

INCITE PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Alice Kandell

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

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## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Alice Kandell conducted by William McAllister on January 30, 2020. This interview is part of the INCITE Oral History Project.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

Transcriptionist: ATC

Session: 2

Narrator: Alice Kandell

Location:

Interviewer: William McAllister

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McAllister: And we're off. My name is William McAllister, senior research fellow at the Interdisciplinary Center for Innovative Theory and Empirics at Columbia University, and I'm here today, the thirtieth of January, 2020, to continue our conversation with Alice Kandell, whose collection of antique Tibetan masterpieces comprised the Alice S. Kandell Tibetan Shrine Room at the Smithsonian Institution. Welcome, Dr. Kandell.

So I wanted us to pick up on our conversation last time about the collecting and about the Tibetan collection. And I'd read that your approach to collecting is based on two principles. Pieces have to be old, and they have to be beautiful. Why is old important to you?

Kandell: [00:00:48] I think the most beautiful ones are the old ones. The contemporary ones that are made for the tourists in China and Nepal just don't appeal to me at all. The sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth century were the prime time artistically for the Tibetans, I think. They were doing beautiful stuff earlier. It's just not my—it's simpler, more basic to me. The objects of the thirteenth, fourteenth century tend to be more basic. I have those, and they're dark and not as appealing to me. Everybody has their own thing. I mean, I know somebody that collects blue glass bottles, and he just loves them. My feeling is that the flowering of the Tibetan culture was within The seventeenth, eighteenth century, sixteenth and seventeenth, eighteenth

century, and that's what I'm drawn to. It's not that it's better or worse, or that modern or contemporary painting is worse or better than antique Tibetan art. I don't know. To me.

McAllister: So the old and the beautiful, for you, come together. If it's old, it's beautiful, and if it's beautiful, it's old.

Kandell: [00:02:12] Well, there's old, and not such quality, also, and I see that. I don't take it.

McAllister: Well, in that context, what makes something beautiful to you?

Kandell: [00:02:26] I guess it's the way it jumps out at you, and almost reaches out to you to be beautiful. What's a beautiful painting, as opposed to just a plain old ordinary one? A beautiful photograph that jumps out at you, or one that's just a photograph of something? What makes something beautiful? That's a whole different discussion. I don't know. But there are people's responses to things. I saw a video, a documentary, on Peggy Guggenheim. She was a contemporary art dealer, and, "The paintings speak to me," she says. I don't get it. They don't speak to me. I like them or I don't like them, but that's not so important. I can understand the feeling. I don't understand it in terms of the art that speaks to her, but if it says something to me, and I know it's got to be the best, and it's got to be beautiful, it's got to be authentic, it's got to be complete—which is rare in the world of available Tibetan antiques these days.

Most pieces in the Tibetan—well, first of all, in functioning Tibet, pieces were never removed from the monastery or the home, never. It wasn't until the occupation and the destruction that

they even got out of the country, and pieces had to come out with families. A lot of them are broken. A lot of them are put together. When you see a statue that has no base, the base of the statue is the most important part, and in it are prayers, jewels, consecrations from monks.

Without that, you don't have a consecrated statue. A statue is not a piece of art. It's something for you to meditate on. You meditate on that deity for yourself, because that's who you are, and that's where your stars were aligned, and a monk decides that for you, and you respond to that and meditate on that piece, and eventually, become that deity, believe it or not. So it doesn't matter if it's beautiful or old. It only matters that it is a manifestation of that particular deity.

But I like the ones that are better crafted and more beautifully crafted. And they're not art. And they're not made as art. But they're artistic, yes. And they have to be complete with the base. A lot of antique dealers now—I mean, the pieces should never have been removed from a monastery, but having been removed by the refugees who had to come here and who had to sell them to survive, they were complete pieces that they used for themselves. They were consecrated. They had a base. They had a figure that represented something. They had certain objects, things that they hold, which have specific meaning. A thunderbolt means the power of the universe. They had certain jewels in certain places in the middle of their forehead, in the crown. That's very important, and my pieces all have that.

Once they hit the art market, objects become damaged. For example, an arm belonging to another statue is stuck onto it. They're often missing the base, because the Tibetans know that's the most valuable part. They'll saw the top of it off and sell it in the market to these stupid Americans, or any place, and keep the base, because it's more valuable to them. Also, with

paintings, they have thangkas, that's the painting. They're brocade around the outside of it, and very often, the brocade is missing. Why? Because the Tibetans know that the Americans will buy the art, and they can make more money selling the brocade.

Now, Robert Thurman, who is a Buddhist, an expert **in the practice and retired head of the religion department** at Columbia and himself trained as a Buddhist Lama, believe it or not. He went to a monastery, became a Lama and speaks Tibetan. He says that the brocade is like a temple where you enter into the painting through that temple. And the painting is something of significance to you. When you're born, a Lama comes and interprets the positioning of the stars, and this identifies **your deity. This is whom you meditate to, which serves as a vehicle for you to reach enlightenment**, and it's covered with a piece of cloth, because what's sacred is secret. It's not a painting to be seen like any other painting. It's to be covered and opened when you want to meditate on it. All of those pieces are very important, and museums strip them of that, take out the painting. They don't even get the brocade, because they can get it cheaper without it. I don't know. They frame the painting. They're artistic, and they're beautiful, but they're not what you want.

Now, my pieces all have the brocades. They come with a stick at the bottom and a silver finial on each end of the stick. I have all those, because they're authentic. That speaks to me. Aside from the fact that they're beautifully made and a rare topic, that's what I look for.

McAllister: I'm curious. This is a really interesting conversation about the relationship between art, if you will, and religious object, that it's first and foremost a religious object, as you've

described. And I was wondering, even though that it is first and foremost a religious object, like your shrine, because they are all authentic pieces. They haven't been torn up for an art market. But you're not a practicing Buddhist, and I was wondering how you respond to it as a religious object, even though you're not a practicing Buddhist. Does it have a meditative capacity for you? Is there some spiritual component of it for you?

Kandell: [00:09:00] That's a good question. I am not a Buddhist, and I don't see it in a religious sense. I see it in terms of beauty. That's what I see. I walk into the shrine room—and I go in every night—because it's peaceful. It's nice. It's not because I'm a Buddhist, but when I walk in first, I say, oh, this is really beautiful. I do feel that. And then something else takes over, and I feel very safe. That's all. I'm not a Buddhist, but I do feel something safe about it.

McAllister: I have been in the room, and I think I understand part of what you're saying, because there is a calmness, a peacefulness there, and it's all-enclosing.

Kandell: [00:09:48] It's almost like I feel the monks will take care of me. I don't know why. I don't know what taking care of me means, but that's how I feel, safe. But each piece is very beautiful, and I respond to the beauty of it, and I also respond to the whole thing, put together. I don't know if I've answered your question. Why this piece and not that piece? I don't know. Why a good painting and not another painting? Why do you like one painting and not another? I don't know.

McAllister: Picking up on what you were just saying about how you enter into that space and feel differently from just entering it, even as a non-Buddhist, you mentioned Robert Thurman, and he's described the function of the shrines, and here I'm going to quote him, as a "doorway from the profane or ordinary into the sacred or extraordinary." And so I was wondering, even though, again, you're not a practicing Buddhist, and so in that sense, it's not a sacred Buddhist space for you, but I was wondering if part of what you were describing a moment ago, when you go in there at night, is akin to what he describes, is that you're entering into a different—

Kandell: [00:10:56] How funny. I'd forgotten about that.

McAllister: —into a different—

Kandell: [00:10:58] That's in his book? In our book, yes.

McAllister: —as a doorway. Yes.

Kandell: [00:11:00] I forgot about that. Yes. He describes that in terms of not only the shrine room, but a painting with the brocade around it. But yes, that's funny. That's just how I feel. He is a practicing Buddhist. He's a monk. I'm not, but I feel that way. But you can be whatever religion you are, and still be a Buddhist. You don't have to be a Buddhist to feel that way. And there's something about it that makes me feel safe and taken care of, and it will take you into the other world for a second. That's all, to me. Whatever that means, it will take you there, period. I'm not a religious person, I don't know, but that's where it is.



McAllister: Perhaps this is an opportune moment to segue from your collection, and from your interest in the objects of the shrine and the shrine as a whole, in terms of talking about feeling protected and safe, to your career as a child psychologist. There seems like there might be a connection there. Then we'll talk about other aspects of your life. Why did you get interested in psychology, and particularly child psychology in the first place?

Kandell: [00:12:36] I don't know, but I think everybody that goes into psychology is looking for their own reasons of what happened to them [laughs] and why. I think that psychiatrists go there for that reason, the psychologists too. I started out as a nursery school teacher, a regular school teacher. And I first enrolled in teaching. I thought I wanted to deal with children. I fast realized I wasn't very good at that, and I was more interested in the individual children, so I switched over to psychology, which was very interesting.

McAllister: This was during college? In college you switched?

Kandell: [00:13:08] This was in graduate school.

McAllister: In graduate school.

Kandell: Yes.

McAllister: You started graduate school—

Kandell: I started graduate school—

McAllister: —as a teacher, for teaching.

Kandell: [00:13:13] —in a teaching school, and then switched into the psychology program, because it was much more interesting to me. I wasn't good as a teacher. I was better at dealing with each individual child, and the school didn't like that much. [laughs] They said, you know, you can't do that. Which I couldn't. It wasn't good.

McAllister: How did you recognize that you were not good as a teacher with numbers of students, but you were good one-on-one?

Kandell: I don't know.

McAllister: How did you recognize that at the time?

Kandell: [00:13:41] That wasn't what did it. I just was always interested in children, and what made them work, and how. And what am I doing, looking for my own answers for my own self? Probably. And probably that's what everybody is doing that's in any kind of psychological field, anyway.

McAllister: That has to do with psychology in general. Why child psychology?

Kandell: [00:14:04] I was always interested in children. Still am. Still love children more than anything. Why? I don't know. Maybe I'm stuck there as a child [laughs] myself. I don't know. Ask anybody about psychology, why they go into it. I don't know.

McAllister: So you went into the psych program at Harvard [University], earned your PhD, and then you came out and you worked at an institute in New York City?

Kandell: [00:14:42] I did. After I finished the degree—before that, I worked at the Jewish Board of Guardians with children, but it was more global. It wasn't individual children at all, and I didn't have a degree then. Once I got the degree, I applied to a bunch of places, and for some reason, every place I applied, they took me, probably because of the Harvard thing, because at that time, for a woman, you know, but they saw Harvard, so they liked that. And I chose Mount Sinai [Hospital]. But there were no children involved. It wasn't really for me. It was more academic, and more testing, and this and that. It wasn't really for me.

And then I moved into the Early Childhood Development Center, which was much more for me, and that really was interesting to me, because it was about mothers, newborns, and babies, zero to three. The head of it, **Dr. Nina Leif** [phonetic], had been a pediatrician. She saw too many problems and became a psychiatrist. She realized in her psychiatry practice that everything was either preverbal or pre-three years old, and that's where the personality was set. And I remember she had all the research pinned up against all the four walls, and she was learning about what went on from zero to three or zero to five. Mostly she was interested in zero to three. What are

the basics that are established by parental interaction from zero to three? And that sends the permanent message to the years beyond.

McAllister: She was obviously a major influence on your—

Kandell: Major.

McAllister: —on your thinking.

Kandell: [00:16:58] Major influence. Major. Those years were major. At that point, I had children of my own, two of them, and boy, I was curious of what to do. She had groups of mothers and babies that she was teaching, but by the time I found out about it, it was too late. I couldn't join. Later I studied with her and became a group leader to teach her things, and learned her philosophy. Her philosophy is, what do you do starting in the delivery room, really? How do you start the bonding system, the bonding process that's so important, and without it, you have no basis for normal development? I always think of these crazy guys in jail and whatever, and you hear their stories. Their mothers didn't want them. They were too busy. Jeffrey Dahmer's mother was a—oh, no, it was that other one. One of the really nutty ones, his mother was a prostitute, and she never wanted him. She'd throw him out in the street when she felt—I mean, there was no bonding, no nothing. And if you don't really want that baby, there's no bonding.

And we teach the mothers and fathers to take that baby in the delivery room after it's first born and hold it, skin to skin for the fathers. And then from there, we move on. She had a particular

curriculum. Every week for the first year, what's happening, what's happening, and what do you do in that week, and what do you do in the developmental level? What do you do when the baby cries? That's the first thing it does. There were lots of theories. Turn on the stereo and close the door, so you don't hear the baby crying, because he needs to cry for an hour to—his lungs and this and that. She found leaving a baby to cry early or later sets the seeds for depression.

And there were studies during the First World War where they had nurseries, orphanages for orphans, babies whose parents were killed in the war. And they had them in cribs, and they had bottle props, which is a kind of a rubber band across the crib with a bottle that they can suck on whenever they feel like it, so they'll always have something to drink, food if they want it. And they found that those babies wouldn't sit up. They were failing. Some of them even died. That was the very basis, the beginning, of mother banks, where they had mothers come in and hold and rock the babies, and feed them, so that that wouldn't happen.

McAllister: Now, would you be teaching the mothers and perhaps fathers at the center, too—

Kandell: Yes.

McAllister: —to bond, how to bond?

Kandell: [00:20:11] Yes, absolutely. We had groups of ten mothers with their newborns. If there were problems, we would see them individually. Generally not. Generally they don't want it, don't need it. But yes. I wasn't part of this, but Dr. Leif started this in a turning [phonetic]

neighborhood, so she could get the poor people, and maybe the drug addicted, and they would teach them by holding a baby and showing them how to hold a baby, and cuddle it, and coo to it, and rock it. And then they'd give the baby to them. I wasn't involved in that. We would just talk about it.

McAllister: And how long did you stay at this center? How many years were you there?

Kandell: Oh, boy.

McAllister: Just roughly.

Kandell: [00:21:07] I don't know. Probably about eight years, something like that.

McAllister: And then when you left there—

Kandell: Or six years.

McAllister: —did you leave there to practice on your own, or did you just conclude your work in child psychology then?

Kandell: [00:21:21] It was about eight or ten years there, eight years. What happened then is altogether different. That was a very, very integral part of my life, and it's still very much a part of it, and I still use it for friends that have had—or I send friends there. I want to finish it. We go

through the first three years, first what happens every week, and then every month, and then the second year is certain issues, like discipline. What do you do when a child does something wrong? What do you do when he goes to stick his finger in a socket? What do you do when he runs to the stove to put his hand on top? How do you deal with it? Just stand at the back of the room and scream no? How do you handle it? Okay. There are ways to handle it. It's not easy, and it takes many times.

But we had groups coming in I taught, and then I had individual private therapy. But then what happened is, a friend of mine, who was married to an opera singer, her husband had a birthday, the opera singer. And I was sitting at a table next to one of the—he sang at the Metropolitan Opera a lot, and I was sitting next to one of the coaches. She said to me, “You're not in the opera. You don't like opera. You do like opera? Well, come. There's an audition on Wednesday to be a supernumerary.” “What?” “To be in the opera.” I said, “What?” “Just come.” I said, “Look, I have a job. I'm busy.” She said, “Just be there at two o'clock on Wednesday.”

So I go there at two o'clock on Wednesday, dressed like a psychologist from an office. And there's an audition, and the audition is a big room full of people, girls all wanting the part. I'd never had anything to do with the theater. I mean, I had in high school. I'd acted a little bit. And (pauses) anyway, there was this big audition. The girls all stand in front of you, and whatnot. There were three directors with clipboards. They make you take your shoes off. They make you turn around. They take notes. I don't know on what. And then they said, “Okay, which one is so-and-so's friend?” [laughs] They said, “You have the part.”

So it started that way. Next thing I knew, I was on stage, and that was just riveting. Riveting. I mean, it was spellbinding. I couldn't move, it was so thrilling. I remember standing backstage being pinned against the wall with the beauty of the violins just rushing over me, and this sound was so gorgeous. The stagehand next to me was chewing gum, reading a comic book. And I said, "Do you like opera?" He said, "Lady, if I liked opera, I couldn't do my job." I don't know how much of this should be quoted. The Met may not like it. No, those guys are fabulous.

McAllister: No, I understand.

Kandell: The stagehands really are fabulous.

McAllister: I think I understand what he means, which is that he would be as riveted as you.

Kandell: But I was just—yes, if he were—

McAllister: And he wouldn't, therefore, be able to do his job.

Kandell: If he were riveted like me, we couldn't do—

McAllister: Right.

Kandell: [00:25:09] I mean, that's pretty seductive, boy. To me, anyway. I'm more sensory. I don't know, right brain, left brain, or whatever. And it just grabbed me. Then it started in with



rehearsals. Well, how do you keep a job as a psychologist running groups if you have to be at a rehearsal at 10:00 in the morning, 10:30 in the morning, and your classes are at 10:30 in the morning, and it was difficult to do both, so I tried to handle both for a little while. It didn't work. And so gradually, I waited until my classes ended, and then I gradually moved into the opera world, which I have been there ever since, including the other day, and I love it. I just can't get enough of it. I absolutely love it. Does it lead anywhere? I don't know.

McAllister: Let's talk about this part of your life. So from becoming a supernumerary, you then moved eventually into being chair of the International Vocal Arts Institute and chair of the International Opera Alliance. Did you have much of a background in music, or was it just—it's interesting, because the moment that you just described about music reminds me of the moment that you talked about in your first interview when you first went to Sikkim.

Kandell: Yes, exactly.

McAllister: And the experience you had of the country, and that that was riveting.

Kandell: Oh, funny.

McAllister: Yes.

Kandell: Oh, funny. I never thought of that, yes.

McAllister: And it sounds like you had a similar kind of experience here.

Kandell: Yes.

McAllister: And that that just took you on this path, as with Sikkim, that you had not anticipated at all, it sounds like.

Kandell: [00:26:54] Not at all. Nowhere near it. I had gone to the opera. My grandfather had a subscription. My mother and father, and then just my mother, because my father stopped going, they had a subscription. I used to go a little bit. I played the piano a little bit. But nothing had prepared me for that experience.

McAllister: Somehow being on stage and hearing the music on stage seems to have done it for you.

Kandell: [00:27:23] Well, that close up to that kind of talent and beauty, and group talent, the orchestra and the chorus and everything together. Oh, my god. I mean, it started out in *La Bohème*, where it's all together in that one second act. Oh, my god. It was just unbelievable. [laughs] And never gave up. It's all unbelievable, every one of them.

McAllister: So how did you go from being a supernumerary to then be chair of these two organizations—

Kandell: Well, the woman who had helped me—

McAllister: —[crosstalk] be part of the organization of things?

Kandell: [00:27:50] The woman who had helped me get a part in Puccini Opera Laboheme in the first place. After that, I was cast in many different operas. In fact, I have been performing at the Metropolitan Opera for thirty years this year.

McAllister: In your job, organizationally in these two chairperson positions, why did you take them and what were you and are you trying to accomplish?

Kandell: [00:28:49] Well, there was this woman who first helped get into the opera was an opera coach at the Metropolitan Opera.,She ran a program at the time in Israel for young singers, training young Israeli singers. And I eventually got to know her, and she asked me to be on her board. She was forming a board for the first time. They had just been loosey-goosey like everything else, always. Then she decided to form a board and have bylaws, and stuff, and would I be on a board? Yes. And then the chairman of that board—I was there for about a year, and then that chairman had to leave, so then I took over.

McAllister: And this is the International Vocal Arts Institute?

Kandell: [00:29:34] International Vocal Arts Institute, which started in Israel training opera singers. We grew it. I said, “You should be in other countries as well.” And we were in many different countries. I got venues in countries, because she was a wonderful coach, wonderful. She ran a fabulous program training young singers. Most of the teachers were from the Metropolitan Opera. They were all her friends. She worked at the Metropolitan Opera as a coach and assistant conductor, so all her friends were from there, and the training was absolutely fabulous. And to this day, I’m still meeting singers that we trained when they were very young.

There’s one who was a conductor, one fantastic conductor. He was a baritone. He didn’t quite make it as a baritone. I tried to help him. I brought him to America to study, and he didn’t make it as a baritone, but Daniel Barenboim discovered him as a conductor. Said, “You’re a conductor, not a singer.” And now I saw him conducting at the Metropolitan Opera. He was conducting *Turandot*, which is a huge opera. Oh, my god. So those students are showing up now still, and saying, “That was my whole life,” Israelis and non-Israelis alike.

It was about two-thirds Israeli and one-third international students. Then we trained singers in many different countries. We expanded it, and it got big, in fact, a little bit too big for us to all go as a group. But we were in China, we were in Japan, for four weeks at a time, teaching. We had singing teachers, acting teachers, stage directors, pianists, all different things that go into making an opera singer. I mean, they didn’t have costumes and scenery, but all the different things that made it, mostly singing, teaching, and coaching, and then whole operas together with no scenery, no costumes, only piano, but the student operas were sold out wherever we went. And I liked the idea of training young opera singers, and getting the training out.

And so then I moved over to—the man who was the director of the Virginia Opera, he founded it. And we also had another program. We went to China. It was a little higher level. And Greece. We went to different places, but mostly in the US. He's now continuing it.

McAllister: The other organization, I wondered how it fits into what you were talking about, a kind of organization, was the International Opera Alliance.

Kandell: [00:32:22] Oh, I'm sorry. That's the one with the Virginia Opera.

McAllister: That was Virginia.

Kandell: [00:32:24] That's what we called it, the International Opera Alliance. And that was a little higher level. We put on a whole opera in Shanghai. We opened up the new opera house with a production of *Tosca*, using all Chinese except one American singer. Amazing. Chinese orchestra. He did it.

McAllister: And you're still participating in the opera as a supernumerary.

Kandell: I'm still there.

McAllister: Are there other ways in which you're still—

Kandell: [00:33:00] Yes. Right now—

McAllister: —still working? Yes?

Kandell: [00:33:02] —we're working with a group called the Athenians, which I, kind of, began here with little concerts in my house here. We gave more and more concerts here, right here on this piano. It got better and better, and our singers got better and better. Michael Fennelly is the musical director, and he is a very well-known pianist and accomplished pianist. He also plays for auditions at the Metropolitan Opera and all over the place, and so he knows who the good singers are. He gets those good singers. They're not stars yet. Many of them are, now, but at the time that we get them, they're not. They're young. They're beautiful. And we have these concerts. So now we're going to be at Carnegie Hall.

McAllister: Who's going to be at Carnegie Hall?

Kandell: [00:33:53] This group of singers.

McAllister: Is this part of the International Opera Alliance, or is this completely different?

Kandell: [00:33:56] No. This is nothing to do with them. This is altogether different. And we call them the Athenians. It's a whole different group. They're young singers. They change, because they get careers, and so we get new ones that are up and coming, and they're all fabulous. But we've been to and toured China. They loved us. We were in Macao and Beijing. We went to Dubai with this singing group. This is recently. This is last year. This is going on now.

McAllister: And you go on these trips?

Kandell: [00:34:27] Yes, I do. And I work the room as best I can. And Dubai. We were supposed to go to China again this year, but it was in the area of where Urumqi is, you know, the Uyghurs, and so everybody's—our visa was cancelled. We're going to be, on the seventh of February, in Carnegie Hall. If you want to come, you can hear them.

McAllister: I'm not sure I'll be in New York, but if I am, I would like to come.

Kandell: [00:35:03] No? Yes. That's very exciting to me, to hear these young singers develop. Just to hear them. It's just so fabulous to be that close to a voice in my own living room. It's so thrilling. You have no idea. It's just absolutely as riveting as that first experience, every time. I love giving these parties, because they sing. They're wonderful. Hopefully somebody hears them, and they do, and they carry them on.

McAllister: What's interesting to me is that, we'll talk about your life as a mother, but we've talked a little bit, now, about your developing these opera singers. We talked earlier about your helping mothers develop their bonds with their children. It seems like one of the things that animates you is, you're interested in fostering capacities of individuals.

Kandell: [00:36:03] Looks like that, doesn't it? Yes, you're right. Yes, fostering. Yes. Yes, that's been, starting with the children, except for the Mount Sinai years, which was, kind of, whatever, but yes, the young children.

McAllister: And obviously you did that as a mom. Yes, and we'll talk about that.

Kandell: [00:36:21] Oh, yes. That was all right, running right through that, of course.

McAllister: That's the primary development that was—

Kandell: [00:36:24] We have to mention that as being the primary thing. We talk about these other things. They're just talk. But the real thing is the children and the family. That was the real thing.

McAllister: Let me hold that in abeyance. We will get there. I did want to ask you one final thing in terms of the arts, which is that you also were on the US Presidential Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. What was that like?

Kandell: [00:36:49] Yes. Well, I supported [William J.] Clinton in those years. I thought he was young and vibrant, and I was on a panel with him in Florida about education. For some reason, they sat me next to him.

McAllister: This is when he's president, or before he's president?



Kandell: [00:37:12] Yes, while he was President. Right. There was a panel about education, and I talked about music and education. And I said, “When children have music in their education, their math scores are better.” And that’s true. It’s been proven to be true. And music education is critical.

The President said, “I would rather play my saxophone than do almost anything else except be with my family, I love it so much. And I had the privilege of having that experience in high school myself. But if the school's roof leaks, they cancel the music programs. And that’s terrible.” Growing up, he loved his music.

I’ve talked to musicians, and that was the one thing that saved them, very often. Many of them come from backgrounds that don’t have the money to support lessons. And music, they just were drawn to it. And I was, too. What can I tell you?

McAllister: And when you were on this committee, do you remember any particular work that the committee was involved in?

Kandell: [00:38:37] Yes. After that, he appointed me to his **Committee on the Arts and Humanities**, because he knew that’s where I belonged. It was a very erudite group of people run by Harriet Fulbright. The idea was to advise the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities as an advisory board. We worked hard to get a **“Music Day”** or an **“Arts Day”**. You know how there’s Earth Day, and that kind of stuff. We wanted to

get an arts day, and unfortunately, Clinton's term ended, and the committee was taken over by the next administration, who didn't follow that up. That was too bad. You know, you have your disappointments in life when things you work on don't come to fruition. I've had plenty of those. That's the way it is. It could have been so nice.

McAllister: Switching gears a little bit, in addition to all this work in the arts, and music in particular, we've been talking about, you also had, somehow, time to do work on human rights, and children's rights, and women's rights. You were vice president of the International League for Human Rights, and you were delegate to a UN [United Nations] meeting on child trafficking. How did you come to get interested in these things?

Kandell: [00:40:01] Well, that's not unusual. My mother was also a delegate to the United Nations from the International League for Human Rights, and I grew up at the UN, sitting at her feet in the delegates' lounge as she tried to negotiate to get some dissidents out of Russia in exchange for us releasing some prisoners, that kind of stuff. It's all done in a back room, and it was all done in the delegates' lounge. She'd be in there, and she'd go to the meetings. The meetings were rather tedious and never did much for me, because [laughs] it was boring. But the back room stuff was so interesting.

She was very interested at the time in human rights. She did minimal marriage age laws. You know, in India, they were marrying them off at nine years old. She worked on trying to get the UN to pass minimal age for marriage, and they finally got it up to 16. I remember that. And she worked on trying to get people out of Russia that were stuck. At that time, it was very difficult.

Russia was a very difficult place. They had no internet. Not allowed. They had no information. There were telephone calls in the middle of the night, because of the time change. I remember listening in the middle of the night to the conversations as they were talking to [Aleksandr] Solzhenitsyn, and [Andrei] Sakharov, and their wives, and they finally showed up. [Mstislav] Rostropovich, a cellist, a very famous cellist, and she worked on getting that. That was natural for me.

That wasn't unusual for me to move into that group. It was called the International League for Human Rights. It used to be called the International League for Rights of Man. That was when it started, by Roger Baldwin, with the League of Nations. The rights of man, well, that sounds good. But, boy, then they got picketed, [laughs] so you can imagine.

McAllister: So you got involved in this when in your life? In your twenties? In your thirties? When did this—

Kandell: Oh, a child. Yes, as a child.

McAllister: I mean, I know you were involved then, but not as a delegate or not as—

Kandell: [00:42:17] Oh, well, [unclear], you know, I had children. First of all, it's crazy, but I was in Sikkim, and then I came home and got married, and then I had a family. So it was going on then that I started to work there, first as a member of the league, and then as vice president of it. Then, unfortunately, the funding disappeared, as things do happen.

McAllister: You described what your mother was involved in, the specific issues, especially with the Soviet Union. Did you continue working in that particular issue area, or were there other issues that you took on in the context of this?

Kandell: [00:42:57] Well, you know, times change. Russia opened up. They got the internet. You saw what happened there. Russia opened. The [Berlin] Wall came down, and they came out. Solzhenitsyn came out. Sakharov came out. And Rostropovich came out. I remember going to a party. Leonard Bernstein had a party for Rostropovich. He was a cellist. And it was an International League Party. It was in Bernstein's apartment. And we were all supposed to go there, and then Bernstein would give a speech, and the International League director would give a speech. And Rostropovich walked in, [laughs] and he and Bernstein started hugging, and they wouldn't stop hugging, and they kept on hugging, and hugging, and hugging, and hugging, [laughs] and people were saying, "Excuse me, but it's time to start," and they were just hugging away. [laughs]

Anyway, I started in with children's rights, with trafficking of children in the sex trade. Boy, was that frustrating. Wow, was that frustrating.

McAllister: Because?

Kandell: [00:44:21] Well, I went to the UN, in Geneva [Switzerland]. They had a big convocation of that. And at that time, there was a new director of human rights. That's

something new in the UN. But something really new was children's human rights. And she was a Thai woman, from Thailand, and I went to her. I made a meeting, and I went to her. I had a talk with her about sex trade with young—and she would have none of it. She said, “There isn't any. The real problem with children is that they're running from Mexico in sewer pipes into America, and they're getting sick because the sewers are dirty, and America has to close off those sewer pipes.” Well, that didn't have anything to do with Asian children being in the sex trade. It's a very difficult—oh, my God. And so I remember the director of the league said to me, “Don't make yourself crazy.” I did make myself crazy. It was awful. It was really so deflating. And, you know, you do what you can.

And I came home and tried to do something with the American government. They put it in the labor department, because it was work. You know, what? And then when Clinton time came along, Hillary [Rodham Clinton] went, and she saw this going on. They were in Israel. There were these trafficked girls in Israel from Asia. She said, we have to do something for these girls. But if the girls go to the police, they don't have documents. The traffickers take their papers away from them, these children, so the government puts them in jail. So now what? I mean, it was just horrible, and it still is.

The safehouses are where the children are captured from the brothels and put in safe environments.

Traffickers go into the villages, convince the parents that they are going to take their children to educate them.

It still is. I went to Thailand. They have a terrible problem with child trafficking. Where traffickers go into isolated villages, offering families education for their young daughters. The parents don't realize their children will be sold as sex slaves. Traffickers say, "We'll educate your children," and then they take them away and lock them up. And these children—oh, it's so awful.

I visited the safehouses where certain NGOs rescue these underage girls from the brothels. One woman in Thailand was writing and broadcasting radio programs into the villages to educate and warn the families about the traffickers. She was making radio broadcasts, but they had no radios in many of the villages. So I went to a store, and said, "I want all of your boomboxes." I bought forty radio boomboxes, as many as they had, to go into the villages in Thailand, in Chiang Rai. Not even Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai. The woman's brother was a translator on the border of Burma, so he could take these to the villages, and they'd disperse them. And then they needed batteries, so I bought boxes and boxes of batteries, so each individual village would have one. And I heard, the next time I went back, that they had a convocation of head people from these villages, and that they it worked. But, you know what? A girl is reusable. Drugs, they have to grow, but not girls. It was very frustrating. It was worthwhile, but trying to interfere is next to impossible. Can you make an inroad into something that has so much money involved? It is more lucrative than drugs.

We went up to the border—I forget if it was Chiang Mai or Chiang Rai—and had a chief of police and all these policemen around there. We went there with this women’s group from Hillary Clinton, “Vital Voices”. All the policemen were there, and the chief of police. Children were being kidnapped and smuggled into Thailand from Burma, Laos, and China. And I asked a question, “Tell us about one trafficker that you have apprehended with girls.” Silence. So I thought, well, they don’t understand, and I asked again. They understood fine. They didn’t answer. The chief of the police has the biggest house on the golf course. Okay, what does that mean? Where is that money coming from? Bribes from traffickers were so lucrative.

And the stories are, and the safehouses try to get people to raid the houses where the girls are, the brothels, and they get there, and there are no girls. They’re on vacation. Police tip them off. You know, they go there with the police, because they can’t go without the police. [sighs] I mean, you don’t give up, but it’s just so deflating.

McAllister: One of the things that, as you’re telling about being in Chiang Rai and distributing the boomboxes, it brought me back to that, when you were talking about music, that you would go on these trips, in which you were trying to develop singers in different countries. Some people might just sit back in New York and be behind the desk of these organizations. It sounds like you like to be out in the field, if you will, and really be very hands on.

Kandell: [00:49:26] Oh, totally. Yes. I rarely just give money to something or other.

Occasionally, but it has to be something that I’m viscerally involved with. Yes, I always went with the vocal arts training groups. I went to China. I went to Japan. I went to Mexico, France,

and I was always searching for new venues. I'd go to France and look for new places and students to teach.

McAllister: So, for yourself, where do you think that sense of wanting to be in situ, hands on—do you have any sense of where that comes from? What we first talked about, going to Sikkim, and that opened things up for you there, in terms of Tibetan culture. I was wondering if, somehow, that experience maybe influenced your experience in wanting to be hands on elsewhere.

Kandell: [00:50:17] I don't think that. I think it started much earlier. I think it was, I've always wanted to know how things work. It's a good question. [laughs] It's a very good question. I've always wanted to know what makes things work. What makes your mind work? What makes everything work? Computers are beyond me, but when I renovated this apartment many years ago, I was the general contractor. I had to know how you put together an electric [laughs] socket. I know where every electric socket comes from, and everything. I don't just say, "Oh, here's the key. I'll be back."

McAllister: It shows in the shrine. I mean, you wanted to know how a shrine worked religiously, even if you're not a Buddhist. You wanted to know how it worked religiously and to make sure that you had a setup that was [crosstalk].

Kandell: [00:51:07] Well, that. I tried to go to Tibet, but Tibet doesn't exist anymore, and didn't when I was there. It was a bunch of soldiers, a lot of soldiers. There were some buildings. Most



of them were blown up. Most of them were just rubble. There was one, the Potala, the main palace of the Dalai Lama, that Zhou Enlai had protected during the [Chinese] Cultural Revolution. The rest was blown up. Dynamited, I mean, to rubble. And a monk was somebody who sat at the door taking tickets. I mean, there was nothing. Army, soldiers. There was nothing there of old Tibet. So I recreated it [laughs] here.

McAllister: Speaking of your human rights work, in addition to the children's work, I understand that you also did some work in the field of women's rights. Is that—

Kandell: [00:51:55] Right. I was very active in the Clinton presidency at that time, particularly more in the second half. I was involved in a lot of the things he did. And when Hillary—

McAllister: A lot of the things he did in the context of women's rights, or more generally?

Kandell: [00:52:16] A lot of different things, yes. Well, at that time, it was the arts, remember? The music and the arts. Seems like I jump around. Yes. But Hillary had founded the Save America's Treasures. She and Bill decided they wanted to do something for the twentieth century, and rather than build a monument, which most people would have done, they said, "We're going to save the treasures that are America." The first thing was, of course, the American flag, the Betsy Ross flag. But all kinds of buildings and all kinds of everything. Martha Graham's dance steps, Louis Armstrong's papers. It wasn't just a big building. It was buildings, too. And we traveled up the east coast, and traveled out west, and traveled to California, to these different places that needed to be saved.

McAllister: When you say we, whom do you mean?

Kandell: [00:53:13] We. She had a group of about six or eight of us who joined her committee, because I'd been active with him, and we joined the Save America's Treasures group. We went on a bus tour. There were three buses. One was Hillary, and her chief of staff, and some of her staff. One bus was us, these six or eight women who were helping to support her. And then the third bus was the press. And we went up the eastern seaboard to Harriet Tubman's house, Thomas Edison's—I'm just off the top of my head. There were many, many things we did. And by going there, we highlighted them for the people, and then they've since developed them and saved them. The administration donated seed money.

Anyway, when Hillary left the White House at the end of the administration, she started Vital Voices for women. I joined that group. And I was on the board of that ever since. Vital Voices. It still is in Washington, and they're working for women's rights and children's rights. I was doing trafficking for them. I did a lot for them. I went around to various places. I went to, I told you, Thailand. I did these kinds of things for them. They're more or less in women's rights now. The problem was, I was on their board, and they're in DC. It's hard for me to get to DC. I don't have that kind of time. If they don't have a quorum, you know—so I try to support them. Well, that was in 2000. It started 20 years ago. Yes, I'm still involved, and when they come to New York, I have big receptions for them, and I still support them.

McAllister: One thing I wanted to go back to that you mentioned earlier—this is in the context of your mother and the International League for Human Rights, and the UN—in that you were interested not so much in the meetings but in the back room stuff, I think you said, you described it.

Kandell: Again, yes. How it works.

McAllister: Right. Again, yes, I suppose it's your interest in how things work. But what specifically, though, about the back room stuff did you find fascinating?

Kandell: [00:55:43] I don't know. It was something that was not—these big meetings were boring, really boring. Had a lot of papers, [unclear] headsets. I didn't really want to go to those. But to get something done, you had to go in the back room. She was talking to them. I didn't really always know what they were talking about. I didn't. I was too young.

McAllister: How old were you at this time?

Kandell: [00:56:03] Probably high school or college, and that age.

McAllister: So you knew enough, though.

Kandell: I knew enough, yes.

McAllister: You're old enough to be able to pick out that a deal was really going down here.

Kandell: [00:56:14] No, I'm not so sure I knew exactly what the deal was or what was happening. She would tell me later. "There's an Argentinian guy who is in jail. If they let him go, maybe we can"—you know, that's where the deals happened.

McAllister: So she would talk with you. She would discuss afterwards.

Kandell: Yes, a little bit.

McAllister: Did you want to go to these meetings, or did she say, "Come along," with them?  
How did that work out?

Kandell: I don't remember. Probably both.

McAllister: Yes, yes. But she would bring you into the dynamics of what was going on.

Kandell: [00:56:39] She wasn't very forceful in saying, "You have to go." You know, she would never do that. I must have wanted to, or I wouldn't have gone.

McAllister: Right. And then, as I said, she cultivated that interest by when you got home—

Kandell: [00:56:50] She did. And my father, too. My father was a businessman. He wasn't involved hands on at all. He was hands on in his business. But he would donate to them, so he was part of them like that. Yes, I would go with her. I must have wanted to. And then I became the vice president when she wasn't there anymore. She had retired.

McAllister: Speaking of family, maybe we can segue into talking about your family and your children. One of the things that I was interested in was—there are two in particular, in addition to whatever else we may talk about. One was that you were a child psychologist raising two sons. Looking back, do you have a sense of what the relationship was between that, how being a child psychologist perhaps influenced your raising the sons? And vice versa, how raising the sons had an impact on how you practiced as a child psychologist? Or did they not seem to interact much for you?

Kandell: [00:57:02] I don't think they interacted much. The early childhood development stuff was pretty much after—well, I didn't get into that until later, after the kids were ten or twelve, much too old for that. I don't know. I don't think it played much. I got married in '71 to a man who had a child already. His wife had died, and he had a two-year-old, and turned three, and suddenly, I had a three-year-old. And I absolutely adored him. Adored him, and adored everything about him, and everything about the whole thing. There was just no choice. I loved it. I loved his father, and, I mean, we were a family right away. We waited to get married. I don't know why, because that's what you do, which is stupid. We should have just gotten married right away.

McAllister: Right away meaning, when had you met him? How much before you got married?

Kandell: [00:59:08] Well, we waited. When did I meet him? I don't know. Sometime. It was about a year before we got married, which was silly. We should have. And then we got engaged, and we waited, like, six months. Dumb. We should have just—I mean, for the sake of the child. But anyway, we didn't. And we didn't even live together. We should have, when I think about it. But anyway, that's over with. He's all grown up, and he's a professor. [laughs] So he survived.

But he was absolutely wonderful. Just wonderful. And we were a family. And then I had my own child. Those were wonderful, wonderful years. Absolutely wonderful. I loved being a mother. I never thought about, I am a psychologist, and I have—you are who you are, and you just respond. There are times when you respond because you are you. It's in the middle of the night and the baby cries. What do you do? You don't think, now, what I would do as a psychologist would be, blah. No. You just do what you do. And if he hits the terrible twos, you do what you do. I think that was just a lovely, wonderful time.

McAllister: It sounds as if you, from what you were just saying, is that when you had a child, or, kind of, insta-family. You had a child—

Kandell: Instant family, yes.

McAllister: —with your husband, and then your own, is that you took to it rather easily, which not everybody does. Some people wonder, in fact, will they take to having a child well? And

even when they then have a child, they wonder about what they're doing. But it sounds as if you felt pretty natural.

Kandell: [01:00:57] That would be so alien to me. I absolutely adored him from the minute I saw him. I mean, who wouldn't? He was the sweetest, most delicious—oh, god, still is. [laughs] He still is the same way.

McAllister: But it sounds like, in addition to who he is, and who he is about, it sounds like there's something there about you, in the sense of feeling this natural ability or confidence to be a mom.

Kandell: [01:01:34] Well, sure. I wanted a baby. I wanted a child. Always wanted a child. Always, always. All this other stuff was irrelevant. And I married the two of them, together, and it was wonderful. They were very much alike, also. It was wonderful. And then when the other one came along, that was wonderful, too. I mean, it was tough, because he had colic in the beginning, but he was adorable, delicious, wonderful kid.

McAllister: We've talked about a lot of stuff in the world, as opposed to in the home. Was much or any of the work we've been talking about in terms of your work in music, and your work as a child psychologist—how much of that was going on at the same time you were a mom, or did you say, I'm going to hold that in abeyance, or you did not yet get involved in the world?

Kandell: [01:02:35] When the kids were young, none of that was going on. I was just a mom. Photography, yes. I had been to Sikkim. I had been used to walking around with four cameras on me at all times. When we got married, and I stopped traveling, I traveled into the kitchen. I did four books about children. I don't know if you saw them, but *Ben's ABC Day*, about a day in the life of a child. I was photographing all the time, but them. I was photographing them. So that went on, but mostly, I was just being a mother. Yes, the photography, and I was studying photography, too. I'd go when they got a little bit older.

McAllister: I wanted to talk about the photography, so let's use this as an opportunity to get into that. As we've talked about last time, you studied at ICP [International Center of Photography] with—and at the New School.

Kandell: Yes, Cornell Capa.

McAllister: Right. That was in the late '60s, maybe? Early '70s?

Kandell: Well, ICP wasn't—

McAllister: It wasn't ICP yet.

Kandell: [01:03:34] It wasn't, no. It was Cornell Capa who was the director of it, and he and I were friends, and I was very much involved. This was before I even got married. I remember telling him, "Hey, Cornell, I'm getting married." He said, "What are you doing that for?"



[laughs] It was, like, aren't you a photographer? Aren't you supposed to be—what are you bothering with this stuff? And I thought, well, you know, he's right, but then there was no choice. I mean, I was marrying Bill, and that was it. I did give up the photography, in that respect.

McAllister: Before we talk about that, partly this is a recap from earlier, that you started getting interested in photography in order to be able to go to Sikkim and take photographs?

Kandell: Yes, that's why. Yes.

McAllister: Right. But then later on, it sounds like what you did, you picked it up at home, if you will.

Kandell: [01:04:28] Yes, I had to. Where was I traveling? I was traveling to the kitchen. Yes, that's when I started studying with Philippe Halsman at the New School, but it wasn't the New School. It was his studio. It was just the registration was there. And Cornell Capa I knew from before I got married, and I continued to study there. Then he started this thing called ICP. He called me up. He said, "I had a baby." I said, "What?" He was an old man. And he said, "Yes, we've found a building, and we're going to open up International Center of Photography." Which it was. It was a big thing for him.

McAllister: I remember when it opened up.

Kandell: [01:05:06] In the Audubon Society, yes. God, that was big doings for him.

McAllister: And now it's become a preeminent center.

Kandell: [01:05:16] And I studied all kinds of people, from W. Eugene Smith.

McAllister: You studied with him, or you studied his work?

Kandell: With him.

McAllister: With him. Oh.

Kandell: [01:05:27] Yes, he was still alive. He was injured. You know that Minamata thing? They tried to kill him. And he was injured, but he still could teach. It was terrible, and fascinating, also. Oof, hear the story and see what happened. Oh, my god.

McAllister: So you turned your lens, both your motherly lens and your photographic lens, on your children.

Kandell: [01:05:56] [laughs] I did. I realize I see things in sequences. I don't see a picture. I do see a picture, but mostly I see a story, and so I try to tell a story from beginning to end. That's a lot of my photography. My Sikkim books are that way, and my children's books are that way.

McAllister: Can you give me an example from your children's books of, like when you said a sequence of your children here, where you take photographs. What's a story? What's a narrative?

Kandell: What's a story?

McAllister: Of your children in photographs.

Kandell: [01:06:28] The children were learning the alphabet. I had my camera, so let's do an alphabet book for children going through their day, a normal day. A, awakening. B, brushing. C, combing. D, dressing. E, eating. F, feeding the cat. D, dressing. You know, through the day, ending up with, Y, yawning. Z, zzz, you know. That was one sequence. Yes.

When the older one was about four, I called the music teacher at nursery school, and I said, "He's ready for piano lessons. Let's do piano lessons." She said, "No. What you do is you let him explore music before you have real lessons." This was a music teacher. She was good, Miriam Stecker [phonetic]. So I started taking pictures. And she said, "Take pictures of him exploring music." So I did a book called *Max the Music Maker*, where he took a stick along a fence in the street, and it went [trills tongue], and he would bang on pots, and fill glasses full of water in the kitchen. He would listen for bugs in the grass. He would make instruments out of cigar boxes and rubber bands. You know, we did all of that. So I put that all together, and tried to get it published. For eight years, I didn't get it published, until somebody at Lothrop, Lee & Shepard took it. And it won a prize. The National Academy of Sciences gave it a prize as being all about science. [laughs]

McAllister: Let's take the alphabet book. You would pose your child brushing his teeth, or sleeping, or—

Kandell: [01:08:28] Well, no. You have to do it while it's happening. Otherwise it doesn't look like it's happening.

McAllister: Just organically.

Kandell: Has to be.

McAllister: As he would do it naturally.

Kandell: [01:08:35] Has to be. You can't say at two o'clock in the afternoon, "Now brush your teeth." I've got the book. I can't get the book out. Do you want to see it?

McAllister: I think I'll take a look at it on the way out, yes.

Kandell: [01:08:49] Then I did a story about Mommy goes away, and what happens when Daddy and Ben are home alone together. What do they do together? Daddy wants to read his newspaper. He wants to be on the telephone. He doesn't want to be with you. Then what happens? They finally get it together and they start telling jokes, and then they're together. They do things together. And he's shaving together [laughs] with his father.

McAllister: How did your husband and how did the kids take to being photographed? Were they into it, or was it, like, okay, we'll indulge Mom?

Kandell: [01:09:31] Oh, it's all, we'll just indulge her. Here she comes again. I don't think they loved it. [laughs]

McAllister: Do they like it now? Do they like having the book to show their kids?

Kandell: [01:09:45] Probably they do. They both took photography. They both got into photography. The younger one was really excellent, but he became a businessman, and just gave it up. And the other one was really good. He had a darkroom and everything in his apartment. But now he went into—linguistics PhD.

McAllister: What do you think, thinking of yourself as a mom, and looking at your children, is most reflective of you in who they are?

A; [01:10:30] Isn't that interesting? I see them—

[INTERRUPTION]

McAllister: So what I was asking was, what do you think, when you think about your children, what aspects of them most reflect you and how you are, and what you try to raise in them?

Kandell: [01:11:02] That's such an interesting question, to think about it. The older one is very Asian-oriented. He's now, currently, an Asian linguistic specialist. But he was always interested in Asia, and China. He loves to go to China. He took Chinese when he was young. I'm not Chinese, but when they were small, I think the Asian influence was there. They asked him if he missed the shrine room, and he said, "You know, it was always there. It was always in the house. When we had company, the offering bowls were full of candy, so we knew company was coming." [laughs] They were both out of the house when I gave it away. He's very Asian-oriented, which, I mean, I am, too. I love that stuff. I love it.

The other one is the other half of me, which is business. My father was in the real estate business, and I worked in that for a while. I'm still doing it. I build houses, sell them, mostly for myself, not as a business. But I'll build a house, and then buy another one, and sell that one. He's watched me knock down this whole entire apartment from nothing. He was young. He was eight. Knock it down completely, and build the whole thing again. This apartment is not what it looked like. He watched me knock down a house. We had a cottage in the country. I knocked that down and rebuilt it. Completely knocked it down. Then I sold that one and got another one, knocked that house down. He watched me doing all of this, and now he's a builder. [laughs] Much bigger and much better than me. He works for a company that builds buildings. He's a developer, and he's very real estate. That's what he is, he's a businessman. He's turned into that, but, you know, he's older now. He's in his forties, and he's a real realtor, like my father. And I'm very much like my father, too, in many ways. Are you like your mother or your father? Do you know?

McAllister: I'm not really like either, I think.

Kandell: You're not like either.

McAllister: What's interesting to me about what you were just saying about building, two elements of it. One was, it's very apropos of what we were talking about before with your International Vocal Arts Institute, with your work in human rights, very hands on. Building is very hands on. It sounds like you were very hands on.

Kandell: Very [phonetic] true, yes.

McAllister: But also, it struck me that the shrine also comes out of this hands on. You built—

Kandell: Absolutely.

McAllister: —you built a shrine, you know?

Kandell: [01:14:05] Absolutely. Absolutely. I had a feeling of what it might look like. I had seen one in Sikkim, in the palace. They had a shrine room. I was only allowed to peek in. I wasn't allowed to see it. I peeked in once, that's all, and I never forgot it. And then when I saw one in Brooklyn, I thought, wow. It wasn't really one. At Philip Rudko's house. But it was his bedroom, and he had a television and all that stuff in there, and a bed. But I just had an image, I guess, of that.

But getting back to my children, I am very much—I never thought of this—I’m very much a part of my mother and my father both, and they’re both very strong influences, mostly my father. My mother was a more gentle person. She had been a nursery school teacher first. She was more children-oriented. My father was the businessman. Now I have two kids, one of whom is very—doing what I’m doing, Asian, and more gentle, and the other one is very hard, very good businessman. You’ve got to be hardcore to be a good businessman, and he is. It’s like living with sharks, but he’s doing it, and I assume he’s loving it. He’s been doing it all, and he loves it.

McAllister: Especially real estate in New York City. I think that was his [phonetic] something specialty, so—

Kandell: [01:15:33] Real estate in New York City, and that’s what my father did. Not like him.

McAllister: Speaking of your children, and you’ve done extensive traveling in your life. I know we’ve talked before about traveling to Mongolia with your son. I was wondering if you’d traveled a lot with your children.

Kandell: [01:16:02] Every year, we went someplace with the kids, but nothing exotic. I mean, we’d go to a Caribbean island, we went to Mexico. When they were small, we went to Disneyworld. But every year we’d go for a week on their spring vacation. We’d go someplace. And my son still does that with his children. Every spring vacation, they go someplace interesting, and then they go skiing in the second week. [laughs]



McAllister: When you were talking before about the shrine room always being there as the kids were growing up, did they think that this was peculiar, or did they just think this is a natural thing? Did their friends ask them about, what's this weird room? Do you have any sense of that?

Kandell: [01:16:52] Well, it wasn't a room. It was just all over the house. It was artwork like that. Did you think your parents were peculiar?

McAllister: Well, kind of, I guess.

Kandell: [01:17:02] You do? Do I think my parents are peculiar? You just think they are what they are. That's what life is. I never thought of them as anything other than, that's what it is.

McAllister: So all this was very natural for your children.

Kandell: [01:17:15] I'm not asking you now, but when you were young, did you think your family was anything other than what it was?

McAllister: No. Right.

Kandell: [01:17:22] Your family is who it is. Did they think I was peculiar? [laughs] I don't know if I am.

McAllister: Well, not you, but the art. Having these—

Kandell: Having that stuff in the house?

McAllister: Yes. I mean, most of their friends, for example. I assume they'd go to their friends' houses—

Kandell: And they wouldn't see it.

McAllister: This is unique. They're not going to see Tibetan art.

Kandell: [01:17:39] Well, your house is different from my house. I don't know what they thought, but I don't think they thought it was anything other than, it's always been here, and that's what it is. It was never, don't touch it. It was never that.

McAllister: Earlier, we were talking about the women's movement. You came of the women's movement roughly when you're in your late twenties, early thirties. Around the time you're getting married, the women's movement was beginning. The famous second wave of the women's movement was coming full force. I was wondering if you have any sense of how the women's movement then and since has had an impact on your life or on your thinking. Has there been much impact at all?

Kandell: [01:18:30] I think when I was at Mount Sinai as a psychologist. I didn't feel it so much, because I'd gone to Harvard, so the administration saw me not so much as a woman but as a person working. I don't think the other people did much. That was the worst of it, when I was there. My father was very old fashioned about that. He was really chauvinist. My mother was put down. He appreciated her and admired her, because she could cook and take care of the children, and he helped her with her other little things, whatever she did. She was a teacher, and she was at the UN. It wasn't all that important. He took precedent at the dining table. He was the important one.

In my professional life, I avoided places where I would have to fight that battle, although it was pretty obvious to me. By the time I got to early childhood development, it wasn't relevant. There weren't very many men there, anyway. Mount Sinai, it was quite relevant among those doctors. Now, I don't think so anymore. There are lots of women doctors. There weren't then. I don't know whether I was able to buck it, or just I avoided the situations where I would get into that. I think probably the latter. I think I avoided going into the law and places where I would be looked upon as inferior for being a woman.

When it came down to renovating and working with real workmen, I don't think they appreciated my being a woman much. In fact, I think they sure didn't like it, and I think they still don't like it. They don't want to be told what to do by a woman, but you have to tell them what to do.

Otherwise, they don't know what to do. But they don't want a woman to tell them what to do. I don't know. I'm about to do that now. I'm going to renovate the kitchen. Believe me, I'll face that.

McAllister: Yes, I'm sure it's never ending and exhausting. As we conclude our interview, is there anything else that we haven't talked about that you would like to talk about?

Kandell: [01:21:07] Oh, my god, we talked about so much. I don't know.

McAllister: There may not be anything, but I wanted to make sure that—

Kandell: [laughs] I don't think it's ever over.

McAllister: —we get—well, in that sense, it's never over.

Kandell: [01:21:15] I don't know what's going on. You know, I find that now, as my life gets on later, that all the things that I've done in the past are now coming to fruition, like I loved Sikkim. It didn't mean anything. That was just part of my life. I loved it. Then I did the shrine room because I loved those pieces, and all of a sudden, they were together. Then I gave them away, and suddenly, it's taken a life of its own, and people are interested in that. The photography that I did for years, and years, and years, and darkroom, and all that stuff. I just got a call from a museum saying, oh, they've seen my photography, they want to do a showing. I have a museum in India. They want it. So I called up the Smithsonian. I said, "What kind of a museum is this?" And she said, "What? Giving them your photography? We want your photography." So somehow the work that I did in those past years is now happening.

McAllister: How do you experience that?

Kandell: [01:22:17] It's fun to think of, and I feel lucky that I've lived this long, that I can see it come together. Before that, it was just something I was doing, and then it was over. But now, it's got some value to it. People are valuing it. To see something that I did as nothing, just for myself, or just because I did it, or just because it happened in front of me, to see it coming to fruition is—like the shrine room has taken on a life of its own. It's down there in Washington. People are writing about it, talking about it, seeing it, doing papers on it, I mean, whatever.

McAllister: I wonder if you feel this. As you're talking, what comes to my mind is that it's an honoring of your work that's perhaps happening now, with your photography, with the museum, with the Smithsonian, with the shrine room, and other work, that you're experiencing that it's being honored.

Kandell: [01:23:14] Well, it's nice. I don't know about the honor. Yes, I guess, I suppose. That's your word. I don't know. Yes, it's nice to be—

McAllister: Yeah, you can disagree with my words. That's why I wanted to see if—

Kandell: [01:23:24] —that it's nice to have the feeling that it's coming up. That, gee, you know, what I liked in those days wasn't just a big waste. What I liked, other people like, too. That's a nice feeling. When somebody reads something that you've written, or it gets published in some foreign newspaper, how do you feel?

McAllister: Right. No, it is gratifying.

Kandell: [01:23:47] It's something about what you liked and didn't really—I think I grew up as the second—I was the second one in the family, so I never really had the respect that the first one had. She was older, and better, and everything. And I never got the respect. And suddenly, it's, like, I never respected, or liked, or particularly put a lot of value on what I was doing. Now that it's coming back, and other people are saying, this is good—which they never did in the past—

McAllister: Let's scratch honor, and maybe, recognition? That you're being recognized more for what you're about.

Kandell: [01:24:25] Well, I suppose that's your word, too. I don't know. Am I? Yes. I don't know. It's just nice to—

McAllister: And, yes, to feel gratified for being recognized, perhaps.

Kandell: [01:24:34] I'm thinking, what I did in the past that I never put much value—because I never put much value on anything I do, because I was number two in my family, and my sister was always better at everything than I was. She's not anymore, but she was always better. And then I did all these things. I was trying so hard to be good, and it never had any value to me, because nothing I did was of value, because she was so much better. I don't know if I can explain that properly. She was always better than me, so I kept on trying. I got a PhD, and then I

did these books on Sikkim, and then I did this photography, and then I, whatever. Yes. It's like seeing your children grow up and be successful. What have you done? Everybody has that. Yes, I suddenly feel recognized, that what I thought was good is suddenly good to somebody else. That's a surprise to me. I'm not geared to do that. My life wasn't spent thinking that way, but here it is, and it's nice. I hope I live long enough to see the rest of it.

McAllister: Congratulations. Yes, congratulations, that's great. That sounds like a very good note on which we should conclude. But thank you very much.

Kandell: Well, thank you.

McAllister: This was wonderful.

Kandell: It was so nice.

[END OF INTERVIEW]