

STORM KING ART CENTER

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

LISA STERN

November 21, 2017

Interviewed by Sarah Dziezic
Storm King Oral History 003
© 2017 Storm King Art Center

Use of Oral Histories in the Storm King Art Center Archives

The Storm King Art Center Archives welcomes non-commercial use of the Oral History Program Special Collection in accordance with the Storm King Archives Use and Reproduction Policy [provide link.]

The following transcript is the result of a recorded oral history interview. The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the person interviewed and the interviewer. The reader is asked to bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

The Archives requires that researchers give proper credit when citing oral histories, including Oral history interview with _____ (date of interview), pages _____, Oral History Program, Storm King Art Center Archives. Only the transcript may be used for citations. The recordings associated with this interview may be made available upon request. Timestamps corresponding with original audio files are included in the transcript at one-minute intervals.

For commercial use of any sort, including reproduction, quotation, publication, and broadcast in any medium, distribution, derivative works, public performance, and public display, prior written permission must be obtained from the Storm King Art Center Archives. Permission will comply with any agreements made with the person interviewed and the interviewer and may be withheld in Storm King's sole determination.

Please contact the Storm King Art Center Archives with any questions or requests at archives@stormkingartcenter.org

Thank you!

Support for Storm King Art Center's Oral History Program and Archival Program is made possible by generous lead support from the Henry Luce Foundation. Support is also provided by the Pine Tree Foundation.

Interview with Lisa Stern
Conducted by Sarah Dziezic
November 21, 2017

Lisa Stern's home
2 audio files
Open for research use

Audio File 1

Dziezic: Today is November 21, 2017, and this is Sarah Dziezic interviewing Lisa Stern at her house. So I want to start, going way back, to talk to you a little bit about your grandparents, Ted and Peggy Ogden. Could start by talking about what their house was like, what visits to their house were like?

Stern: Their house, which has since burned down, was in Mountainville, and it was very modern for its time. There was one bedroom that was on a second level, but basically the house was on one level, with sliding glass doors and terraces letting in a lot of light, wonderful views. It was set on a hill and had views of a couple of ponds [00:01:00] and out to Schunnemunk Mountain, and was very contemporary for its time. It must have been built in the '40s, '50s? My grandfather built it with his second wife. I just remember a lot of light, a lot of space, a sort of midcentury simplicity, and these wonderful views. And lawns. They had a swimming pool. There was a lot of space outside.

[Interruption]

Dziezic: Did they ever talk to you about the design of the house? Was the purpose to be to facilitate those views?

Stern: They didn't, but then, my grandfather, he died when—in my twenties. So, they didn't, and I don't know how much of her influence—Peggy, his second wife—the house was. I always took it for granted, because I was young, that it was there. It was their house, so I didn't even think to ask. It was just embedded in my earliest memories. I don't know much about the design. I just know my grandfather loved the outdoors and I think he wanted to bring as much of it in as possible. I guess I was also struck by the fact that they had separate bedrooms, which I wasn't used to because my parents had one bedroom. So I always thought that was a little odd. Each bedroom was very distinctive of their personalities. [00:03:00] Big separate dressing rooms and bathrooms. And then they had one guest room that was upstairs. Occasionally we slept over and it was very exciting, because it was the only room upstairs and it was like a clubhouse. And then this very expansive living room. It was all just done very tastefully. The dining room and kitchen were on the opposite side from the bedrooms. And you walked to the front door past a little fish pond—not really a koi pond, but a fish pond, with a little statute. So that was always intriguing as children. And you could go in—the house was in an L—it was kind of curved, so you could go through the main door. You could go to the left and go in through the kitchen door or, I guess, to the

right through sliding doors. It was all just very open and accessible. That's how I remember it. And just kind of a fun house for kids.

Dziedzic: You've talked a little bit about [00:04:00] how your grandfather loved landscape and the land, and were there things that you did with him outside that communicated that?

Stern: Oh, yes. Well, when we knew him, I guess he was in his seventies, and we would ride around in his Mercedes convertible. He would pick us up, and we would ride around Mountainville. We'd go down to Ketchum's General Store usually several times a day. We'd buy some ice cream. We'd sit on the lawn—his lawn—and eat it. Sometimes we'd sit in his lap and actually steer the car, drive the car. He would be supervising. He'd be checking up on projects that he was doing. We'd go past the dairy farm. We'd go past the cow barns, see what was going on there. He was usually building things. He had different projects going on.

At Storm King [00:05:00] he was beginning all sorts of sculpture projects and landscaping. And so we'd make many trips a day in his car, driving around, checking on things. He didn't walk. He wasn't much of a walker. He was too heavy for that, but we would drive, and we would drive into fairly inaccessible places. That didn't bother him a bit. And he had a snowmobile. I guess they called them snowmobiles then. I'm not sure I ever saw him on it, but he really wanted these machines that could get him up the mountain and get him to where he needed to go. So that's mainly what we did with him.

Dziedzic: He also rode horses, right?

Stern: Oh, that was my father.

Dziedzic: Oh.

Stern: Yes, that wasn't my grandfather. That was my father. With Dad, we did a whole lot, yes. He was a dressage rider. He also had a jumper. We had about five horses growing up. They were all named after wines because he was a wine collector and a [00:06:00] connoisseur, so all the horses were Medoc and Champagne and Chablis. So we rode horses with him. In fact, he used to trail ride over to Storm King, over to the Art Center. We ice skated with him. We skied with him. We hiked, backpacked. I think our love of the outdoors really came from him, because he was very involved. Every weekend we would go hiking or do something outside. So that was more Dad. But both my father and grandfather loved the outside, just in different ways.

Dziedzic: Yes. I'm curious to hear from you, when you were young, and you were checking up on stuff at Storm King with your grandfather, what the size of the area seemed to be. You know, I know that the [00:07:00] parcels came bit by bit to be part of Storm King, but I'm just curious about, from childhood, being young, what the scope of it seemed like to you?

Stern: Yes. It was definitely smaller. It was really the building. It was really the top of the hill and the driveway. I remember beds of pachysandra in the driveway which we weeded when we were older. I remember the house. There was a caretaker named Bernard who built little ships. He was a model shipbuilder. So we were kind of fascinated by him. And he lived in the garage portion, which is now offices. But it was very small. I don't remember the South Fields at all. I don't even remember what they looked like wooded. I don't have a memory of that. It's more just the massive building, and coming up the driveway, and I guess, looking south, the garden. It was much more manicured [00:08:00] and had flowerbeds. Some of that may have been my grandmother. I don't know how much—how involved she was in that. But there were none of the massive sculptures, nothing like that. I think my main memory is not even of sculptures; it was of the house itself, the building.

Dziedzic: What was in it at the time? Were there some offices in it?

Stern: Well, what was in it? All I remember is my cousin Judy Cabot got married there. So I remember what's now Gallery 1 was really empty. I think the rooms were empty. I don't remember them furnished. But I also don't remember—there was no art or sculpture in them. I just remember the wedding. So, of course, it was all fixed up for the wedding, but I don't remember it as a house or a gallery space, but just as this massive, massive building with the stone and the windows, that it was so large. I guess with him we would just drive up the [00:09:00] long driveway—and as a little child that seemed pretty big in itself—and walk or drive around the building. And he was probably pointing out sites. I'm trying to remember what the earliest piece that I even remember seeing there was. I don't have an early memory of sculpture at all, more just the hill. I don't even remember looking out to the south. I guess eventually the allées took shape, and I remember looking out at them. I more remember walking around the Art Center with my father, because with my grandfather we did, but we were much younger.

Dziedzic: And the job that you had weeding—

Stern: That I remember.

Dziedzic: —how exactly did that come about?

Stern: I don't know how that came about, but [laughs] I guess we probably asked our grandfather [00:10:00] for a job. We were twelve, thirteen, maybe a little younger, and we probably just asked him for a job—I don't think he approached us. I think we would have approached him. I don't know. Maybe he thought we should be working and not idling. So that I can't remember. And I don't know how long it lasted. It might only have been a week or two, because we weren't very good at it. Every time he came by we'd be lying down, or I would be lying down, taking a break, lying in the sun, relaxing, and it was always when he would drive up around the driveway. He didn't miss a thing. So I don't think it lasted very long. It might have lasted a few weeks. I think it was just one summer. I don't think we were invited back. [laughs] I doubt that happened.

But with my father, I can remember him riding along Storm King. I don't think we rode with him, but I can remember his riding. It might be that my grandfather—we were with him in the car and my father would [00:11:00] ride up on a horse. I think that's probably what happened. But, you know, we were pretty young.

Dziedzic: You've also talked about your grandfather's love of the future, and it sounds like the house is a little bit of that—in a sense, a new style of living, and a couple other things, too. I'm just wondering if you had a sense of that when you were young.

Stern: Oh, yes. He was forward-thinking and he liked to get things done immediately. If he had an idea, he wanted to get it done—a project—it would be done the next day. And I think of that a lot because I've inherited it from him. When I have a project, it has to get done right away. So yes, he was forward-thinking in that he gave us electric typewriters for Christmas when they first came out. Huge. We were about six years old, and he gave us these huge electric typewriters. I do remember his talking about McDonalds [00:12:00] when the McDonalds first opened nearby in this area. He would go with his wife. They would get hamburgers. He thought it was the greatest thing in the world to have fast food, bring it to the Art Center, and sit on the hill above the pond on Bunny Road, eating their fast food and watching the sunset. So I do remember that. I must have been with them. I either was with them or I just heard stories about it a lot. And Xerox—when Xerox came along, and printers, he just loved it. He was an early investor in anything that was new or revolutionary, or that he thought would really take shape quickly. Computers, all of it.

And when he had projects, like at Storm King, once he had a vision, he wanted to move right ahead. He had picked out hills for each of us, and he thought we'd each have a house on certain hills, and I guess when my father built the house—[00:13:00] Cedar House—that he lived in, they discussed putting in a tennis court. And right away my grandfather got on the phone with an architect, or it might even have been a contractor, and said, "How soon can you get over here? Can you come today? I want to lay this

out, get it built in the next week or two.” He didn’t hesitate. And so I loved that about him. His wife, Peggy, had an idea for the gallery building, to have Hudson River School paintings. So she was a voice in all of this, but I don’t know how the sculpture came about. I think they both visited the Kröller-Müller and they’d both been to Bolton Landing, but she was definitely involved in the creation. But he was the mover and shaker. If he wanted something done, he just got it done. [00:14:00]

Dziedzic: I’m just kind of thinking about this now—this fact of getting things done. You have the idea, you want to see it through. That seems like very practical-minded, in a way, but at the same time if you think about what should the Art Center be used for, Hudson River School paintings seems like the first thing that you’d think of, but to think maybe more broadly, or even more abstractly, that it could be a place for sculptures to be seen outdoors? Did your grandfather have an abstract thinking side like that, too?

Stern: I think he was more practical. He was an engineer. He knew how to do everything that he was asking people to do. I wouldn’t say he was a farmer, but he understood farming. He understood engineering. He understood building. [00:15:00] I would say he was more practical than a visionary. He wasn’t an artist—didn’t know that much, even, about art before starting Storm King. But I think when he’d been to the Kröller-Müller—that might have sparked his initial thought, and when he got an idea that, oh, this would work. I think he was also thinking about, originally with the property, using it for the public good. He was very practical. He was trying to keep it public for many reasons, but I’m sure, financially speaking, that was part of it. So I think when he got an idea, he went with it. I’m not sure he was that much of an abstract thinker. I definitely see him as more practical, but if he thought something could work—

And when he went to Bolton Landing and saw the 13 David Smiths, it was like an a-ha moment. This is what we could be. [00:16:00] And then he went ahead and made it happen. But I don’t think he sat at home at night visualizing, thinking abstractly, what could this become? I think my father was more of an abstract, intellectual thinker. My grandfather was not as intellectual as my father. I don’t think he was as broad-based educationally, or had even travelled as widely as my father. But that’s what I liked about my grandfather. He was down-to-earth, practical, got up really early—which I also inherited—he got up at sunrise or before. And he built what we called a view house, which was one of the first prefab structures. When prefab buildings came into existence, he bought one of the first ones. Cleared a hill, had it brought up, because he thought, this is great. Now I can go up. I can watch the sunrise. I can keep an eye on all the other hills, [00:17:00] on the Art Center, and see what’s going on. He was fascinated. He also had an interesting relationship to land. He wanted to conserve it and use it for the public good, and cared about the land, but he didn’t want to build tract homes, but he also cleared hills. He had no problem clearing hills and clearing trees for what he wanted to do. He definitely had a land ethic, but I think, again, it was the practical mixed with the visionary.

Dziedzic: Yes, I think a land ethic of that time was about preservation and use all in one—

Stern: Right.

Dziedzic: —whereas now there's an element, in some cases, of preservation and non-use. [laughs]
Moving away from it, protecting from—

Stern: Right, [00:18:00] and he wasn't of that school at all and that's why I think he would be really interested in some of the sustainable agricultural practices that are going on in small farming, and agricultural easements, and conserving agriculture, because at heart, he wanted to use the land, and the dairy farm was certainly part of that. Again, it was getting an agricultural break on his taxes, but it was then using it in an agricultural sense. So he would have fit right in today. I think he would have fit right in.

Dziedzic: You mentioned before we started that you'd lived away from the area for a while, and I wanted to ask you about college and where you went for that, and what you were interested in studying.

Stern: I went to Prescott College in Prescott, Arizona, because I wanted to get as far away from New York as I could and experience something different. So I lived in [00:19:00] Arizona for about 12 or 14 years, and I loved it. I loved the desert. I really loved the landscape. And actually, my grandfather had a second home in Palm Springs, in the desert, so maybe I got some of that from him. When I was home I visited Storm King Art Center, but it wasn't top of the list in my mind during those years that I was away. And then I moved back to New York in the mid-'80s. And I got a master's degree in social work and did social work out there for several years, and then came back and worked in New York City practicing social work, and then moved back to Mountainville and continued to work in that field.

Dziedzic: What drew you to social work?

Stern: That's a good question. I think [00:20:00] it was just always compassion and being interested in people and in animals. I used to bring in stray dogs growing up in New York City, and trying to figure out if we could keep them. I just always had a certain compassion for—I guess for the world, for people, for animals, so it just seemed like a natural thing. And I think sometimes you just fall into things, as well. [laughs] I think I kind of also just sort of fell into it. I started working with Big Brothers Big Sisters, and it was, to me, such a, again, practical thing: take kids who don't have role models in their lives and put them together with adults that can mentor them. And it seemed like, okay, this isn't complex. This is something that can maybe work. And I worked there for several years, and it just felt right to be affecting at least some kind [00:21:00] of change in people's lives. I stuck with it and did different jobs in the field. But it

became more and more frustrating because I was rarely working on the policy level, so it was just working individually, and it became a little bit of a burnout situation.

Dziedzic: And you said that you worked around in this area too?

Stern: Yes. I worked in the city for several years with the Juvenile Justice Department in the city, and then I came to Mountainville and worked in a community health center in Newburgh, New York, and began to understand Newburgh as a city a little bit, and I was there for several years. I developed the social work program there. They hadn't had one before. Then I worked at a center for kids with disabilities. And then after that [00:22:00] I started working in mental health, doing diagnostic emergency evaluations in two local hospitals in the area. But in between that, I had my son, so I wanted to really work part-time, so I did grant writing for the county and I did some real estate. I got a real estate license to do that, because I really wanted flexibility. And then I went back to social work full-time.

Oh, and then I taught at [laughs] New York Military Academy in Cornwall, New York. I somehow, again, was trying to do part-time work, even as my son was in middle school. So I answered an ad for Director of Admissions at New York Military Academy, thinking, this will be great with my social work background. But I got hired as an English teacher, and mistakenly took the job, and it was really, really hard. I mean, these were really troubled [00:23:00] kids. So I did that for a couple of years and then that's when I thought it was [laughs] better to be doing emergency psych evaluations than working with kids at New York Military Academy, so I moved to a local hospital and started doing emergency room evaluations, because you did them, the person was then transferred to an inpatient unit or released, and your work with them was finished. The school years working with these kids—and some of them were really out of control—was torture. So I was very glad to be doing short-term mental health evaluations.

Dziedzic: Yes. I can imagine that. So what made you decide to come back to the Hudson Valley?

Stern: That's a good question, because all of us did come back, my siblings, from other places. I think it was probably the pull, a little bit, [00:24:00] of the legacy that we had here and my family. I think at the time, I was looking for a job change. I was in a relationship that had ended. It was a transitional time, and I came back for the summer, and then just thought, I'll stay and try to get a job here. My mother and father had divorced. My mother was pretty unhappy. I just felt like I really should be here now. And it was also the pull of Mountainville, and at that time my grandfather was long deceased, but I think it was just roots, family roots pulling me back.

Dziedzic: My understanding of how your father got involved with Storm King was kind of getting roped in and handed the reins. It seemed to have worked out really well, but—

Stern: For him, not so much for my mother. But for him, yes. [laughter] Yes.

Dziedzic: You're kind of describing something a little more [00:25:00]—something slightly similar to that.

Stern: Yes. Oh, in my own coming back?

Dziedzic: Yes.

Stern: Yes. I didn't think I was roped into coming back. I felt like it was the right thing to do. Things were at a definite transition point in Arizona, so it wasn't like I was leaving a lot behind at that point. But yes, it was definitely a difficult choice. It was definitely a turning point.

Dziedzic: And then when you came back—you mentioned you had a number of jobs, and I'm wondering—

Stern: Yes, none of them had—oh, you're probably wondering what all of this has to do Storm King.

Dziedzic: No. I think it has a lot to do with access, in a way.

Stern: It has to do with access. Yes, it definitely has to do with access, and I think with compassion. When I was young, I never thought of it in terms of [00:26:00] access, but I think that unconsciously it was a lot about privilege. And even though now we discuss privilege, and white privilege, and wealth disparities, and at that time we did not. But I went to a progressive school in Manhattan until ninth grade, the New Lincoln School, and my father once said—he eventually got on the board of directors of the school, but I remember him walking out of the school after one board meeting, I guess, just saying, “All they learn about in this school is civil rights and Indians.” [laughs] And it makes you sort of grimace now, but he was right in the sense that it was not a standard education, and it was by no means a white, Western civilization-gearred education. Now, I'm actually sorry I didn't get that. I don't have a good grounding in history, or European history. I don't have a good grounding in literature, philosophy. I did not get a good education there, and I think it was, for me, [00:27:00] far too progressive and too hands-on to the point that we weren't learning a lot, and I had a series of teachers that might have been skilled in their knowledge base, but they were not good teachers. So it did not work out well for me, and it was not structured, and I needed a lot more structure.

But I went to this progressive school, so I think my values were set up to be all about access and opportunity and privilege, and my mother, I think, was uncomfortable with growing up with wealth. I think

she really would have preferred to not inherit the family mantle. She always wanted to move to California, to the West Coast, for my father to get a job being a lawyer, and not get into this family dynastic legacy. She was very uncomfortable with it. So I think all of that filtered down. Even my father—he was a great intellectual. He had gone to Harvard. He wanted to teach. [00:28:00] He was interested in international affairs. He wanted to be a professor. He ended up getting a law degree. He didn't like practicing law. So when his father-in-law asked him to come into the business with him, he accepted, but I think he wasn't at heart a businessperson either. He would have been happier being a professor, or being in the academic world, because he was extremely intellectual. Loved to read, loved classical music. So he went into the business, but he definitely didn't love it.

I think what he loved was—he rose up pretty quickly through the business, and working with his father-in-law, because his own father had died when he was a teenager. So I think he enjoyed being up here; he enjoyed forming this partnership, and he later enjoyed the flexibility that it gave him to run the business. Eventually he ran Storm King, but he was able to pursue his other interests at the same [00:29:00] time. It ended up working for him. But I think you're right. For me, all of these influences led to somehow just feeling that the world was [laughs] unequitable, and there had to be ways of getting it more equitable. But I didn't really know how to do that. Looking back on it, I would have probably gotten a public policy degree, or done something more on a policy level, but that was then.

Dziedzic: It's something we all struggle with I think. [laughs]

Stern: Yes.

Dziedzic: Yes. So when did you start getting involved in one form or another with what was going on at Storm King?

Stern: Well, we were put on the Board, and I honestly [00:30:00] can't remember what year that was, or if we were all put on together. That's a really good question. I cannot remember.

Dziedzic: I think John suggested that it might have been the early '90s.

Stern: It might have been, because I moved back here somewhere between 1984 and '86. So it probably was. I guess we were all put on at the same time. And that was great. It had become a public institution. There was a Board. I remember it back in the days when it was private and it was just family-run. So we were put on the Board, and we were all perfectly delighted about that. I don't think my father expected us to—he did not want us to be great influencers. He wanted us, basically, to back up what he was doing. He discussed things with us, but I think he had pretty clear ideas of where he was taking Storm King, and

[00:31:00] was happy to have us on—we're family—more to learn about what was happening at Storm King. Which was fine with us, with me, anyway. I was working and having my own life, so it didn't bother me too much.

I do remember walking—he really did want to keep us informed about his thinking, so there were a lot of walks at Storm King, a lot of long walks. And I can remember for years he would want to walk and show me new pieces that were going up, or where he was thinking of putting sculptures, or what he was thinking. But I do remember always saying to him, because I was working at that time, and I'd come back, and I always had dogs, and I'd say, "Well, I've got to take the dogs. I can go walking, but I have to take the dogs, because I only have so much time, and they need to get walked." And he would always say no, that dogs are not allowed at Storm King. This was in the winter. There were no people even at Storm King! And I look back on it and think, what [00:32:00] was going on? So oftentimes I would just tell him no. I just didn't have time. I'd get home from work, I had to walk the dogs. And it sounds crazy that the dogs were such an issue, but they were, because I just remember him saying, "No. We can't bring the dogs over." And now I'm just thinking, that's crazy. But we certainly did walk, and he did want to keep us informed, but it was more his telling us what he had in mind. I'm sure at the time I was questioning and trying to contribute to the discussions, but I think he had a pretty clear idea of what he wanted to do.

Dziedzic: Do you remember some of the things that were on the agenda at the time?

Stern: Well, they were clearing the South Fields. They were opening the South Fields up. I think that was one big thing that was going on, although I think that might have been more in the '80s. [00:33:00] I don't remember. He had great relationships with many of the artists. I didn't travel with him to meet them, mainly because I was working and, again, had my own life, so I didn't take a lot of those trips. But he was working on the landscape. He was working on expanding the boundaries. He was working on land gifts. He was working with certain artists, acquiring certain pieces. Some had been acquired, like, of course, [Alexander Calder's] *The Arch* (1975). The [Richard] Serra [*Schunnemunk Fork*, 1990–91]—it's one of my favorite pieces. I can't remember exactly how or when that came in. I think it was before. Oh, it might have been about the same time. I don't remember that piece actually being constructed in the field. I do remember many of the [Mark] di Suveros coming in, and his crews, and setting up and watching some of those go up. And I remember the Kenneth Snelson [*Free Ride Home*, 1974], watching that one be [00:34:00] erected. The Noguchi [*Momo Taro*, 1977–78]—I did meet Isamu Noguchi, but I don't remember that one going in. So I think it was a lot about the landscape, and where trees were being planted, and where things would go, and I think it was more those kinds of discussions.

Dziedzic: And what were the things you would have wanted to bring up, or maybe tried to bring up? Concerns of yours at the time?

Stern: Probably education. Probably public access. Probably hours. Probably food. These became more consequential in later years as visitorship grew. I remember the lawns were sculpted so [00:35:00] beautifully—I think he didn't really want people walking on the lawns. He was creating this vision, but he was not really thinking about public access. So I think our conversations were definitely about—food was a big one because as the crowds really began to grow, people would have to come in, buy their ticket, park, then two hours later they were hungry, or an hour later, if they hadn't brought lunch, or they had kids. They'd have to go back out with their ticket, then get on line to come back in again. And I thought that was crazy. And I do remember advocating quite a bit for a café, or a food truck. We need something. Whether it's just grab and go sandwiches—that was a huge—and I don't remember when that started, but I felt like I was just beating the drum on that one with David Collens and with my father.

Education was more complicated because they did have—and David would have to give you the history—there were educators, and there were a couple of [00:36:00] education directors. I don't think they lasted that long, but there were a few, and there were certainly a few attempts at education, but I just don't remember a concerted, consistent effort to develop a philosophy so that they could be hiring an educator in conjunction with a philosophy. There just wasn't. And if there was one, David kept it quiet, and I don't even think my father knew what they were doing as far as that goes, which is interesting because my father had a very broad interest in education, and he had a very good grasp of what it meant to engage with kids. Because when my son was in second grade, I brought his class, and I said, "Dad, why don't you be the educator?" And Dad was great. He came out. He met the group. I'll never forget it. He said—and they were all, like, seven- or eight-year-olds. He said, "Where are the walls of this museum? What would you call the walls?" And these kids were like, "Oh, I don't know. I don't know. There aren't any walls." [00:37:00] And he said, "The mountains," or some kid might have said the mountains. And then he said, "Where's the roof? Where's the ceiling of this museum?" And the kids had never been asked questions like this before. So then eventually it was, "The sky." And so he really was interacting with them and asking them questions, and relating to them about space and shadow and light and how sculptures change. And what is an abstract piece? What does it look like? What does it remind them of? What could this possibly be? What was the artist thinking? What was in their mind? Who would create something like this? And why this color? I was just watching, astounded, because he was doing just what I thought education should be. He had it down. And it was a great visit.

But then he never carried that vision forward to say this is what education is about here. This is what we need to be doing. I think he was too busy with the art [00:38:00] and the landscape and creating it, and then starting the public tram system, and trying to get it all done in his active lifetime. I think he had a lot of goals that he wanted to do, but for whatever reason—and I'm not sure if I ever asked him or ever got an answer as to why he didn't carry forward that vision. And David—again, I don't know, because he had

hired several directors of education, but I was largely out of the state when they were working—I didn't know them very well. I knew that he had the docent program that went way back, from maybe at the beginning. There were always docents as far back as I can remember. I just wasn't very pleased with it because I didn't think it was a consistent program of training so that all the docents were all acting in unison in terms of a general philosophy. I don't think that was ever there. [00:39:00] I don't know what my father was thinking, but I think education just was not at the top.

I think he also felt that people should—which I respect, also—it was a place of exploration. People should come, not be directed, but just wander. It's 500 acres. You will come upon things. You'll stumble upon things. We don't want to direct too much. This is an unusual place in that it's really up to whatever mindset you bring to it, or to whatever experiences you bring to it. And he loved taking us to museums, from the time we were young. In fact, we went to so many museums that I developed a hatred of museums because they were hot and stuffy and crowded, and I still have it, to an extent, when I go to a museum, because he would drag us there. But he was always saying, like with painting, he wasn't attached to a particular style. He did love Asian art. He loved early Indian art, Mughal art, but as far as painting, [00:40:00] he just said, "What is beautiful? What strikes you?" He loved Impressionist paintings because they were beautiful. He just thought they were absolutely beautiful.

So I think his views were just: let the public come and let them form their own vision. Let's not have an educational philosophy, or let's not have the docents all lined up giving one message, which I understand and I respect, but I think that my view of access was about either people who troop in and who, "I can't go to Storm King Art Center. I don't get what these pieces are. I don't get it." Or people coming in and being too embarrassed to say they don't get it, but not getting anything out of it because they don't know how to respond. So I thought there had to be an intermediate step where they could be guided a little bit as to, how do you interact with a piece, and then sent on their way. That was my ideal way to go about [00:41:00] education, but either I didn't press hard enough, or my father was not at a point to be focusing on that. He might have been now. But right then there was just too much to do.

Dziedzic: And when you say philosophy, you mean a kind of methodology around teaching—

Stern: Yes.

Dziedzic: —as opposed to a set way of interpreting the sculpture or something like that?

Stern: Right. A mission around education, that here's what we're trying to do in education. It can be broad, it can be open-ended, but we want people to walk away with their eyes opened to seeing something new and having an idea of what the artist may have been trying to do, opening their minds to

thinking in different ways. Whatever that mission was [00:42:00] that the docents, everybody could have gotten behind, so that there wouldn't just be lecture. It's complicated. A lot of the docents—and I think still do—lecture. "This artist was born at this time period, died at this time period, worked from here to here. This is what they were trying to do." There's a place for that, but I didn't think Storm King was that place. I thought Storm King was more about experience, and that the docents could somehow contribute to that. So they could give a little information, but not as much. And I saw, oftentimes, people, especially kids, bored to death. And I'm not castigating all the docents, but it was a method that I didn't think was good for Storm King.

So in about—oh gosh, when was it? I can't remember exactly when it was—late '90s? [00:43:00] Early part of 2000? Maybe it was 15 years ago. I did start—I honestly can't remember when it was, but certainly before we got a director of education—I was given some rein to experiment with bringing in different methods of education. We didn't have an education director at that time, but we had Ron Romary, who was the stand-in director of education, and we had Helen Hydos doing the scheduling. But Ron a large role, and he brought in VTS, Visual Thinking Strategies¹. It was an experiential way of looking at art, and it was practiced at the deCordova Sculpture Park and different institutions. But it was a very set way of looking at art, free of interpretation, [00:44:00] letting people come up with their own interpretations. And Ron was familiar with it. And so we did try it for a season, and I also developed a student-led docent program where students were taught to guide their peers. So we were experimenting with different things, which was good. I was pleased that we were doing it, because we didn't have a director of education. So we didn't really have the resources to do it, but we did it, and we hired people, to take on these projects. They weren't full-time staff. They were hired to run the student docent program, and we tried them, and they were all part of a whole. It was nice to try them. But we needed a director of education, and now we have one who can look at what we're doing, and hopefully eventually we will come up with an overarching [00:45:00] educational mission statement.

Dziedzic: What were the age of the students that were—

Stern: Oh, they were high schoolers. I had seen this done at the Aldrich Museum, and David, interestingly enough, had also been to the Aldrich Museum. He was familiar with what they did there, and he knew the former director, and he was very much behind it. But in his own quiet way, he hadn't really pushed it. I guess that program still runs—where they had actually fifth graders, and they would be taught to guide other fifth grade classes. Maybe it was fourth and fifth. And they got grant money, and they were reaching many school districts. They'd come from a 100-mile radius, and this was a full-time program and buses would be coming in all day long, and these fifth—I think they were fifth-graders—would be taking

¹ The proper term for this approach was recalled in Audio File 2, and has been inserted here and elsewhere in the transcript of Audio File 1, where appropriate

their peer groups on tours through the collection. And I was blown away when I went. [00:46:00] These fifth graders, they had the information down, they were engaging with their peers, everybody was engaged. Everyone was being taught the same language to use, the same engagement methods, and it worked. It just—they had a complete model that worked beautifully.

We learned from them in developing our own program, but we just didn't have the resources, and we learned that the Aldrich had a full-time education director. They had the resources to pull this off, and they had grant money. We were just experimenting. Not that it was a bad thing, but we needed a director of education to do this right. But what they were doing was unbelievable. I still look back and just think they really had it right. So we did it, and it worked and it didn't work. It needed more full-time direction. It was a hard program to pull off, but I think the kids that we worked with over two or three seasons, [00:47:00] got a lot out of it. There were kids that had never been to a museum or an art institution. There were kids who grew up in Cornwall that had never been to Storm King. And for a few of them, it changed their lives. They applied to art school for college. They became interested in art. And so I think we succeeded on that level.

Dziedzic: And the students were local? You said it was over a few seasons?

Stern: Yes, but we worked only with Cornwall High School, because we didn't want people to come far. We didn't have funds for transportation. They had to come in their own cars. We didn't want them to come a great distance because they were coming after school. It would get dark. I don't know if we ran anything in the summer. It was more in the fall and spring, during the school year. So we worked, and we wanted to pilot it with Cornwall High School, so we did that, and we had an art teacher in the school at the time who really wanted to partner. [00:48:00] She had the right experiential attitude, thinking outside the box, trying things. So we had a good partner in her. So we were able to work with Cornwall High School, and we had a couple of different people who led the program. She was the school partner, but then we contracted with people to run it from Storm King. So it did work, but it took more time and resources than it should have, because we didn't really have anyone at Storm King full-time who could oversee it and do the training. So how we pulled it off, I have no idea. And we had Ron Romary, which was good.

Dziedzic: And how hands-on were you in that?

Stern: I was hands-on in terms of overseeing it. I wasn't doing the training or the teaching. People later on said, "Why didn't you just do it, do the teaching?" Partly I didn't have time; partly I wasn't trained. I'm not a teacher. I've taught, but I'm not a trained teacher. I didn't think I [00:49:00] should. So I was evaluating it. I was often at the sessions. I was working with Pam Hudson from Cornwall High School. I talked to the administrators to get the okay. So I was definitely there, but I couldn't be there at every

session. I think it would have helped if I could have been. But eventually we went through at least two people. I think one—it wasn't that they disliked doing it; they just were moving on to other things in their lives, because it wasn't a full-time job for them. So I was involved in the administrative part and the evaluation part of it. Yes, and then after that ended, that's when we started Visual Thinking Strategies—that Ron started.

We then started other experiential ways of looking at art, for adults, as well. [00:50:00] But at Storm King, everything that we do, we want to do it well. And so I think that I was very glad to have the latitude to experiment with this, but I think now, the research, and having someone not doing anything that we're not ready to do makes a lot of sense. Because I think some people got a lot out of these ways of looking at art, and a lot of people just weren't. Anyway, they led to where we are now, which is good.

Dziedzic: As far as the experiential learning goes, I was struck when reading about Mark di Suvero's work, and how he describes his work, and especially earlier on—the late '60s and '70s—his work was really kind of designed for people to be on it—swinging on it, moving it, climbing on it, and all these images of, you know, adults and children just scrambling all over his work. [00:51:00] And the way that he spoke about that work was that it was supposed to be something that you feel the movement of it, you know, very physically experience it. You touch it. And so that just made me wonder if that was a coincidence, or just sort of proof that Mark di Suvero is a great artist to have at Storm King, or if that did inform some of the kinds of [experiential] education philosophies in play at Storm King. Or even your ideas of access?

Stern: Well, I knew that Mark felt that way, and a lot of even his pieces, even the early ones, had a swing, but it ran into, of course, insurance and liability, and I was very upset about that. I thought his pieces were meant to be experienced, and they should be. And I still understand the balance, and I understand the liability concerns, but I never—I don't know how much I discussed it with Mark. But he was [00:52:00] working within the confines of Storm King, and so he accepted it. I think he would have had kids climbing all over his pieces. There was a lot more of roping sculptures off prior to the last eight or ten years. The Alexander Liberman was roped off, *Adonai* (1970–71, refabricated 2000). Andy Goldsworthy's *Storm King Wall* (1997–98) was roped off; there was rope on either side. I was mortified. I really thought of coming in the night and just jerking those ropes away. I was so upset. It was one of the things I was most upset about. I understood why: they didn't have enough security. They had to protect the work. They didn't want people climbing on the pieces. But I just thought this [00:53:00] is not—visually, it was awful to have a rope around it. The message it sent, sent a terrible message. Having Andy Goldsworthy's *Wall* have ropes, when his whole way of working was—and as I understand it, the reason he moved from England to Scotland was because in Scotland there was not private land. You could walk across each other's land.

The whole idea of that wall was farmers shaking hands across a wall. It wasn't about roping it off. I don't know how he felt about that.

But finally, anyway, the ropes came down and I was overjoyed. It also goes into touching pieces, and I understand why—handmarks—you can't touch pieces, but I think, again, that has to be part of the education with kids, with adults. "This is why. This is what touching does to pieces, and why there are certain pieces that you can touch, and you can interact with." That needs to be part of education, [00:54:00] but I think that there are many sculpture parks where there is no prohibition on interacting. You can touch them. You can be on them. And I have mixed feelings. I think that artwork—you need to learn respect for—it's not a park. It's a curated landscape, and a curated museum outdoors, and you need to learn there's a respect for pieces. And I don't enjoy seeing people using the [Robert] Grosvenor [Untitled, 1970]—running up and down it. But I think there's an element of interacting with outdoor works: running your hand along them, seeing what they're made of, getting that sort of kinetic interaction.

I think there's a balance, and I think we're beginning to achieve that balance now. And it's really great the ropes were removed, because that's what, to me, an outside sculpture park is. You're not inside, [00:55:00] looking at a painting on the wall. You're walking around it. You're interacting with it. You're maybe touching it. So I think we've probably struck a good balance. I don't know how Mark di Suvero feels about his pieces not having kids run on them, but I think he just feels like this is what Storm King is. And he, at the time, was so grateful that he could move his pieces there.

Dziedzic: And I think being able to look at them from within them is also—you can still do that now that the ropes are gone and that's a hugely important aspect, too.

Stern: Yes, getting rid of the ropes was just huge. And people don't abuse it. Maybe they do, but I've never seen anyone climbing all over the Andy Goldsworthy wall. There are a couple of pieces they abuse a bit, but I think there's greater education now, or seems to be.

Dziedzic: [00:56:00] Did the ropes come down when there was a greater ability to hire more visitor services staff?

Stern: I think that was partly it, and I think it was partly, as I recall, when John took over leadership, and I probably hammered him to death about it. I think he didn't want to see ropes either, and I don't think David really wanted to see ropes, but I think it was trying to figure out how we could take those ropes down, and have the pieces be safe. So I think it was partly, yes, having more visitor services staff, and more guides.

Dziedzic: I also wanted to ask a little bit about programming, public programming, in addition to education. I know there's a lot of overlap there, but I think John said that you'd also initiated a kind of music series.

Stern: Oh, that was way back. Yes, that was way back, probably when I first moved back here. There was a small committee, and we did institute a music series, [00:57:00] and we funded, from our Foundation, we funded evening hours so that at least on Saturday nights Storm King could be open until 8:00. And then we wanted something to draw people, so we did form a musical series, which was good. We had a local committee. And that was really good, because that was the other thing—and I'm sure I talked to my father about it many times, about keeping the hours longer. I could never understand—and I still have trouble accepting that an outdoor art museum closes at 5:30, just when the sun is setting, just when the light is most beautiful over the pieces. Now, in the fall and spring it's one thing, but in the summer—you know, I get it. I get that there wouldn't be many visitors, that we would lose money, all of that. I get it, but I feel like this is what we are is seeing sculpture in different lights.

I did discuss with my father [00:58:00] over many years—this I clearly remember—opening at noon and being open until 9:00 during the summer, or different ways we could possibly do this, because they didn't want double staff, they didn't want double hours, but maybe we could open later. We did discuss it. He was on board, he understood, but I think he just felt practicality-wise it just couldn't be done. They had to take advantage of when the most people were coming. Now I think eventually it will be open during the summer until eight or nine o'clock. I think we're getting there. I also felt that there are certain sculpture parks that are open year-round. There are certain sculpture parks that are open dawn to dusk. In an ideal world we would be open dawn to dusk, year-round, and that's what we would be. That's what we would do. Because the winter is amazing for seeing sculpture. I think the main hours that we're [00:59:00] open is when it's a very flat light, and you're not seeing the changing light. So I think we're working toward it. I think that John and David—I think everyone is behind it. I think it's just figuring out how it can be done, and I think we're beginning to move in that direction. But it all, again, has to do with access. I actually cringe when I run into people who have driven—it happens all the time—they've driven four hours from Boston, or they've come from Europe, and, oh, they didn't know we were closed on Mondays and Tuesdays. Oh, they didn't know. And my gut feeling is always just, let's just let them in; they've come this far. And I've always felt, well, why are we closed? I mean we're an outdoor institution.

Dziedzic: It's a good question, but I understand the push and pull there.

Stern: Yes.

Dziedzic: [01:00:00] All right. So I guess we can talk about just within the last few years when you were saying you started to become more involved with Storm King, after John took over. So John told me that you were instrumental in helping there be a café finally.

Stern: Finally. Yes.

Dziedzic: That was one of his important goals.

Stern: There was a committee, because he took the job in 2009, I think, but he also still had his job in Washington. So there were six months, or maybe a little less, that he couldn't move up here full-time, and that was one of the most frustrating times, because there was no—I mean, David was leading, but there was this transition going on, and I know John wanted certain things to happen. So I remember we got, a committee together, [01:01:00] and we were trying to interview and talk to different restaurants and cafés in the area, trying to see who could possibly come in and do this, because at that time our visitation wasn't what it is today. There were rainy days. Who was going to come in and do this when visitation was uncertain?

So we started with a committee, because I can remember several of us meeting to try to see who we could tap into, and we got Woody's Restaurant in Cornwall, and they did the first two or three years until we got Fresh & Company, which was good, just to get a food company in there. And then I guess we were also then working with VSBA [Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates] on the master plan, so there was a food committee—thank goodness. They started sending consultants up, [01:02:00] and we worked with those consultants—or I did—with identifying restaurants and people in the area that knew restaurants. So I was active with that committee at that time to identify a restaurant that could come in, and then figuring out where they would operate out of, and how they'd have enough equipment, and then the Health Department regulations, and how they could do it with not having a full license to operate a restaurant.

That was really interesting, actually, to just see how we could possibly do something, if not the whole, full-fledged thing. And that was a time that I think Anthony Davidowitz may have started, too, and it was great because he was able to really come in and apply his hands-on skills to getting this going. And so that was a huge relief to finally just have a food company there. They're really getting there, and now we have food trucks, and we have dispersed food throughout the site. [01:03:00] So that was just a huge leap forward. Again, I think David wanted it. My father wanted food. It's just, again, priorities, and how to do it, and slim resources, and not enough staff. And I think one of the greatest things that John immediately engineered was staffing up so that we could do these things. We could do education and access and food, and get things going, and pull an audience, and get onto social media, and get [laughs] the word out that we're not—as people used to refer to it—their grandmother's attic, because it just wasn't moving forward.

[Side conversation]

Dziedzic: So it sounds like John really shared your commitment to increasing access.

Stern: [01:04:00] He did. John is much more of a diplomat, and he's quieter about things. I get a little bit on a high horse. But he has a background as a lawyer, and he thinks before he acts. But he definitely shares my feeling about accessibility and services, and so does David. And I don't think anyone doesn't. I don't think anyone says, "Oh, no, we don't want to do this." I think there are differing views about how big we should become, and how much we promote ourselves, and what is enough. But I think that nobody is against having food, and having music, and having educational programs.

Dziedzic: Can you talk about the Director of Education and Public Programs position, and how that came into being?

Stern: [01:05:00] The Ralph E. Ogden Foundation seeded it, at my suggestion. I think that my frustration with John in the beginning—he was up against so much, and he was trying to do so much, but I didn't see education rising to the surface. I just didn't see it happening. And we'd been talking about it for so long, and I'd been talking to John about it for so long after my father. I was beating on John and David about education. When are we going to get an education director? And finally, I just knew it wasn't going to happen unless we seeded it, so we provided funding for the first year to bring someone on, hoping that it would then get formalized, which is what did happen.

I was involved with the interviews of several people, and it was a little hard because we didn't have, again, a philosophy of education, so who are we looking for? Well, [01:06:00] that's a good question. But luckily, I think when we interviewed Victoria we just knew this is the person who will help us develop that vision, and has the academic background and the vision to do this properly with us. So that's been really good. It's a growing area. We don't have a board committee on education yet. It's definitely a growing area, and I think she has her hands full. But I think that we have a ways to go. I mean, what I'd like to see happen—and Victoria and John know this—is that eventually we have a philosophy of K–12. What are we doing with K–12? What is our philosophy about school groups coming in? What's our overarching philosophy? What are we offering them? What about college-aged kids? Are we ever going to do things with developmentally disabled? [01:07:00] Blind? Alzheimer's? That's a whole area we need to tap into. More internships.

We have this Newburgh outreach program which is fantastic. It's our nearest underserved community. In future years, how do we reach farther than that? What are we offering people? What grant money will

come in? How will that budget grow so that we can be doing more with underserved kids coming maybe from father away? How do we model a program in Newburgh that we can scale? And maybe we become experts in the field, and then people are coming to us find out how we engage underserved communities—not just kids, their parents. I mean, I'd love to see several people at Storm King who are working on nothing but engagement with underserved communities, under Victoria. [01:08:00] But we're starting, so we're piloting what can work.

Dziedzic: Can you talk a little bit about what the school partnerships are like? What are the components of those partnerships?

Stern: Well, I'm not totally on the ground with these, so I don't know. I know that it started with Horizons-on-Hudson, because Newburgh has a magnet school system, and that was a school that was receptive. You have to find, again, a partner in a school that's going to be receptive and want to work with you. And Horizons-on-Hudson was trying to offer programs to talented, bright kids—they were trying to reach them with some innovative kinds of programming. And so that was the beginning school, and Victoria—they'd go into the school, they'd train the teachers, they'd work with the [01:09:00] teachers, they'd do in-school presentations, they'd bring the kids—not once, but several times—to Storm King, so that Storm King is feeding into their curriculum. I don't know how involved the parents get—but the program is not just one school visit; it's more than that. They've now moved into a middle school, and into, I believe, the Newburgh Armory, which serves, again, low-income kids with various programs, and they have an educator embedded in Newburgh who is running these programs. So that is a huge step forward.

Dziedzic: Yes. You mentioned the kind of role of the Ogden Foundation a little bit, and I think it would be helpful to kind of understand how those [01:10:00] entities interrelate, and when the Ogden Foundation might—like, for instance, do a seed grant for a position? Or fund any other kind of aspect of something at Storm King? How does that work?

Stern: The Newburgh Partnership program can only move at its own pace. If we were suddenly to say, “You know what? We're going to grant now \$200,000 to get this program going.” It has to scale up slowly. So that's one thing. But in terms of how we fund things at Storm King, it used to be that we gave a set amount a year for [01:11:00] operations, and that was done for years, years and years under my father. And then we looked at it and said, well, this is somewhat arbitrary. There's now a fundraising staff. Rachel Coker is there. They're raising money. We want to begin to target our funding to things that will help Storm King, but where we can be most effective.

And so we funded the beginning of the Capacity Building Plan through VSBA. We're giving a large leadership gift to Continued Master Planning. Bea has been a huge part of that committee—she chaired

for a while—because this is the future of Storm King; this is important. We need to seed this, be one of the leadership people behind getting this going. Because operations, hey, they're raising money. And operations is hard to raise money for, but they're doing a great job, and they're raising money. And capital projects are tough, so we have funded that. We've funded education. We've funded [01:12:00] occasional installations, sculpture installations. We've funded, I think, the John Knight work [87^o, 1997–99], things that we're interested in, working in tandem with Storm King, that we think will help Storm King build capacity to raise money. So, again, it's more sort of seeding or capacity-building, I think is how we see ourselves.

Dziedzic: And about protecting the viewshed—is that also part of—

Stern: Yes, there were viewshed studies done, and certainly we have contributed to those. As a Foundation, we contribute to land, yes, to a lot of that work. Some of that was done several years ago. But we've contributed to studying the water table, things that affect—things that are going on in the community that affect Storm King, and land, and preservation of the land, yes. We certainly [01:13:00] have done that and will do that. So we're not really restricting ourselves. It's just that rather than giving each year the same amount to operations, we're looking critically and saying where can we be most useful here as a partner in things that we're interested in and that will help Storm King.

Dziedzic: Yes. I'm interested in this definition of community, or local community. And “legacy” is a really intimidating word, but your family's legacy with facilitating whatever it might be in this particular area. I know your grandfather funded some things in Cornwall, like a pool, and the school or something like that.

Stern: Yes.

Dziedzic: And then I know your father was interested [philanthropically] in looking more internationally and at refugees. And so I'm just interested if you could, [01:14:00] link these eras, in a sense, of the Foundation? What sort of comparisons do you see, or differences do you see? And, of course, [approaches to financially supporting] Storm King is part of that.

Stern: Well, yes. My grandfather, in 1947, started locally with the pool and the Recreation Department and part of the hospital. He wanted to give locally in his community, and to his alma mater. And then the funds went into building Storm King. And then my father also continued with Storm King, but he was interested in refugees, and in monuments across the world, preserving monuments. He'd been a refugee himself. And then when we took over—I think that, in a way, we're continuing both of those legacies. We have an impact investment we're doing in Chester, New York to preserve and expand organic farmland, trying to get young organic farmers onto the land, and [01:15:00] figuring out ways that healthy food can

become more available, and ways of supporting that. So that goes back to the whole farming heritage. So we're interested in sustainable food systems, and we're working in that area.

We also are working with human rights and social justice, both through food sovereignty and agricultural projects—not just locally, but internationally, as well, and nationally. And with human rights, we grant a lot in prison reform, education in prisons. I realized last week or a few weeks ago that we support—we give a dozen grants in Newburgh, more than I thought, and one of them is to a private school, San Miguel Academy, but that takes kids from the most dysfunctional households, not just low-income, but [01:16:00] really dysfunctional, and does amazing work with them in terms of experiential education. And actually Victoria's program, the art program, is going into San Miguel, and she's working with them now. We're working with a garden program in schools in Newburgh. So we want to work with community-based organizations that hopefully have leadership from the ground up that are working to solve some of these social issues of equity and education.

We do fund in several areas that really come down from—maybe not from my grandfather, but certainly from my father, that we divided into arts and culture, education, social justice and human rights, food and agriculture and environmental sustainability, and direct services. So we're kind of all over the board, but they're linked by a lens of human rights and social justice in whatever we do. [01:17:00] And Storm King is—it's not an outlier in that it's now a very successful, large [laughs] institution, and its focus is not on reaching low-income people; its mission is on being this wonderful outdoor sculpture park. But that's okay. It's a part of arts and culture. It's part of getting people in. We do have this wonderful outreach program. It's protecting land. It's educating. So we have a big focus that we are trying to not narrow but to focus in on. It's now more about the kind of impact we want to make and how we do that, and do we work more and more with not so much top-down but bottom-up organizations? Do we try to get diversity of leadership into organizations? Are we going to start working with Storm King, and maybe with our Storm King board member hats on, and getting more diversity into Storm King's leadership? [01:18:00]

I think there's a lot of continuity from farming and agriculture through human rights—my father's time—he was always interested in human rights and refugees and helping people—to using the arts as a window through which we can bring in and can work with people that haven't had exposure to the arts. So we definitely see a thread emerging. And then we don't know what the next generation—we don't know where they'll take things with the Foundation. We don't know what will happen with Storm King after John's leadership, whether there will be family involvement or not. We don't know. Big question.

Dziedzic: And it also sounds like a thread amongst the organizations that you fund now is that you have a partnership with those organizations, and a strategic partnership. And it sounds like, [01:19:00] in a

sense, through John's leadership, that by funding more strategically on your end, then Storm King can be more responsive to the way that it strategizes and plans.

Stern: Yes. In fact, we just had a board retreat this past weekend, and we finally came up with a mission statement, and it's so new that I haven't even memorized it, but it does have to do with partnering with organizations that are trying to bring about social and community change. And John inserted the word "creative," which is very important. But our role is to partner, to see what an organization wants and what we can bring to it, and if it's in line with our values, how we can help that institution.

Dziedzic: It sounds also very experiential, too. [laughs] It seems informed by Visual Thinking Strategies. [01:20:00]

Stern: Yes, yes. I think we are very experientially-based. We want to see on the ground what's working, what's not working. We don't fund by coming in and saying we're going to do this. We want to hear from and work with the community of people that we're—what can we add to? And who are our funding partners?

Dziedzic: Yes, I think that seems very savvy and in line with the way that a lot of funding has shifted over the last maybe 10 or even 20 years, maybe less than that, in terms of [01:21:00] changing the way that organizations are funded based on the region, and on their capacity, and on the partnership itself, in a sense, as opposed to just a blanket "Detroit gets what New York gets, gets what Los Angeles gets."

Stern: Right. Exactly. I was reading about this yesterday, about minimum wages. It's great to raise the minimum wage, but maybe you do it according to different states and localities, what their cost of living is. [laughs] You don't just say, "Hey, it's \$15 across the board." It's "What's needed in this community? What's the cost of living here?"

Dziedzic: I have a few general questions that I wanted to ask you. And I guess the first thing that comes to mind is, you know, thinking back, again, to your grandfather and the way that he introduced landscape to you—and even, like you said, your father and the activities that went along with him, I'm just wondering if your [01:22:00] own understanding of landscape has changed over the years, and whether any of the art at Storm King has played a role in that.

Stern: Oh, that's an interesting question. That's a really interesting question. I grew up backpacking all over the place, and really being involved with wilderness, and really experiencing it, and going on ten-day backpack trips, so there's wilderness, and appreciating the land, and really being in the land, and then there's landscape.

I think certainly growing up around Storm King has widened my vision of landscape. I don't think about landscape in terms of cultivation and nice little arboretums or flower gardens exactly. [01:23:00] I think I've gotten a wider appreciation of what landscape is. Landscape is what lands are surrounding you, and how they're managed, and how they're curated. And then seeing art in a landscape has been eye-opening, because it brings to life what is around it and what is changing around it all the time. That's why I like the Richard Serra piece so much, because it has brought that hill to life. You look at that hill and you see it in a whole different way. That whole expanse, just by those simple pieces that he has inserted into the hill, it brings that hill into focus, the mountain behind it, the light, the shadows, the line of the hills. So I think I'm very attuned [01:24:00] to the natural environment and to landscape. It's certainly come into play even on the land I live on. I'm always looking and figuring out and wanting to add or change something or look at something differently. So I think that putting art in a landscape, it changes something completely, irrevocably, [laughs] that you just don't see that place in the same way.

Is that what you were getting at? [laughter] Is that what you were asking, sort of?

Dziedzic: I wasn't sure where it would go, but I guess, you know, some people would say that a good work of art is something that looks different every time that you see it.

Stern: Yes.

Dziedzic: It's hard to know, and, in a sense, that's true of the landscape. It's always changing.

Stern: It's always changing. And that's why time of day—season, seasonality—I think that's just so critical to viewing landscape. [01:25:00] And it also taught me that yes, you walk in the same place a hundred times, then you see something you haven't seen before: a different tree, a different a way of something. You see something you had not noticed before. So I think that landscape is just central. I can't imagine not living in a landscape. I can't imagine it not informing where we are. And I think it affects thinking, too. Just seeing the possibilities in a landscape, I think, affects our thinking about what's possible in either our work—the grants we're making—or just our lives. And that's why I just felt it was so important to open this to as many people as possible, to get people to view things differently. If they come and they're allowed to experience and open their minds to the possibilities of seeing art in a landscape, it opens up other possibilities for them, things they haven't thought about. [01:26:00] It just opens up their minds. So it's kind of counterintuitive, but I think that's—I think that we all, growing up around Storm King and Mountainville, we all appreciate land in a different way. I mean, my sister is an architect, and that probably came about somewhat from the history, and the hiking and backpacking and doing things outdoors. That's just all, I think, part of growing up.

Dziedzic: It was interesting to look through this summer program folder from 1984 that I showed you, because there was a way in which the summer interns were being instructed on how to get the kids to see the art. It wasn't imposing an interpretation, but a lot of it was based on how new it was for artists to be using these kinds of industrial materials in their work. It wasn't clay, [01:27:00] it wasn't paint, even though those elements might be part of the artwork. But, it struck me that people still need an education in looking at this art, even though this is 30 years ago, and when the work was made was 20 years before that, probably. And so it strikes me that the kind of introductory lesson is still needed, in a sense, when people see this kind of artwork that isn't figurative, that isn't of—

Stern: Right.

Dziedzic: —the landscape directly. I guess I'm just wondering in terms of the education—having had some experience with arts education, is there a future in which an understanding of this kind of work is more broadly seeded, I guess? And [01:28:00] what sort of lessons could Storm King teach if they didn't have to do this introductory lesson [alerting visitors that art can be made from industrial materials]?

Stern: If they didn't have to do which introductory lesson?

Dziedzic: Understanding that this, too, is art.

Stern: What kind of impact could they have?

Dziedzic: Yes, what is the next level? There are works from so many different periods and regions at Storm King—is there a way to learn the [art] history, in a sense, and still keep it exciting [laughs] and experiential?

Stern: Well, that's a good question, and that's sort of the question of why we want people to come back. And people will say, "Oh, I've been there once," or "I've done that." I think part of it is just—which I hope we can do with our education [01:29:00] program as we develop it is we can scale it, and maybe we become the thought leaders in this field of experiential education around art and landscape, which would be fabulous. People would be coming to us, and we would be able to package something. But how do you keep things new? I don't know, and I think as education changes—as public education changes—and hopefully it will—and gets out of its old strictures that I can't believe kids are still learning the way that they're learning—that [laughs] education will catch up to where we would like to be at Storm King, and that education will be experiential, and opening people's minds and challenging their thought, and instead of this kind of rote learning that I think still goes on.

But it's interesting: how do you incorporate technology into Storm King? I think we already have. I think there are a lot of people on social media that don't even come, but they know about it [laughs] through social media. [01:30:00] So how do you make the experience beneficial, and not just have it on YouTube. I don't know the answers. I know that it's very—it's great to see people walking around not on their phones, and I see it all the time, where there's not an electronic device in sight when people are walking around. They're actually just experiencing it. Or going to Maya Lin's *Storm King Wavefield* (2007–08) and seeing people roll down the hill.

That was another huge issue, the Maya Lin, when it was built, because there were all kinds of drainage issues, and it was roped off for years. And it still is roped off a lot of the time. It's begun to be opened up now, and what a difference, because, again, that's what it was meant to be, people maybe not harming the ridges, but running up and down them. You can't get a feel of that piece until you are in it. It's kept me up at night, knowing that people are not understanding what that piece is about. Or they'll go by on the tram and see it from the bottom, [01:31:00] but that's not it at all, and if we're going to have a piece like that, the opportunity has to be there, that people can at least have the opportunity to go down and run through the waves. So seeing people do that has been very gratifying. But again, without electronics, and just experiencing a piece—that piece is actually a really good example of experiential—you look at it from above and say, oh, that's interesting, but then when you're in it you feel all kinds of things. You feel cocooned. You're looking at space differently. You're hearing things differently. It's amazing. So I just hope that, I guess, education can catch up with what Storm King is trying to do, or formal education can.

Dziedzic: Well, you took my rumination and made it into a longitudinal plan, so I thank you. [laughter]

Stern: Yes, plan for us, too.

Dziedzic: It's great to hear. And you've touched on this a little bit in terms of, [01:32:00] the ways in which Storm King will grow in the future, in terms of how it considers access. So, for instance, working with people who have either physical limitations or developmental disabilities—you mentioned Alzheimer's—you know. Where do you see those possibilities? And I guess, when you were talking about privilege at the beginning, you were saying, we didn't think about it that way, but it was still something you were concerned about. And I see this as similar in the sense that now we have a vocabulary, a better vocabulary about disparity and diversity, and that means so much to kind of broaden the view. How close is Storm King to, [01:33:00] I don't know, venturing out into those broader areas, increasing the access, I guess?

Stern: I'm sure it's on the template. I'm sure it's on the plan, but it's staff, it's resources. I don't honestly know. I think there's so much even in terms of audience cultivation. Who is our audience there on weekends? I don't think you see too many people of color. It's been great having Heather Hart's exhibit, and I think we need more exhibits like that that engages people—diverse populations—and I think we're getting there, but I think we have a long way to go in being on the radar of people who might not normally even go to a museum or to an art institution, let alone one outdoors in the country. And people are reluctant to walk on grass, and they're afraid of ticks. It's also a whole education of being in the outdoors. So I think we have a long way to go, and I don't know how far we'll get, [01:34:00] because it depends on resources and money.

I think it's, again, figuring out a plan, as we'll have an education plan, and marketing that plan, where we have a philosophy, and then getting the word out there, and having groups and people come, and then being able to accommodate them. So I'd like to see it happen, but it's not something I've talked to the education staff about, or even Victoria, because I think she's got her plate so full right now. I also think it's just, again, adding staff. I think that education and public programming, of course they're related, but I think that may need to be divided a bit, because Storm King does so much public programming during its season, that I think that may have to be a separate person, and somehow if we're going to start appealing to more diverse populations, [01:35:00] and get more programs going for them, that's a whole project onto itself. I don't know at other institutions that I've heard of a position called education and public programming. Usually it's separate. Again, we need more staff.

Dziedzic: And over time, it becomes clear where the intersections are and where the differences are, in a sense.

Stern: It does. And again, we can't be everything to everyone. I'm not sure if we had a full program for those with developmental disabilities, if we had a braille program, I'm not sure how many people would come all the way out to Mountainville, New York to partake. You can't look at just numbers, but I'm not sure what the demand is for [01:36:00] that. We can't be everything to everyone. I think that was a big discussion when the tram went in. Do we really want to provide this? It's a walking museum. Well, I'm very glad we did, because there are people who can't walk. But how far do we really go to meet the needs of people? We're not really set up for people with certainly walking disabilities. It's uneven ground. And we're not going to pave it over and make a flat parking lot experience. That's not what we want to do. I'm a huge believer in equity and in opportunity, but I'm not sure that people who have certain limitations can experience everything, or should. I just feel like we can make the accommodation, but I think we have hard choices. We may not be able to set up specific programs for every category of people who may need special accommodation. So those are [01:37:00] choices. I think we're headed in a good direction

with it, but I haven't thought that far, because I think there's so many populations we could be targeting. So, you know, I don't have the answer to that.

Dziedzic: Yes, that's fair. [laughs]

Stern: Yes, I'm not sure, and that would take a lot more research. And that's probably well beyond my lifetime, [laughs] to reach all the populations that should be reached.

Dziedzic: Yes, I think there's the simple fact that it can be hard to get to without a car. So that's something that, even though there are partnerships that Storm King has with buses and a few other things—like coming from Beacon, the MetroNorth—[01:38:00] you still can't get here that easily without your own car.

Stern: You can't, and you really do have to think about that. I don't think every museum—I don't think every place can serve everyone. You can try. You're not going to say to someone who's handicapped in some way, "Sorry, you can't come in." It's just that to make special accommodations, I guess it would take studying: who is really in our area, or who is within a 100-mile radius? Is there a huge group of people that would be partaking more if we could do something? And if so, what is that population? But, again, how many people come from more than 100 miles away? Or, you know, maybe there are institutions better set up to accommodate this.

I think it's all a matter of seeing who's in our area, and who's in our catchment area, and who can be served, and who do we want to serve, or think we can serve. Most people were from the Tri-State area, or from Boston, [01:39:00] and sure, we have people visiting New York from other places, but I think we have to just look at who's in our area, what we can realistically do. I mean, sure, it would be great if we keep the docent program, and have educators who speak more than one language. Ideally, there'd be people on call who, if a group comes in that needs—they have trouble hearing, or they have trouble seeing—there'd be someone who has some experience in that who could be called in to give them a better experience. But I don't think we can be set up to reach every under-accessed population.

Dziedzic: Yes. Well, I think I'm coming to the end of my questions, so I guess I just want to ask if there's anything else that either we didn't touch on or that I didn't know to ask about. Things that are kind of bouncing around that maybe you'd like to say.

Stern: [01:40:00] No, I think that we're really headed in a very positive direction. I think that as society changes—and it's changing rapidly—we need to keep up with that. I think there are questions that we're thinking about now that we weren't even thinking about even two or three years ago, like a lot of the

diversity questions. Again, that's why it's so great bringing in someone like Heather Hart to help bridge cultural and different—to have groups talking to each other, to use Storm King as a means or a platform to bring people together. I don't think we can ignore what's happening outside of Storm King, I guess is what I'm saying. It was great to say years ago, yes, we want to reach underserved populations in Newburgh, and bring those kids in. That's great, but there's so much else happening in the world that I think we have to address. So to have more platforms like Heather Hart's. Maybe we address it with music. Maybe we address it with having [01:41:00] lecturers, people come in maybe even during the off season, in the winter, and there are lectures held, or engagement tables.

We're not getting away from our mission. We're using what we have in our purview to engage people. I don't know, I'm just saying that in our off-season and our on-season, keep using Storm King to engage, to use what we have—the art, the landscape—to bring people around a table, without becoming overtly political. I think you have to become political to address issues and be part of the ongoing dialogue in this country. We can't be apart from it. So I think that's really important in coming years, and I don't think that was something that was ever on anyone's radar because it was a different time. But I think now, we can't just sit idly by. So hopefully next year there will be someone [01:42:00] like a Heather Hart. There's going to be more engagement. I think that's really important going forward.

Dziedzic: And even next year's exhibition, right, is centered around climate change.

Stern: Yes.

Dziedzic: So that seems like a very strong step.

Stern: It's a very strong step, and I can hear my father both sighing about it, [laughs] partly he was just a pessimist by nature, because he was a refugee, but he was always nervous about getting too entangled politically. So I don't know what he would have thought about it. My grandfather would have thought, this is great. He would have loved Heather Hart. He would have said, "Climate change? Great. Let's get right on top of it." Dad would have been a little more circumspect, but, you know, basically he would have agreed with moving with the times, I think. You just can't stay—I think that's been a question for all of us in dealing with post-1945 sculptures. How do we [01:43:00] make that relevant? That's a huge—sure, we make it relevant with ongoing yearly exhibitions, but how do we keep Storm King relevant, when it has to do with an era and an age? These are weighty questions. I'm glad I don't have to answer them all.
[laughter]

Dziedzic: Well, it seems like there's a team, whether it be the board or the staff, you know, the senior staff at Storm King that are continually asking these questions and answering them together.

Stern: And there's a great staff, and there's a young staff, and that's really important. So yes, they're answering them together. So I have great hope [laughs] looking forward. I would just like it all done in a day. I'm like my grandfather like that. Like, where's our educational mission statement? Where's our...? Why aren't we...? You know, I want to do what it'll take 10 or 20 years to do [01:44:00] in a day, and that can't happen.

Dziedzic: Well, I think that's the end of my questions, so I think we can end there.

Stern: Great.

Dziedzic: All right, thank you so much, Lisa.

Stern: Thank you.

Audio File 2

Stern: The name of the strategy that we experimented with several years ago with Ron Romary was Visual Thinking Strategies, VTS, which is practiced in several institutions. A couple of sculpture parks; the deCordova being one of them. And it was a way of just concentrating on seeing. What are you seeing in front of you and how are you experiencing it and what does it remind you of? What does it bring to mind? And you walk around the piece and you look at the landscape and the piece, and you just rely on your vision and your experience of it and then you share this with the group. And it's a strategy; it doesn't give a lot of context or history of the work. It's a way of experiencing it. It's probably, in my mind, a strategy that could be incorporated with other strategies. We tried it by itself, but it does go back to my father's thinking about [00:01:00] seeing art where you look at it and you respond to it. What does this piece of art have to say to me? And that was his philosophy when we went to museums as children with him. Just look at what's on the wall. Do you like it? Does it speak to you? What does it say to you?

So VTS was an extension to what my father was trying to get at. It can't work alone, but I think it's part of what is very important to get across to visitors, and children and adults alike. What are you seeing? What are you reacting to? What are you even hearing because we're outdoors? So that's kind of what VTS was about, that I was trying to remember earlier—what strategy we were employing with our student docent program for those few seasons before we got a full-time education director.

Dziedzic: It's actually interesting thinking about that now that you've explained [00:02:00] it in that way, is just thinking about artists. So, it's so common now for artists to have gone through an MFA program. And

not all MFA programs have a historical component, but there is a sense of: you need to know your history within your field, or at least, what is leading up to what you are doing now because it's just inherently kind of influential. And so in a sense, what you described, VTS, is kind of something that you can do to begin that quest in a sense.

Stern: That's right. To begin the quest and to get excited about what you're learning, but then you need the follow through. It didn't work alone. And I credit David Collens a lot for giving us permission to try it because as I said, everything he and my father tried to do at Storm King, they wanted it to be top of the line. And this wasn't. This was very [00:03:00] experimental. A lot of people didn't like it. The docents didn't like it. We were trying something. It did work a bit with the high schoolers, but it was an experiment, so I give them credit for trying it, but I think we needed to have done more research. It can work, and it has worked at the deCordova, but I think the deCordova is very different. I think they don't have rules on touching and climbing on sculptures as much. They don't—it's just kind of experiential at the deCordova. It's a different philosophy. So I think VTS is great and can be incorporated, but it's not a standalone; it's not giving enough context. So, you know, we learned.

Dziedzic: But like you said, in some cases, the students that you worked with went on to pursue art history or to study art. It can bring awareness that this is something that someone is interested in.

Stern: It can. And if those same students had just been talked to and given a dry description, they might not have taken off into fields of art, but there can be a combination and I think that's what I've been desperately [00:04:00] trying to feel like our docents, or any of our leadership should be doing. It's kind of a mix. It's a mix and I think Victoria is striving for that.

Dziedzic: Okay, thanks. Glad you remembered.

[End of interview]