I was too busy with my own work at the symphony, running around to schools, teaching at Stanford and U.C., and I had my two girls, so I wasn't too involved with those rock 'n' roll groups.

0:54:52 Debra Schwartz: How about the beatniks that we're here when you first moved here? Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsburg? Were you aware of them?

0:55:01 Phil Fath: Well, I read their books.

0:55:04 Debra Schwartz: Did you know they were living here though? You didn't encounter them?

0:55:07 Phil Fath: Were they living in Mill Valley?

0:55:08 Debra Schwartz: Mm-hmm. On Montrose.

0:55:10 Phil Fath: I was a great admirer of them, but I never met them.

0:55:18 Debra Schwartz: So tell me if you would, you seem like a philosophical kind of guy, am I right?

0:55:30 Phil Fath: Philosophical?

0:55:31 Debra Schwartz: Yes, I mean you —

0:55:32 Phil Fath: I guess so.

0:55:34 Debra Schwartz: What kind of philosophy do you embody in your life? Do you have a philosophy? Are you a religious man?

0:55:45 Phil Fath: I'm a very good human being. I'm a very kind human being. I was a good husband and a great father. There's nothing I wouldn't do for my two daughters, nothing. My daughter is looking for a house to buy. I gave her a down payment. My other daughter, a violinist, she has grown so much as an artist, thanks to my influence. To my wife, 62 years marriage, I was a good husband. I'm very kind. I'm good to people who are good people. If you're mean to me, look out. But my initial attitude is to be helpful.

0:57:06 Debra Schwartz: Do you think this is your nature or the way you were raised?

0:57:08 Phil Fath: My nature, yeah. I can't be mean. I'm a very good-natured guy. But I know meanness when I see it and I can react to it. But myself, I'm a good human being. I shouldn't admit that. It's very hard to admit, to confess to something, but I'm a very good person. I wouldn't hurt a fly.

0:57:46 Debra Schwartz: You didn't wanna kill anybody in the war.

0:57:49 Phil Fath: Imagine, I was a youngster, and I said, "I will not kill a Korean." And he respected that, it was interesting. The army psychiatrist, "Oh, you're a musician." And he came through, put me in a band.

0:58:06 Debra Schwartz: And you never had to be tested in a way that was in conflict with your nature.

0:58:11 Phil Fath: Oh yeah.

0:58:11 Debra Schwartz: Another lucky thing.

0:58:13 Phil Fath: Lucky.

0:58:17 Debra Schwartz: You've had such good fortune with your career. Who are the people that you wouldn't be here without their influence?

0:58:27 Phil Fath: That's a very good point, and I always go back to those people. Mrs. Kozak.

0:58:37 Debra Schwartz: Oh, your seventh grade teacher.

0:58:39 Phil Fath: She put me into music in art high school. I can never thank her enough for doing that. That's such a life changer. I cannot describe to you what a life changer that was to go from darkness to — corny — light. Then, these two people who recommended me to Szell.

0:59:14 Debra Schwartz: In the New York Philharmonic.

0:59:17 Phil Fath: In the New York Philharmonic.

0:59:17 Debra Schwartz: Their names were?

0:59:19 Phil Fath: Robert McGinnis and Simon Kovar. And Ross Taylor who brought me to San Francisco, the horn player who called me: "Come, take the audition." So those are four people who I owe my life to.

0:59:39 Debra Schwartz: How about some of your musical teachers?

0:59:41 Phil Fath: My clarinet teacher, wonderful, in New York City. Leon, great name, Leon Russianoff. Russian-off. [chuckles]

0:59:54 Phil Fath: He set me straight on the instrument. Wonderful.

1:00:02 Debra Schwartz: How about special friends of yours, 'cause friends can make such a difference.

1:00:08 Phil Fath: Marc Lifschey, oboist. Funny, I knew him in Music & Art High School, we were both students. He was three years older than me. Then he went to the Cleveland Orchestra and I went to the Cleveland Orchestra, and then I went to San Francisco, and he came to San Francisco. A great human being, a great artist. Marc Lifschey, first oboe, first principal oboe in the San Francisco Symphony. Paul Renzi, first flutist in the NBC Symphony in New York, and then he came to be first flutist in the San Francisco Symphony. Great human being. What can I say?

1:01:10 Debra Schwartz: You taught on the faculty of U.C. Berkeley and Stanford.

1:01:14 Phil Fath: Five schools.

1:01:14 Debra Schwartz: And San Francisco State University, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and San Dominico in Marin. Where did you find the time to do all that?

1:01:26 Phil Fath: Mondays.

1:01:27 Debra Schwartz: On Mondays you would —

1:01:28 Phil Fath: We were off. This is not at the same time. This is different times.

1:01:34 Debra Schwartz: Yes, of course.

1:01:35 Phil Fath: On Mondays I would drive down to Palo Alto, and I stayed there a few hours teaching the students at Stanford. Stanford, I cannot describe to you. When I walked into the campus of Stanford University, it was like going into a new world. I don't know what it was, but it was the only place where I entered, and the world changed for me, maybe for the better, I don't know, but certainly it was different. It was an interesting place.

1:02:21 Debra Schwartz: Was it the academics, was it the buildings, what was it?

1:02:25 Phil Fath: I don't know, but —

1:02:26 Debra Schwartz: Was it the lofty reputation?

1:02:28 Phil Fath: All that, all of that, 'cause I never got the same feeling going to U.C. Berkeley or San Francisco State. There was always protest rallies going on at San Francisco State. I once had a student at Stanford, who became a very prominent doctor, but he played the clarinet at Stanford.

1:02:57 Debra Schwartz: Oh, is there a picture? No, it's not the guy that you're playing clarinet with here.

1:03:01 Phil Fath: No, that's different. That's Dr. Posner. So when I was teaching at Stanford one day, I asked him if he has a certain piece of music? He said no he doesn't have that piece of music. I had it with me — and this is in the early 1960s when he was a student at Stanford. I lent him the piece of music I referred to. And I get a big envelope last year, 2018.

1:03:46 Debra Schwartz: [laughs] No.

1:03:47 Phil Fath: “Dear Phil, you lent me this music in 1962. I'm a little late in sending it back to you, but I hope you don't mind.” Dr. Hoffman.

1:04:04 Debra Schwartz: [laughs] That's funny.

1:04:06 Phil Fath: That was a good one. [laughs]

1:04:09 Debra Schwartz: Now, you're no longer professionally playing anymore?

1:04:14 Phil Fath: We play concerts.

1:04:16 Debra Schwartz: I mean, you play concerts still.

1:04:17 Phil Fath: I don't play with orchestras anymore.

1:04:18 Debra Schwartz: No more orchestras. But you certainly have a lot of experience under your belt, both life experience and professionally.

1:04:25 Phil Fath: Maybe 50 years.

1:04:29 Debra Schwartz: What's your advice for young musicians. If you could share the most valuable experiences you've had, or the lessons —

1:04:38 Phil Fath: Two stories, wait, wait.

1:04:40 Debra Schwartz: I can see them loading in your mind there.

1:04:51 Phil Fath: One day a girl calls me up and she says, "Mr Fath, I'd like to take lessons from you." I hated to teach. I taught in all those schools, but I really didn't like teaching, the mechanics. "I would love to take lessons from you," she said, "How much do you charge?" And I said, "\$500 for half an hour." She says, "How many students do you have?" I said, "I have none." [laughs] There was another story. My memory is going.

1:05:40 Debra Schwartz: It's okay.

1:05:41 Phil Fath: Go ahead, whatever you want to ask me.

1:05:42 Debra Schwartz: Advice, friendly advice, or wisdom.

1:05:46 Phil Fath: I would say, "Don't go into the profession anymore because Juilliard, Manhattan School, they're loaded with people who are studying music. And my instrument, there's only four in the whole symphony. There could be 30 violins but four clarinets. I'd say, "Unless you're a genius, don't go into it." That's my advice.

1:06:17 Debra Schwartz: I did not expect to hear that.

1:06:19 Phil Fath: Don't go into it unless you are brilliant. Unless you're a Heifetz. Don't go into it, unless you're a genius.

1:06:32 Debra Schwartz: So, do you think that you caught a wave of opportunity because the world was less populated when you were younger?

1:06:40 Phil Fath: It was less crowded. What I did, there weren't as many as there are today.

1:06:49 Debra Schwartz: There's still the same amount of orchestras.

1:06:51 Phil Fath: Yeah.

1:06:52 Debra Schwartz: But so much more people, that opportunities —

1:06:56 Phil Fath: It's too difficult. I discourage it, unless you're a genius.

1:07:05 Debra Schwartz: What other advice?

1:07:10 Phil Fath: No, I have no advice.

1:07:12 Debra Schwartz: How about life advice? You're 90 years old.

1:07:15 Phil Fath: My advice is try to be a *mensch*. A *mensch* in Yiddish means be a good human being. That's my advice: try to be a *mensch*. [chuckles]

1:07:31 Debra Schwartz: Now, when we did our pre-interview, not only did you seem very much a *mensch* to me — I like the way that you use your Yiddish terms. [chuckles] But you also have a few jokes to tell, too. You're a joker. You're quick to laugh.

1:08:02 Phil Fath: What's the name of that actor? A very famous actor told this joke at the film festival, so I could tell it. Two old couples, past 90, they're gonna get married. So the man says to the lady, "Isn't it wonderful that at our age we can get married?" And she says, "Oh, it's wonderful," and then there's a pause, and then she says, "What about sex?" And he says, "Infrequently." And she says, "Is that one word or two words?"

1:09:05 Debra Schwartz: [chuckles] Oh, my goodness.

1:09:06 Phil Fath: In-frequently. [laughs]

1:09:07 Debra Schwartz: Colorful joke.

1:09:07 Phil Fath: This man gets on an airplane, and he sits next to a gorgeous girl and he gets up enough nerve, he says, "Where are you going?" And she blurts out, "I'm going to a sex convention in San Francisco." So this blows him away. And then he says, "Tell me, what kind of lovers do you like?" She says, "I like Texas men and I like Jewish men." She says, "By the way, what's your name?" He says, "Tex Goldstein." [laughs]

1:10:02 Debra Schwartz: All these jokes are horrible. [laughs] Have you got one more bad one for us?

1:10:12 Phil Fath: Oh gosh.

1:10:14 Debra Schwartz: No, okay. I've got another question.

1:10:16 Phil Fath: Wait, let me —

1:10:17 Debra Schwartz: Oh, it's coming.

1:10:24 Phil Fath: No, I —

1:10:25 Debra Schwartz: We haven't talked politics, my friend.

1:10:28 Phil Fath: Yeah, I'll talk politics.

1:10:31 Debra Schwartz: Are you a political man?

1:10:32 Phil Fath: Yes, with my background.

1:10:39 Debra Schwartz: You carry the torch of your father's political passions.

1:10:43 Phil Fath: Yes.

1:10:44 Debra Schwartz: Were your parents religious Jewish people?

1:10:47 Phil Fath: No. That was interesting. Half the Jewish population in New York were religious and the other half were not.

1:10:58 Debra Schwartz: But humanists.

1:11:00 Phil Fath: Humanists?

1:11:01 Debra Schwartz: I grew up Jewish and there were many that were humanists.

1:11:04 Phil Fath: I like that word "humanists."

1:11:05 Debra Schwartz: Yes, not religious, but humanists.

1:11:08 Phil Fath: Gee, I learn —

1:11:15 Debra Schwartz: So that's how you were raised, you're more of a humanist then. You're not a religious man, but you consider yourself to be —

1:11:23 Phil Fath: I was never bar mitzvahed. Everybody, most boys in Brooklyn were bar mitzvahed.

1:11:34 Debra Schwartz: You weren't bar mitzvahed?

1:11:35 Phil Fath: I was not bar mitzvahed because my father was a follower of Marx, and you know what Marx said about religion. Marx said, “Religion is the opium of the people.”

1:11:54 Debra Schwartz: Of the masses, right.

1:11:55 Phil Fath: So my father, as a believer, we never were bar mitzvahed. But at the end of my father’s life, interestingly, he started to go to the synagogue.

1:12:09 Debra Schwartz: Do you go to synagogue ever?

1:12:14 Phil Fath: I go to the synagogue in San Rafael. Not for religious purposes, but when they have an event, I go there. What’s it called? I forgot the name of the synagogue.

1:12:29 Debra Schwartz: There’s a synagogue in San Rafael? This I did not know.

1:12:33 Phil Fath: Oh, beautiful, wonderful synagogue, Kol Shofar or something like that. I go there for events, concerts, lectures.

1:12:42 Debra Schwartz: I know there’s one in Tiburon.³

1:12:44 Phil Fath: Yeah, I go there too. I go to the Dominican University senior school — OSHA, ASHA, OSHO.

1:12:58 Debra Schwartz: The learning center. I think it’s OSHA learning center.

1:13:01 Phil Fath: And they have classes at the synagogue in Tiburon. So, I still take courses.

1:13:13 Debra Schwartz: As we’re coming to a close with your interview, I want to ask you if there is anything that we haven’t talked about that you want to talk about?

1:13:31 Phil Fath: Well, when one is married for 62 years and you lose your wife, it’s always there, it’s always in your head.

1:13:52 Debra Schwartz: And your wife passed away last year?

1:13:55 Phil Fath: Two years.

1:13:55 Debra Schwartz: Two years?

1:13:56 Phil Fath: Yeah. I have a little shrine of her pictures, everything. That’s the sad part which I live with, but I’ve come to the now. My two daughters are *numero uno*.

³ Congregation Kol Shofar is the name of the synagogue in Tiburon. Congregation Rodef Sholom is the name of the one in San Rafael.—Editor.

They are number one. There's nothing I would not do for them to make their life easier, nothing. I encourage them, I'm always encouraging them, emotionally. 'Cause when I was a kid I suffered terribly from inferiority feelings. I was running to psychiatrists for many years, so I want them to feel good about themselves and I encourage them always. "Why are you depressed today? Why? Tell me about it. Come on, that's nothing to be depressed about."

1:15:33: I'm there for them. I like that word. I'm there for my two daughters. Whereas before that one takes things for granted, I don't know, your wife, your children, your profession, that becomes almost number one. What you do, how you make your — well, maybe I don't do it anymore. I'm no longer involved in how great I can play. Now I could go outside of myself and concentrate on other people. That's become very, very important. I have my two kids sleep over a lot. They're both married, but they come over to stay with their dad for the evening. I'm a terrific father. I hate to admit it, but I am. And I was a very terrific husband. What can I say?

1:16:49 Debra Schwartz: Well, I guess when you're evaluating your life and what matters to you, I think what you're saying, and correct me if I'm wrong, is that at the end of the day, and into your later years, now 90, this is your priority, this is who you are.

1:17:04 Phil Fath: I've lived. I cannot tell you how satisfied I am from my career. It was amazing, and I was met with great recognition from all over.

1:17:20 Debra Schwartz: Including the Milley Award here in Mill Valley.

1:17:22 Phil Fath: The Milley Award.

1:17:23 Debra Schwartz: Your own community recognizes you.

1:17:28 Phil Fath: The things in the press.

1:17:31 Debra Schwartz: All the accolades.

1:17:32 Phil Fath: I had an artistic career that was so fulfilling. I can't believe it myself. Now that's behind me. I'm happy, proud, I feel good about it, and now it's another turn, and my goal is to be as good as I can be to my two children, and to everybody.

1:18:02 Debra Schwartz: As my father would say, "It's a mitzvah."

1:18:05 Phil Fath: Yeah, yes.

1:18:09 Debra Schwartz: We'll, Phil, thank you so much for spending the afternoon with me.

1:18:13 Phil Fath: I'm trying to be a *mensch*.

1:18:15 Debra Schwartz: I think you're doing a pretty good job. [chuckles] Thank you so much for spending this time, and for giving me the rare pleasure of seeing this 100-year-old hat that you're wearing, which I'm happy too darn for you. But most of all, I just wanna say thank you so much for the music. Thank you so much for your bright, wonderful personality that you share with so many in our community. Your name was given to me by one of your friends, who insisted I must meet you and interview you.

1:18:47 Phil Fath: Joe Angiulo.

1:18:49 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

1:18:49 Phil Fath: Lovely man.

1:18:49 Debra Schwartz: Yes.

1:18:50 Phil Fath: I thanked him. I saw him the other day at the market, and I thanked him for this.

1:18:54 Debra Schwartz: Yes, and I see exactly his point now. You have a glow about you, and you make me laugh. [chuckles] And I think from what I can tell, you're fulfilling your desire to be a *mensch*.

1:19:08 Phil Fath: Yes.

1:19:09 Debra Schwartz: So thank you so much on behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Public Library, this concludes your interview.

1:19:18 Phil Fath: Well thanks for having me.⁴

1:19:19 Debra Schwartz: My pleasure.

⁴ Upon reviewing this transcript, Phil wished to extend his thanks to the Mill Valley Historical Society for "adding [him] to their 'club'."—Editor.