

STORM KING ART CENTER

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

JOAN O. STERN
November 28, 2017

Interviewed by Sarah Dziedzic
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Interview with Joan O. Stern
Conducted by Sarah Dziedzic
November 29, 2017

Joan O. Stern's home, Waccabuc, NY
1 audio file
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Audio File 1

Dziedzic: Today is November 29, 2017, and this is Sarah Dziedzic interviewing Joan O. Stern at her house in Waccabuc, New York. I wanted to start by trying to get a sense of where you grew up, the place. Because that has a lot of significance to the Art Center. So, can you tell me about some of your earlier memories of the house that you grew up in?

Stern: Now, do you mean earlier memories of Mountainville, or earlier memories. Because I wasn't born near there. And we lived in New York City—

Dziedzic: Yes.

Stern: —before. What brought us to Mountainville, the family, was the Great Depression of the 1930s. [00:01:00] My father's parents had a house in Mountainville. I don't know whether that was their only house, or whether they moved up from the city. This is where I don't know very much.

When we lived in New York City, I was in kindergarten, at the Brearley School, and my father's [00:02:00] office was down in the Wall Street area. And then the crash came, and we couldn't afford to live in New York anymore. So somehow or other—I'm not very clear about this—my grandfather, my father's father, either had a house, or rented a house across the road from where he and my grandmother lived in Mountainville. It was called the Stone Cottage. And we moved up there. I was five or six years old at that point. The Stone Cottage was an easy walk from my grandparents' house. I was very excited and happy to be moving [00:03:00] to the country. I remember saying to my kindergarten teacher, "We're going to the country for good." And I thought "for good" meant it was a good thing.

My father had a long commute from Mountainville, because his office was downtown. It was on Cedar Street, which was down in the business district. He had to get up very early in the morning, and then he would drive—where was it, Tuxedo? No. He would drive to where he got a train. [00:04:00]. He drove south, maybe half an hour's drive, and then took a train. And the train stopped on the west side of the river. I can't remember, again, the name of the place. From there, he would take the ferry over to the Wall Street area. So he left very early in the morning, came home I guess around maybe 6:00. But I had no concept, as a child, of how long his commute was. And how hard he was working, because it was the Depression. So my brother and I never got to really know him very well during these years. [00:05:00] He

would come home, and we'd be listening on the radio to *The Singing Lady*, or *Uncle Don*. And we just would hover. You know, just sit at the very end of the sofa so we could hear the radio, and that was about all I remember of those early days.

But I loved being in the country. There were lots of trees, and my father's father, my grandfather Ogden, had a small farm. He had a farmer. I think it was all on a very small scale. The farmer's daughter was also named Joan. And she was the only child within miles [laughs]. We became best friends. Joan Loeven and I played together, and at one point I [00:06:00] had a riding teacher who gave me a horse. I loved my horse, but Joan Loeven didn't have a horse, so he gave her one too, an old retired horse. We used to ride our horses all around the place. The roads were all dirt roads. And I went to school. There was a public school. But I didn't go to the public school at first. They sent me to a private school in Newburgh.

Now this is getting to be more about me than—

Dziedzic: No, please go ahead.

Stern: Okay. [00:07:00] The nearest town was Cornwall, five miles away, and we did our shopping there. And then, beyond Cornwall was Newburgh. And they sent me to a private school in Newburgh. We shopped in Newburgh, which was more of a city than Cornwall. There was a ferry going over to Beacon. The bridge had not been built then. As far as my father goes, we didn't really do much with him because he was so busy. But my parents got to know people in Cornwall, they had friends there, and up on the mountain. And I liked my school. It was a very small, private school that was in a [00:08:00] building that had been somebody's house, which we thought was fascinating [laughs] because you'd go to the bathroom and there was a bathtub, in the school.

Dziedzic: I'm interested in hearing more about what was around in the area in Mountainville. You mentioned the roads and trails for horses. How far did you wander out from the house?

Stern: Well, I guess not very far in my early years. But then when I was six—I was driven by my grandmother's chauffeur, I think it was to Newburgh, [00:09:00] which is about 10 miles away. But in those days, we didn't go as fast, it was kind of slower. And I took my lunch with me. And then, as I got older, up to, you know, nine, 10, 11, I would ride horseback with my friend, Joan Loeven. And sometimes we would go on walks, and we would go down to Mountainville, where there was a place called Ketchum's General Store. It was a great place because they had candies that were a penny each. We went there a lot. It had barrels that you could sit on, a real [00:10:00] old-fashioned general store. I think the mail came to Ketchum's also, but I'm not sure.

Then when I got a little older, my friend Joan and I would ride our horses in a much bigger circle. I can't remember any of the names of the roads, but we'd go down to where Route 32 is now, and then we'd come around. We'd go past the Black Rock Fish & Game Club, and then we'd go [00:11:00] all the way around Otterkill Road. It was a big, big, big circle. And then come back on the road that our house was on, Pleasant Hill Road. There was the little house that we were living in, the Stone Cottage, and then very close to it, there was an old hay barn, which was deserted, empty. And I don't know how my father did this, because he was so busy at work in New York, but he decided that he was going to make a guest house out of that, because the cottage that we lived in was nice, but not very big. [00:12:00] So, he worked—I don't remember too much about it—but he kind of stripped it, got all the hay things out, and then he worked, I'm sure, with workers, with people. The first thing I remember about it is that it was a big empty barn, and he built a swing for me. Put the ropes up, and everything, so I could swing, which was great.

[Side conversation]

Stern: [00:13:00] So, eventually, what happened—and I'm sure there're pictures somewhere in the files—is that my father, with help, turned this barn into a guest house with a great big living room on the first floor, and a little bar for drinks, for entertaining. And over the years, it became really a guest house. Two bedrooms upstairs, one bedroom downstairs, and my father's office. I don't really remember how long it took to finish all this. It had kind of a balcony outside, facing east. And my mother built a garden, a very pretty garden with a [00:14:00] stone wall, and then there was a rock garden that they did together.

Dziedzic: Well, let me ask you. So, you moved up there because of the Depression. But it sounds like you really settled up there. Even as the economy came back up, you didn't go back to the city. So, I'm interested in how maybe your father—besides that guest house, I think that's a great illustration—but if you could tell how he was getting involved with the land up there?

Stern: With the land? You know, I never [00:15:00] paid much attention to it when I was a child. But he certainly was. He didn't have a great team of people working for him, but he had one or two regulars. My grandfather had cows, and had a small farm. Then, at one point—I can remember these things, but I can't remember how they came about—my father decided we should have a swimming pool. So there was the house, and then below the house the garden, and then beyond the garden, a little bit—I don't know how we came to have all this land. [00:16:00] I watched him sometimes staking out the land, and staking out the pool, and of course he had workers. So, a pool came into existence. And then he had a little stable built, down the hill from the guest house, with a couple of horses. I had one horse. I'd learned to ride. And my father rode, but it wasn't his thing. He rode occasionally.

Then it all stopped when the Thruway came. There was no Thruway [00:17:00] in those days. And then when the Thruway—you can't resist it, you can't say no. And so when the Thruway came through, it would've been directly under or downhill from our pool, but very close. And actually, from the house that's still there on another road, the house that my children grew up in—you can hear the Thruway very clearly. So my father decided, "Well, we can't live with this, so we'll build another house." So west of where our house was, and closer to where my grandparents' house [00:18:00] was, he built a new house.

At that point, I had just met Peter Stern—no, I hadn't just met him. I was engaged to him, actually, at that point. And [laughs] I remember my father taking me over to see how his new house was progressing. And, you know, I just, [laughs] I didn't care. I mean, it was fine. But I was so wrapped up in this new man in my life, and also not sure what my father's impression of him would be, and so forth. So that house was where it all ended up. [00:19:00] Far from the Thruway, very nice house. My father really just loved to build.

At around this time, my grandfather, who was living across the road, died. He wasn't 70 yet. He was 67 or 69, something like that. He had emphysema. My grandmother, his wife, lived to be well into her eighties. But I never really—she was a little tiny, quiet woman, so I never got to know her too well. [00:20:00]

So, in other words, I guess when you look at what happened from the Depression to the time my father died, there was a lot of building. And he really, really enjoyed that. That barn that he redid, the original barn that he made into a guest house, he did a lot of work on himself—I don't know what you call it. It was woodwork, almost the way you'd see in Switzerland. He made curving designs, and put it up over the bottom [00:21:00] of the balcony. I can't really describe it, but he did quite a few things. He loved to work with wood. And I think he made two benches, but I'm not 100% sure about that. But he liked to do work with his hands, as well as, you know, planning things. So, I guess that's about all I can—

Dziedzic: Did you go to school in Newburgh through high school?

Stern: I wish I had. But it was a difficult time. My mother died when I was 10 years old. And I was in this little school in Newburgh, but it closed. I guess it just didn't have the money to stay open. It was a sweet little private school. So my father wanted to send me to Saint Mary's, [00:22:00] a Catholic school. But the word got around, among the children, that at the Catholic school they nuns slapped you. And none of us wanted to go there. But there really weren't any other private schools. I begged my father not to send me to Saint Mary's. So he sent me to the Cornwall public school. And that was okay. And then—I don't know if you want all this information that's more about me—

Dziedzic: Yes.

Stern: I guess this was before he married his second wife. Anyway, I was fine at the Cornwall school. I adapted. And then my father heard that two girls [00:23:00] in the senior class were pregnant. So, out of there! [laughs] He pulled me out of there. I went to quite a few schools. So, what to do? My mother's sister had three children, and they lived in Englewood, New Jersey, across the river from New York. There was a school there called the Dwight School. Private school. It wasn't really a boarding school, they were a day school, but they took boarding students. It was sort of a combination. So that's where I went next. I stayed there during the week and then came home on weekends, as I remember. [00:24:00] Now, do you want me to go on with this?

Dziedzic: Yes.

Stern: Because, now, it's not about my father, it's more about me.

Dziedzic: No, I think this is still important.

Stern: Oh, okay. So, the Dwight School, maybe I went there for a year, or two years, I'm not sure. I was staying there during the week and coming home on weekends. And then, the next thing was that—I don't know if it was my stepmother or my father, but they thought maybe I should go to boarding school. [laughs] And so we looked at boarding schools. And we found one that I liked, and they liked, in Maryland. Outside of Baltimore. It's called Oldfields School. So, I went there [00:25:00] and I liked it very much. Someone who became my best friend for life, I met there, at that school. It wasn't the greatest academically, perhaps. But it was a cozy place, and kind of very much in the country. I could ride. I rode horseback there. And had many friends. So, that was until I graduated. And then I went to college.

Dziedzic: Where did you go for college?

Stern: I went to Sarah Lawrence. And I think my father was very disappointed. My stepmother had not gone to college. I think she was sorry that she hadn't. [00:26:00] And she was very interested in the arts, she'd been an actress. I think she was not tough enough to keep on being an actress. She was very nervous. But she knew lots of people in the theater. In fact, I think she may've been influential in pushing the Art Center. As she grew older, she went around to New York galleries all the time, became very interested in art. She read a lot. She had heard about Sarah Lawrence. And at that point, I wanted to be a writer. I thought I was going to be a writer, so I went there. [00:27:00] I enjoyed it very much, and met another friend, another person who became a friend for life. My father was disappointed; he wanted me to go to Smith, to go to a really rigorous—I think I could've gotten a lot more out of a different college. I took writing classes. I took a class in piano, can't play a note now. [laughs] Anyway, that was very enjoyable

for me. And [00:28:00] my father didn't say anything. But I know he was disappointed. I would come home on weekends, and my stepmother and I would take turns reading aloud from the famous writers.

Dziedzic: Famous literature?

Stern: Literature, yes. Often one of the Russian novels. You know, we'd take turns reading aloud. We both were very interested. And my father would sit over across the room, reading *Life* magazine. That's the part of education that I think my father missed. He was smart—but his education was in engineering? [00:29:00] Yes, Yale School of Engineering. And he was very creative, as you probably know. But he wasn't educated in the arts at all.

Dziedzic: How did your father meet your stepmom?

Stern: Well, that is kind of a coincidence. My stepmother had a friend who also happened to be a friend of my parents. Her name was Trask. Mrs. Trask was shopping in one of those wonderful big department stores that we used to have, like Bonwit Teller. And she ran into Peggy, my stepmother. And she said to Peggy—oh, you know, they talked about old times and everything, they hadn't seen each other in a long time. And then she asked, "Are you by any chance free tonight? Because we've invited a friend of ours, Ted Ogden, and we invited a woman friend of ours, but at the last minute she said she couldn't come." Peggy said, "Well, fine, yes, I'd love to come." So that's how they met. Because Mrs. Trask's first invitee didn't come. [00:31:00]

I think Peggy felt sorry for my father. She thought he was very sweet, too. She was much younger. I mean, she was maybe 12 years older than I. And she thought this nice man—it was so sad that he'd lost his wife. Anyway, that's how they met. At the time, he had already booked a space on a ship to take a cruise. [00:32:00] So he did that (my stepmother went to the dock to see him off). By the time he got home, she had gone to California. She never was in a movie, but she wanted to be in the theater, and she had a lot of theater friends and movie friends. I think she met them in stock companies during the summer—she knew Bette Davis, and lots of others. And [laughs] that was her number one asset, as far as I was concerned. That she knew all these movie stars. Well, anyway, my father came back from this trip, and somehow they had kept in touch, and he went out west, and courted her, and came back, and announced that he was marrying again. We had never even met her, until they [00:33:00] got engaged.

Dziedzic: So you were 19 or so, when they (inaudible)?

Stern: No, I was much younger. I was 13, I think. Yes, when my mother died, her sister, my aunt, who we all loved very much, came and stayed for about a month with us. And then when my father married

Peggy, I guess I was maybe about 12 or 13, because that's when the whole boarding school thing started.

Dziedzic: Did your mother's family live nearby too?

Stern: Only the aunt that I mentioned who lived in Englewood, New Jersey. She and her [00:34:00] husband. But he may have died by then. He died quite young. They had three daughters. So I had cousins, whom I was very fond of. But my grandmother, my mother's mother, lived all the way up in Corning, New York, which in those days was quite far. It's too bad, because she was the jolliest, warmest, nicest grandmother you could imagine. But then after my mother died, we didn't see them too much. But occasionally I went up to Corning. I guess I did see quite a bit of the cousins in Englewood. There were three girls, older than I. One summer, when I was in my teens, I went [00:35:00] out West with one of them who had a job at a ranch in Wyoming. And so my father said I could go out with her. That was really nice and fun.

Dziedzic: I wanted to go back a little bit, and ask you about Vermont Hatch and Walter Orr. Or any of the other kind of characters that your father knew. Can you recall them, or where they lived?

Stern: Yes. Well, Walter Orr, I can remember vividly what he looked like, because he was [00:36:00] one of those people with very dark eyes, very black hair. I don't remember his wife at all. But he lived down at—I don't know how well you know the area—the place is called Orr's Mills. And I assume it was called that after him. I don't know any of the story at all, except that he lived there in a house just before that bridge. I don't think he was a close friend of my father's. But everybody sort of knew each other in that area. It's not a big, big area.

Vermont Hatch—Vermont was his first name but they called him Monty—and they lived where—[laughs] you know where they lived [what is now the Museum Building]. They didn't have [00:37:00] any children. I found them kind of awesome. He was a nice man, and I don't remember whether he was a businessman or a lawyer. But they had a place in New York, and then he built her house modeled on a French chateau. She gave me singing lessons. And really, in my mind, as an almost teenager, I was old enough to think that a great voice had been, [00:38:00] not ruined, but never heard, because of the system where married women didn't have careers.

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: When you were talking about Monty Hatch and his house, what was his wife's name? Do you remember?

Stern: His wife's name was—well, they called her Nita. But I think Anita must have been her name. And [00:43:00] she was an amazing person. The great big room in the Art Center [Gallery 1], when you go in and then go to the right, was their living room. And she had a grand piano at the near end of it. If you walk into that room and turn right, the grand piano was there. I may have been 12 or 13, and I used to sing a lot, and I don't know whose idea it was, maybe my stepmother's: "Would you like to take singing lessons with Nita Hatch?" And I said, "Yes, I would." I'll never forget this. I went in, and I'm short, as people go. I was even shorter then, at the age of 13. [00:44:00] And the doorknob was about level with my chin. I felt as if I was in *Alice in Wonderland*. And I opened this door—or maybe she opened it—but every time I go there, I think of *Alice in Wonderland*. I don't remember too much about it, except that she asked me to sing from a Mozart aria. I did, and it was this big room, you know. I sang [sings in mock-childish voice], and she played the piano. Then when I finished, she sang it as it should be sung, and I almost fainted. This big voice, but beautiful. Then this big empty room, [00:45:00] carrying the sound. I knew right then and there that she should be in the opera. And she was striking looking. Very white skin, medium height, fairly tall, I guess, very black hair. She painted, also. She was completely artistic.

My stepmother told me (they became friends, because my stepmother was very interested in the arts) that Nita Hatch had told her that when the bills came in, she just stuck them between the books on the bookcase so that Monty [laughs] wouldn't see them! [00:46:00] But I always used to think, growing up, that if she had only gone and auditioned for the opera, because she was a very strong personality, but not loud—I mean, perfectly nice, but she just lived in another world. And I think that Monty—despite the fact that I thought he was just like, you know, every Wall Street businessman—I don't know, he may have been a lawyer for all I know, but I think he must have had a great appreciation for these qualities, or he wouldn't've married her. And so he must have had a greater appreciation of the arts than I gave him credit for. Because I was getting very left-wing at that time. You know, all these Sarah Lawrence girls [00:47:00] with rich families, and their fathers owned some big company, and they all went out and marched against—you know, in those days. But, anyway.

Dziedzic: What were you protesting, at the time? Or marching against?

Stern: Probably workers' pay. I guess to a certain extent most teenagers rebel against their families. And certainly there was a lot to rebel against. There still is. But it was always considered sort of ironic that their fathers were earning a lot of money, sending them to college, and they were out there protesting capitalism. [00:48:00]

I wish I knew more about the house itself. Because I heard that it was modeled on a French chateau. And of course, in those days, there were trees everywhere. It was in the woods. There wasn't all of the space that there is now, where the Art Center grew up. There were just woods everywhere. Big tall trees.

Dziedzic: I was going to ask if you remembered when the house was being built. Do you remember that?

Stern: The Hatch house? I don't. I'm not sure I ever saw it being built. I know they had an apartment in New York. But [00:49:00] that singing lesson's the first thing that I can remember.

Dziedzic: How long did you take lessons for?

Stern: Not too long. It may be that I went away to school. I didn't say, "I don't like it." Because I remember that one scene that I told you, but I don't think it went on for too long. Maybe Mr. Hatch died, or maybe I went to boarding school, but it wasn't many, many weeks.

Dziedzic: I know your father had relationships with farmers in the area, and also with the local community. And I'm not sure when that started. So, do you recall, [00:50:00] first of all, when he started farming some land? And what his relationship was like with the farmers in the area?

Stern: I don't remember. But I was an adult by then. He used to go to cattle shows, or fairs, and was a respected member of the cattle raising community.

This is not answering your question, really, because I don't remember other farmers except for one. [00:51:00] There was one man, Jim Szold, who had a farm, oh, maybe 30 or 40 minutes away. I don't think I ever saw it. And he became great friends with my father. They talked a lot about breeding. But what horrified me even at the time—I mean, I didn't know anything about farming. But the theory then was not to have the cows go out and graze (now they're back to that). And the theory wasn't to have minimal fat. The theory was to have as much milkfat as you could get. So those cows just stayed all the time in the barn, lying in their stalls. [00:52:00] There was a great deal of discussion between my father and Jim Szold, the friend, about breeding. Which cow should be bred with which bull, etc. [00:53:00]

Dziedzic: Yes. It sounds like they were interested in the kind of economics and efficiency of farming.

Stern: Yes. And they were also interested in the line of the family tree, as you'd say.

Dziedzic: The breeding lines?

Stern: Yes. There's something they always said—"out of." They had names: "Jezebel, out of Thompson," or something. I really wasn't too interested. But I didn't think it was bad to have all the cream. And I [00:54:00] did think that there was something wrong about not letting cows out in the pasture. But this friend of his, Jim Szold, they became great friends. And they were just rattling away like crazy about all the line of the bloodlines, or whatever you call it, of these cows. And then I think he went to these places where you buy cows, cattle shows, or fairs. And that's about all I remember.

Dziedzic: Let's see. So, you mentioned when you first met Peter Stern. How did you meet? [00:56:00]

[Side conversation]

Stern: A friend and I wanted to go to the annual music festival in Salzburg, Austria. [00:57:00]

Dziedzic: What sort of music is there?

Stern: Classical. Every summer, they have classical music concerts with orchestras from different countries. So, we went to that music festival. The [00:58:00] girl I was traveling with was tall, and slim, and dark-haired. Very good looking. We were in line to buy tickets, and ahead of us there was this very tall young man, and another dark-haired shorter one with him. The tall one took a liking to my friend, Ann, and asked if we would like to have lunch with them. His name was Dick [Uviller] and he was Peter's law school roommate. We accepted their invitation and got in their car. [00:59:00] Dick was driving, and Ann sat next to him, and I sat next to Peter, in the back.

I was so naïve at that point about the world and about Europe—and I wanted to make conversation, so I said, "Where are you from?" "Romania." I was thinking, [speaking as though dazzled] "Romania?!" [laughs] I was such an unworldly person. Anyway, we had lunch together, and then they asked us if we would like to go out [01:00:00] that evening to hear another concert, or just go out. And so we said, "Fine." We told them we were staying at a little boarding house, and so they took us home. Then, we decided we really didn't like them, and we didn't want to go out with them. They were going to pick us up at 9:00. So, at 8:30 we pulled all the shades down in our room, we turned the lights off, and we got into bed. We wanted the housekeeper, the one who was running the boarding house, to think we were asleep. So we got in bed, and she knocked on the door when they came. And we pretended to be asleep [laughs] and they went away. We just decided we didn't really like them. [01:01:00]

We stayed quite a few days to hear a lot of concerts. And the next day, or maybe the day after that, we ran into them. At some point, Ann decided she didn't really like Dick Uviller, but I was sort of interested in Peter Stern, because he wasn't like anyone I'd met before. That's how we met. And then at some point,

there was a concert, and I bumped into the two of them, and I had lunch or supper or something with them. Anyway, that's how it all started. And then, the two boys were going to [01:02:00] another place in Austria. Was it Vienna? Probably. Peter asked me if I'd like to come with them (Ann had gone home by them), and I said yes. So that's how I got to know Peter. And we continued to see each other after we got back to the United States. At that point he was going to law school, but he hated it. And really, his parents never should've pushed him, because he was completely into the arts and history. And so he spent one semester, I forget whether it was at NYU or Columbia, studying not law, but history. [01:03:00]

Dziedzic: Well, I'm wondering if you can talk about how it came to be after you were married that Peter was working with your father?

Stern: Well—

Dziedzic: Big question, I know. [laughs]

Stern: Oh, but no, I can tell you. It's not too complicated. I am four years older than Peter. And at that time, he was in his early twenties, [01:04:00] in his last year at law school. And at some point we broke up. It would probably have been better for him if we'd stayed broken up, because he was really very young, and he didn't know what he wanted to do. But after a while, [01:05:00] we got back together again and got married. He graduated from law school, and got a job with a law firm. They sent him to their Washington, DC office. So we moved to Washington, DC (by that time we had Lisa). And we lived in Bethesda, a suburb of Washington. [01:06:00]

In the meantime, my father was thinking of retiring, but had no one to take over the family business. And [01:07:00] So I guess we'd been in Washington about a month, when my father called, and said he would very much like Peter to go into the business with him. Well, I didn't want it. I didn't think it was right at all. But I thought, you know, Peter's father was killed in a plane crash. My father's son was killed in an automobile crash. And my father wanted a son, and my husband wanted a father. Which is really what it was all about. And I think Peter was so nervous and upset that he didn't have a job he [01:08:00] liked, and he was unhappy, and he was still very young. And here he was with a wife and a child. And he liked my father. So he said to me, "I won't do it if you don't want me to." I knew that he really wanted to do it, and my father really wanted him. So I said, "Okay." And that's how it happened. They became very fond of each other. But as I said before, I don't think running a business was Peter's real talent. I think it was in artistic fields.

Dziedzic: Did he know that there was these inklings of starting an Art Center in your father's mind at that time? Maybe they weren't there yet, though.

Stern: I don't think they were there yet. What I think [01:09:00] is that my father didn't want a housing development so nearby. When Monty Hatch died and his widow put the house on the market, I think, knowing my father, that he was afraid that some developer would buy the place, and there'd be a whole bunch of not very nice houses very close to us. Because he liked to buy land. And I don't think an Art Center was in anybody's mind until they were wondering, "What will we do with it?" It's a beautiful house. "First, I think, they thought, "We'll have a little museum." And they were going to use the building, to show artists from the area.

Dziedzic: Hudson River School painters, right?

Stern: Yes, that's it. And my stepmother had gotten very interested in art, by that time. She had bought some things, she went around to galleries in New York, and she kind of got me interested. So then (I think this is relevant) my father's niece, who lived in Australia [01:11:00], when she was 11 years old, said that, she was coming to the U.S. "because I want to go to Harvard."

Dziedzic: Radcliffe?

Stern: Radcliffe. Right. So, he thought that was very amusing, coming from an 11 year old. But sure enough, she grew up, and came over, and she did go to Radcliffe. And she met Lewis Cabot, one of the Cabot family, the Boston family. They fell in love, and got married. The marriage didn't last. But Lewis Cabot [01:12:00] had gotten very interested in art, and had started a collection, and had met all kinds of people in the art world. They were married in a church. A little white church near Mountainville. Lisa and Bea were the flower girls. The reception was in the Art Center. That's how Cabot came into our lives.

I'm quite sure that he was instrumental in pushing the idea of an Art Center. Because first, as I said, it was going to be the Hudson River School, and it was going to be in the house. How they got [01:14:00] from that to the outdoors, I'm not sure. But I think this whole big thing that's always told over and over about going to David Smith['s Bolton Landing], to see his sculpture, I think it could have been Lewis Cabot who suggested that. Because he knew quite a few people. And he was a collector of art. I don't know about sculpture. But I think he was influential. And then once the David Smiths got there, I don't know the exact next step, but I think maybe Lewis Cabot may have introduced my father and Peter to some sculptors. There's some tie-in there. [01:15:00] I don't think he ever got credit for it. He and my cousin divorced, and I haven't seen him in years.

My father had never shown any interest that I knew of in art, of any kind. But I think what fascinated him about the sculpture, and what sculptors were doing, was tied in with the things that his company made—

these fasteners, wall fasteners. And he was kind of interested [01:16:00] in putting things together. How things, you know, worked together. I think that was one of the things that he got more and more interested in, as it was being created, to the point where he just loved it, and loved to see these things being done. There was one incident that I've always remembered. It was during the period—I don't know which war it was—but it was a period of lots and lots of protests. Political protests. Vietnam, I don't know. But one of the sculptors—and I don't know if he's still living, and I don't remember his name—came up from Washington to see the Art Center, or [01:17:00] he was going to make something for the Art Center. And he came from where he had been in a demonstration. My father told me this—he came to talk to my father, and when he got up from his chair, my father noticed that he had blood on his head.

Have you heard this before?

Dziedzic: I think maybe it might be Mark di Suvero, coming from Chicago.

Stern: Oh, that's who it was!

Dziedzic: After the Democratic Convention in Chicago.

Stern: Yes.

Dziedzic: But we asked Mark di Suvero about this, and he didn't really tell this story. So the story that you're telling, that your father told you, is helpful.

Stern: I thought it was Washington. And I guess he'd been protesting. But my father was brought up a Republican, and sort of conservative. And he just thought it was fascinating, that this guy hadn't even taken the time to wash the blood off his head before coming up. [laughs] You're right, it was [01:18:00] Mark di Suvero, yes.

Dziedzic: Yes, there's such a—like you said about your father's interest in putting things together. And I assume you mean that that's kind of, you know, metaphorically putting sculpture together with nature.

Stern: Yes.

Dziedzic: But I see that, too, in a sense, of your father in terms of his background, like you're pointing out, putting him together with someone like Mark di Suvero. [laughs] An unlikely pair.

Stern: Yes, a very unlikely pair. But my father did love—as I said, he made wooden carvings, with curves, [01:19:00] Austrian things. So he was very creative in that sense. And I think that the fact that—what his company made, all these bolts and things, that it has some distant relationship to sculpture. I mean, certainly the ways sculpture was being done then. And now.

Dziedzic: Yes, absolutely. Just seeing the David Smiths getting deinstalled from the grounds, there's a lot of engineering aspects.

Stern: That's it. It's the engineering, yes.

Dziedzic: And the concrete, and the bolts, and the weathering of the steel. Making art out of industrial materials—you need to have those industrial materials.

Stern: Yes. Exactly. [01:20:00]

Dziedzic: Yes. Did you travel up to Bolton Landing, with your father?

Stern: I did. [laughs] Oh, I've been asked that so many times. I did, and I was not at all aware of who David Smith was. And it was a cold, cold, cold ride, and cold, cold when we got there, and snow all over the place. In retrospect it was a very exciting thing. I love those original dark sculptures that portray [01:21:00] tools, and equipment, and that's what we saw, when we went. But I was, kind of, not really into it. I had other things going on in my life, and my children were very important to me, and I thought, "Oh, that's nice." And when they had the house, and then the northern part that whole area almost like a garden, I loved that. I still do love that. But I never quite got used to the southern part, which is so vast. Lots of things I love are there. But I always kind of loved the more intimate side of it. [01:22:00] And the things that are in the woods.

Dziedzic: Well, maybe we can talk about your gift of the Josef Pillhofer sculpture [*Reclining Man* (*Liegender Mann*), 1964].

Stern: Oh, yes. Yes, I think that was always on the wall outside my father and stepmother's house, their new house. And then, when he died, I don't know how that came to me, really. I don't think it was a specific gift. But I loved that, and [01:23:00] I thought it would be great at the Art Center.

Dziedzic: Well, I brought it up because it seems like it kind of encapsulates the kind of art that you're describing that you like. The more intimate, and—

Stern: Yes, that's true. It does.

Dziedzic: Yes, and I guess also, it is also smaller, and there are so many works there that are really kind of monumental.

Stern: Is it still on the wall up there? Yes. I always loved it. And I think my father loved it. It's sort of the guy, the creator, is having a rest. [laughs]

Dziedzic: Yes, I just saw it yesterday. [laughs] It was nice, because the other sculptures that are usually out there were brought in, the David Smiths, and so it was the only thing that was [01:24:00] left in that little space outdoors. It was very nice to see.

Stern: I like it very much.

Dziedzic: It is kind of a calming breath. Well, I have some other questions about some things that you may not have been involved with. So let me just ask you, and you can—

Stern: All right.

Dziedzic: So, I know that there were, especially in the early days of the Art Center, there was a lot of—maybe even before the David Smiths—there were chamber music performances, there were art classes, things that kind of would fall into the Art Center category. And I'm just wondering if you were aware of any of those things that were happening in the early days?

Stern: You mean, the early days of the Art Center? There were chamber music concerts. I think [01:25:00] I only went to one or two. And also, Peter had a little group that he played the violin with. And it was nice, but it wasn't very professional.

Dziedzic: And did you know Bill and Joyce Rutherford?

Stern: Yes, I did. I didn't know them well at all. She designed what my parents had as their guest house, where Bea lives now. And I do think that's just incredible. Wonderful. I liked them. But I didn't know them well. I was sort of uninvolved. She designed [01:26:00] a sort of pool house for Peter and me, our family, in back of our house in Mountainville. We had a pool, it kind of went out, like this [indicating a long, sloping roof]. And there weren't guest rooms. You could change into your bathing suit, there were bathrooms, and there was a place where you could have your lunch.

[Side conversation]

I think the Rutherfords were very, very good at what they did, and that the guest house that Bea lives in now is just, I think, fabulous. Wonderful.

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: [01:28:00] Well, speaking of houses, you mentioned this a little bit, but Lisa brought up your father and Peggy's house. That was kind of very modern in a lot of ways.

Stern: Yes, in those days it would be considered very modern. I can't remember who designed that house. I don't think Joyce Rutherford did.

Dziedzic: No, because I think it was built—

Stern: Before. Early, when the Thruway came in. I wish I had a picture of it. It was a lovely house. I liked it very much. It was full of light. You never found any pictures of it?

Dziedzic: I didn't.

Stern: [01:29:00] No? It burned down, as you know. And I don't know whether I have any pictures of it. But it was up on a hill. And it wouldn't be considered modern now, I don't think. But it was full of light. And spread out: kitchen, dining room, living room. And there was an upstairs for guests, although I don't remember that too well. And my stepmother put a lot of paintings around.

Dziedzic: Lisa had said that your father was very interested in the future. Open to new things.

Stern: Oh! Yes, that's what we all laugh about, now. He was so open to new things. He [01:30:00] died before he was 80, so he wasn't really an old man. So many people, as they get older, get more and more negative about new things. He was just the opposite. I guess Lisa probably told you—he thought everything was great. He thought McDonald's was great. "Oh, it's the greatest thing! You walk in there, and"—my stepmother and he would go and buy hamburgers, and then they'd drive up to the Art Center, and they'd sit and look south, and eat their hamburgers. [laughs]

Dziedzic: [01:31:00] The other things she told me about were the electric typewriters.

Stern: Yes. To two little girls! And I don't think they ever even used them. Did she tell you about motels?

Dziedzic: I think she did mention motels.

Stern: Because he was [laughs] so funny. He just thought they were the greatest thing, because they were so practical. You don't have to give your car to somebody you have to pay, you just drive up to the door, get your key, wonderful. [laughs]

Dziedzic: I guess I wanted to ask you—[01:32:00] in that transition between your father and Peter, with [heading] the Art Center but also the Ralph E. Ogden Foundation, what sort of differences you saw in terms of priorities, or the interests there?

Stern: The difference between Peter and my father?

Dziedzic: In terms of their focus on philanthropy, or their interest in art, or artists. Or running the Art Center.

Stern: In the Foundation, you're talking about?

Dziedzic: Well, both. But why don't you start with the Foundation? Both the Foundation and the Art Center.

Stern: The difference between my father's view of it and Peter's?

Dziedzic: Yes. Their view of it, or their leadership, [01:33:00] or their priorities.

Stern: Well, that's really quite hard to answer. Because my father was very private. I mean, he started a Foundation, but there was no special building, there was no—it was just him. He had money, he wanted to save [laughs] on taxes, which most people do. And so he thought it would be nice to have a Foundation. He gave to the Storm King School, and he gave to local things. And Peter—you want to know the difference between him and Peter? Well, I think the difference was that Peter, having been brought up in Romania, was very Europe-oriented, and had, I think, a much wider [01:34:00] view. I think my father was very loyal to the local hospital, and local institutions. And I think Peter was coming from a totally different point of view. He was very, very interested in the International Rescue Committee. A well-known charity that helps people, but more abroad, saving lives. And the World Monuments Fund, saving buildings. Peter was very interested in preserving not just artifacts, but the old world, and saving, let's say, Venice. But my father, [01:35:00] because he went to Europe a few times in his life, but then the

war—two wars, really. He was probably a child in World War I. But I think my father's financial situation during the Depression, plus the wars that we had, made him a less worldly, less international-oriented person, than Peter. Peter came from a whole different place.

Dziedzic: So you think that your father was more—"nationalistic" sounds bad to use in 2017. But that your father was more kind of home-focused?

Stern: In general, yes. I remember him [01:36:00] going to Europe a couple of times in the summer. He and my mother went to Scotland to play golf. And he loved Switzerland. He went to Switzerland quite often in his later years, which reflects his love of nature. But he was basically a home, nationalist kind of guy.

Dziedzic: In reading about your father, he really sounded like there was a similarity with what he did in terms of slowly growing his property and working the land, to the kind of pioneer stories out West, a century earlier, in a sense.

Stern: I never thought about that. That's interesting. Yes. There is a similarity.

Dziedzic: And then in [01:37:00] terms of Peter, just having an appreciation for—I don't know what to call them—sculptures as cultural objects.

Stern: Cultural—yes. Well, he also loved music. And actually, I learned a lot, when I was married to Peter. I loved music, but he knew a lot more about it than I did. He loved Mozart, and I did too. I think being married to him brought me into a kind of other world because I was just this local. I mean, when he said Romania, I thought, "Romania!" [laughs] He might as well have [01:38:00] said, "I grew up on Mars." Because even the history that I learned in school—not at college, but in school was, "Read from here to here. And then tell about it." But I wasn't really there.

Dziedzic: Were you ever involved with any of the—it sounded like some of the sculptures that Peter brought to the Art Center were the result of a kind of courtship with the artist. Relationship building, in a sense, of meeting the artist for the first time, introducing them to the Art Center, working with them, and being in dialogue as they decided which work they might build for the Art Center.

Stern: I was not part of that, no. [01:39:00] Frankly, I like sculpture, and some of the things at the Art Center, I really love. But I'm much more interested in painting. And I was, at that time, sort of collecting as much as I could. And I think I liked the intimacy of the way the Art Center was at first. And it's sort of grown, and grown and grown. It's amazing. I just—I wouldn't want it to get too [01:40:00]—I guess the

bikes are fine. And I know a lot of people love to walk, which I think is great. I have some different views, but I think everybody's doing a great job, and it's wonderful that people can come up from the city. Also, I think it's wonderful that Lisa worked so hard on getting programs for schoolchildren. But I guess I wasn't—I was sort of a little bit out of it. And partly, [01:41:00] I don't know whether it was at the time of Peter's and my divorce, or I was just sort of involved with other things, and my children, and everything. But I think it's amazing, what it's become.

Dziedzic: Well, you mentioned Lisa's working with bringing children, developing those programs.

Stern: I think that was so good. And she had to push for that. Because I guess, there were so many other things that were going on.

Dziedzic: Well, I did want to ask about the kind of changes that you've seen, now that, John is the President of the Art Center, and that Bea and Lisa are on the board, contributing that way. [01:42:00] And you've kind of touched on some of the changes.

Stern: Yes. I was on the board, originally. Way back. But then, the divorce, then his remarriage, and living right up there, and I just sort of wanted to get away. So that's I guess at the root of it.

Dziedzic: Are there any other changes that you've seen? Maybe within the last 10 years or so?

Stern: There are certain things that I think are great. And one of them is the food. Because it used to be that there was no food there, and no place anybody could go to eat. And I think that [01:43:00] whole place there—it's good food, and it's a pleasant place. It's a very nice addition. And I'm sure there are a lot of other things. I love the sculpture in the woods, and all of that. And the [Andy] Goldsworthy wall [*Storm King Wall*, 1997–98], which is my favorite thing. And, I don't know. What worries me is that it seems like a horse that is running away. [laughs] Got the bit in its mouth, and it's running away.

Dziedzic: Yes. Are there any changes to the region—I guess, Mountainville—that you can comment on? [01:44:00] The other question, too, is, how Storm King works within that context. It seems like for a time it was a destination place people would travel to. But especially with working with the school groups and some of the other programs, there's efforts to make it be actually part of a community. So I'm just wondering demographically—

Stern: So that's what I'm not sure about. Lisa sent me the Cornwall local paper, and it sounded as though there were a lot of problems with the traffic. I just had this feeling [01:45:00] that it was going to get bigger and bigger and bigger. And that sort of worries me because it's a very small community. But Lisa says

they're working on that, and having a big plan for the parking, and all of that. I guess that's the thing with me anyway. I love things that are small, and you sort of come upon them. I certainly don't think that the Art Center should be much larger than it is now.

[Side conversation]

Stern: Of course, the biggest change that happened in Mountainville, many, many, many years ago, was the Thruway. It was a different place before the Thruway came, but the Thruway was essential I guess, though we all resented it at the time. It's nice that the area has retained so much of its country feeling. But, I don't think I have the right to say what the Art Center should be, since I really wasn't involved. And I think it's made a huge difference in the art world. I think it's wonderful that kids can come, and that people from the city [01:47:00] are able to see sculpture in an outdoor setting.

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: It sounds like you're saying that it has some growing pains.

Stern: Yes, and I guess every institution does. I talked with somebody recently who was complaining about one of the museums in New York. She said that people in the neighborhood are starting to feel pushed out, because this museum was adding more and more structures. [01:48:00] But I don't think you could say that of the Art Center, because it's not taking up the space of any structures already there. It's moved fast, though, since John took over.

Dziedzic: Yes. I think even from my perspective, that's when everybody that I knew, living in New York City, became aware of it as a place to go for a day.

Stern: Oh, really?

Dziedzic: Yes, it's—like all of a sudden, [laughs] the day John became President!

Stern: All of a—yes! [laughter] Boom! I know!

Dziedzic: But it is true that it has more name recognition from certain groups now. Like you said, not just for art, but also as an open space to walk around.

Stern: Yes. [01:49:00] But there has to be—all I know is that I would hate to see this beautiful place spoil any of the surrounding area that's there. Although, we used to complain and complain about the Thruway, because it was so quiet and so rural before. But, I mean, that had to happen.

Dziedzic: Well, there are I think two things that I wanted to ask you. One is if there are any other artworks there that you really like that you want to talk about. And the other is if there's anything else on your notes that you wanted to bring up. Is there anything else that you want to bring up? [01:50:00]

[Side conversation]

Stern: Well, one thing I love [01:51:00] is in the woods, when you go a little bit away from the building into the woods. It's silvery, that goes like this [indicating movement of George Cutts, *Sea Change*, 1996]. The two, sort of arched pieces and they go like that. I love that. Because even though it's got electricity in it or something, I just find it very soothing, and delicate.

And I love the wall, *Storm King Wall*.

[Side conversation]

And I love the idea of its going under the stream, and then coming out on the other side. But there are some things that I don't like at all. And that's just me. I can't help it. But I love the—my children would always mention it—it comes from under the hill, and—

Dziedzic: Oh, the Richard Serra [*Schunnemonk Fork*, 1990–91]?

Stern: Is it? It's as if it's buried, and then it comes out here?

Dziedzic: Yes.

Stern: Yes, I love that. And [01:53:00] I love the David Smiths. And I love just about everything that's on the northern end of the building—it's kind of built into the hill, it's sort of white, and it's like a shell with a curved cup, stone. And I can't remember his name.

Dziedzic: Oh, the [Isamu] Noguchi. *Momo Taro* (1977–78)?

Stern: Yes. Love that. In fact, I think I really love just about everything that's at that end.

[Side conversation]

I love the mirrored fence [Alyson Shotz, *Mirror Fence*, 2003 (refabricated 2014)] I think that's a lot of fun. And then there's, not the new thing that looks like a house, but the other one—you just see the roof—I think that's great.

Dziedzic: That is Alice Aycock [*Low Building with Dirt Roof (For Mary)*, 1973/2010].

Stern: That's it, yes. I like that a lot.

Dziedzic: Yes, I do too.

Stern: And there are probably others.

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: All right. Well, I guess I'll just ask if there's anything else just about Storm King that you want to add, or any other reflections?

Stern: Well, I think I've often wondered to myself whether my father would like what it's become. The magnitude of it. Or not. And I think it's great that people can have bicycles. I don't know if they still have the buses, but I didn't like that at all. And actually, to be honest, there's an elevator there. Which I guess has to be there. Because you want people who can't walk to see it, so—

And then, one other thing that I just love. It's inside the building, and it's by a woman artist, white stones that go like this [indicating a slanted top], and they're sort of cut.

Dziedzic: I think that's Louise Bourgeois [*Number Seventy-two (The No March)*, 1972].

Stern: It must be.

Dziedzic: Little marble blocks on the floor. Right?

Stern: Yes, they're white, [01:57:00] and they overlap each other. I don't know why I love that so much. Actually, I loved it when it was outdoors. They had to move it in, I guess because of the weather. But it was at one point outdoors, and it looked even better. But I think I've probably forgotten some things that I like.

Dziedzic: I'll have to see if I can find pictures of that work outdoors. I would love to see that.

Stern: Oh, yes. If you're facing south, it was somewhere over near where the pool is, and the tall statue of the nude [Emilio Greco, *Tall Bather No. 1*, 1956]. It was somewhere around there, and had to be moved. But I love it.

Dziedzic: Well, Joan, I think that's it. [laughter]

Stern: Okay. Well, I don't know if—

Dziedzic: You shared so much, and I'm so grateful.

[End of interview]