

AVERY FISHER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Nancy Fisher

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

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## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Nancy Fisher conducted by Gerry Albarelli on May 22, 2019. This interview is part of the Avery Fisher Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

ATC

Session #2

Interviewee: Nancy Fisher

Location: New York City, NY

Interviewer: Gerry Albarelli

Date: May 22, 2019

Albarelli: Okay. So I guess my first question is, did anything occur to you, any memories I'm sure were stirred up by the last session? Anything between then and now?

Fisher: Well, the first session was related to childhood, and anything additional? I can't think of anything, in terms—I don't know where I stopped, actually.

Albarelli: Well, I think one thing I wanted to ask you is, you had said—I mean, just what it was like—and this came up in Philip [Avery Kirschner]'s interview, is he said it took a while for him to connect the dots that Avery Fisher Hall was just who his grandfather was. I think that was pretty obvious to you. I mean, you talked about when—the naming and so on, and your memories of what your father said about that.

Fisher: [00:01:56] Well, Philip was born in '80. I suppose my brother's two sons, Will and Matt, might have the same gaps in remembering Avery and the hall. They were not even at the memorial service, because they were too young. [pause] I think what I'm groping with is that my father didn't—was it my father's role or was it my role to explain what he had done, and it wasn't just with the name on the hall, on the building, that there was a history of a company. That's what I mean. That's where it really started. Interesting he said it that way. Whether that's

a failure on my part or just that I thought he was absorbing it, and he was—I'd have to know how old Philip was or how young he was.

Albarelli: Yes, I think he was talking about, you know, when he was quite young. And then he mentioned, I think—was it his sister who said, “Is the hall named after grandfather, or—”

Fisher: [00:03:27] It's classic. “Was Avery Fisher Hall named after Boopa, or was Boopa named after Avery Fisher Hall?” Diana said that. That's divine.

Albarelli: Yes, yes, I think so, too. I think why I wanted to start with that is just the weight of that name, you know? And I think one of the things that you touched upon was a kind of modesty, modesty both in terms of how you present yourself, and how you move around in the world, and that you got it from your father. Then there's this big name out there.

Fisher: [00:04:18] And the impact growing up with it. I think in Philip's current role as an advisor to the artist program, he's come back to realize this, to understand it. In other words, I was young enough, obviously, to have remembered the company, and to have worked out there, and to know that when it was just a—not just a business, but it was a business with a worldwide reputation, but then it morphed into something else. Anyway. But it carried a certain weight, and it's the weight that I feel that I still carry, even though the name is not on the building. But you go in there, and the list of the prize winners is there, so it's gone, but it's sort of not gone. We're in a different phase. I don't know where I left off, you know.

Albarelli: I think we had said that we would talk about the name change this time, and really, I think, when that first came up.

Fisher: [00:05:54] Well, I believe I mentioned in the first interview the efforts by Lincoln Center to put this on the table with their “Avery Fisher Hall of Fame”. And we rejected it. It was awful. It was like a cliché, and it was not worth taking that bait from them.

Albarelli: So what do you remember? You mentioned it, but really just briefly, so maybe you could mention the first time that that bait was offered. Philip talked a little bit about that, too, and about how his father talked to him about the legal ramifications of the possible name change the first time it was brought up.

Fisher: [00:07:03] You know, there were gurglings about taking down the building. I’d have to have my husband here to give you the exact dates. And we met at the offices at Schulte Roth & Zabel, because the family was ready to initiate a lawsuit. We were appalled by the mention of the possibility in the *New York Times*. That was the way they brought it up, the architectural firm that had been engaged to redesign the building, and the line in the *New York Times* article that said, “I wonder how the Fisher family will feel.” My mother was alive at the time, and she was at the meeting, but not really a strong participant. Reynold Levy was there. I became quite stirred up about their attitude. I got very angry at them. And I remember railing at Reynold Levy that he owed an apology to my mother for the issue having been come up the way it did. But it was an indication of, I guess, what they really felt, that they wanted the building. It also raised family issues, because neither my brother, Chip, nor my sister, Barbarba, participated in sharing the

legal bill for all of this. But the meeting broke up without any decision being made, and more an expression of standing our ground, although it was really my ground and my husband's ground. My sister doesn't live here, so she wasn't a participant, but my brother really backed away from it. That's probably fifteen years ago.

Then it came up with meeting Jed Bernstein. That's the next thing I remember. Sitting next to him at a planned encounter at a dinner party at the home of a friend of mine, who is a board member of Lincoln Center. Then Marc [Kirschner] and I had lunch with Jed. He wanted to know more about my father, which, just in hindsight, probably really didn't mean anything to him, for what they were planning. Then it morphed into this presentation of the Avery Fisher Hall thing, as if it were the Kennedy Center. And of course, that whole thing blew up, anyway. Jed blew up. That blew up. We said no. I guess Bernstein is still the president of Lincoln Center. We met in the offices. There was this mystery donor.

But the divisive impact within the family, between my brother and my sister, was augmented by this. They wouldn't have supported a continued legal battle with Lincoln Center. I remember my brother saying to me, "We've had a good ride." I remember that expression. He wasn't willing to stand as a family, nor was my sister, so I was the capitulating vote. I remember calling Yo-Yo Ma, who was somewhere in Asia performing, and his saying that my father would have done that—who the heck knows? My father wasn't here to voice his own words—and that the hall needed refurbishing or renovation, or who knows what. Anyway, it was executed. I remember the article that came out in the paper about the number of places that the name appeared at Lincoln Center, and what the process was in turning over the name, and whether it was in a

[laughs] bathroom, or who knows, some direction sign around the campus, that they had—it was, like, sixty-one places where it was. Can I use the word trade-off? I don't know.

I had two very unpleasant encounters over the whole thing. One was the husband of a former neighbor here in the building. I ran into him at Mount Sinai [Hospital] one Tuesday morning when I was up there volunteering in the cancer center. He's been not in treatment for cancer for years, but for something else somewhat related, and so I ran into him. I greeted him, and he said to me, he asked me, he said, "What are you going to do with all that money?" I know exactly where it happened, where I was standing, where I had just walked by greeting him, and that's what I get back. In a nanosecond, I knew—I didn't know, but I didn't know whether he thought that the \$15 million was coming to me, or that I had anybody to share that with, which, of course, were my brother and sister. I really controlled myself, because this guy has always not been high on my list. I remember turning around and saying something to the effect that that was an appalling question and none of his business. That's all he saw, you know, when we just greeted each other as we passed by each other. But I controlled myself.

Then there was another one at a New Year's Eve concert. We were in the hall, and I hear from behind me, "Did you hear Lincoln Center gave the Fisher family twelve million [dollars]?" There I didn't control myself, because it was hideous. It was as hideous, but it was in public. And I turned around, and I corrected the amount she had said. I also identified myself as Avery Fisher's daughter and that it was fifteen million. After intermission, she and her husband did not come back for the second half of that program.

It's been in the public conversation. People come up to me continuously and say to me, you know, it will always be Avery Fisher Hall, and all this. So it isn't a clean cut. Some things carry a deep emotional content, that you can't just slough it off for love or money. It just doesn't happen that way. It's an identity, which when I said to you in the first interview, I find very difficult to just look at the building as I pass by. It's not that—it hasn't been that easy. No pity party here, but that's an honest answer to your question. Those two incidents were—

And more recently, there was a gala at Lincoln Center to honor the sixty-year history and to honor several families who had been magnanimous in their financial contributions to Lincoln Center. And one of them was the friend of mine who started the conversation going in her apartment. The dinner was in the Metropolitan Opera House, and then we all went over to Alice Tully [Hall]. There was a program of artists who came out and played and performed and reminisced. It was Neil Patrick Harris who was the MC for the program, who came out and started to mention having appeared at Avery Fisher Hall. But in the film that was played, my father's name, and whatever his perceived contributions were to Lincoln Center, were not mentioned in this film at all. That accounted for two-thirds of those sixty years. It wasn't a film about him. It was a film about Lincoln Center in its first sixty years. I mean, there was nothing in there, either, about Alice Tully, but she's not related to me, and she was deceased when the hall was changed to Avery Fisher Hall. I never knew her. But I was pretty upset when I came home, and I wrote a letter to Katherine Farley, which I haven't ever mailed. My father always used to tell me, "Write it, but don't send it." He wasn't, I guess, in their minds, like Rudolf Bing to the Metropolitan Opera. I don't know, but my feelings are different, and I was pretty offended. It's just one more offense in the string.



But Lincoln Center went out of its way to handle the whole change carefully and appropriately, and with kid gloves. Then the final change came during the ten-day period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I guess it was 2015. Excuse me. Our synagogue held its high holy services for the general membership, which didn't buy the additionally expensive seats in the sanctuary. For years, they would have it at the Waldorf Astoria [Hotel], but then the Waldorf got booked, and they rented the hall to have their services in. It was really very beautiful. But that year, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the hall was changed. The name of the hall was changed. The invitations came out from the Central Synagogue Office. It was still Avery Fisher Hall to the congregation. And then on the day of Yom Kippur, when I was leaving the building, the photograph of my father was gone. I came downstairs, and somebody from Lincoln Center—his name is Cubby—was standing there waiting for me. He used to work for Jack Kirkman, who was the original director of the hall. Cubby was standing there waiting for me to come out of the hall, because this was, like, the last hurrah. And the photograph was gone. That was off the wall. So it was in that ten-day period that they were making the change. The places it was around the campus, the sixty-one places. They were slowly changing it over to [David] Geffen [Hall].

Anyway, that was hard. During that same ten-day period, I remember going out for lunch. You couldn't have scripted this. After the first day of Rosh Hashanah or the second day of Rosh Hashanah services, I don't remember which—one can still eat. [laughs] It's not a fasting day. And I went to Sette Mezzo on Lexington Avenue and, I think it's Seventieth Street. And I walked in, and I was meeting two friends, one of whom was in a wheelchair, so the restaurant placed the three of us at a window table. We're sitting there, and all of a sudden, I hear, "Good

afternoon, Mr. Geffen.” David Geffen sits down at the table next to mine. I’m looking at you now, and so he was to my left, and my two girlfriends were in front of me, and my—you know, it’s not like the food dropped out of my mouth, but my mouth dropped open. I remember that. I was where I didn’t want to be, and why did I feel that way? If you could imagine, he was sitting at the next table. Then I saw him subsequently at Kappo Masa, which is underneath the Gagosian Gallery. It’s a restaurant. By that time, I recognized him.

It’s like a slow-motion heartache dripping dry. I don’t know how my brother expressed it, and you won’t interview my sister, but that’s the residue. That’s the residue of all of this. Was it worth it? In hindsight, was it worth it? You know, I thought we were doing something good for the [New York] Philharmonic. For many, it was also a loss.

Albarelli: Can you say more, because it sounds as if there are many scenes, about the impact on the family? You said it had a divisive impact.

Fisher: [00:23:47] Well, the hall was preceded by a family discord after my mother died, over the settling of her estate and what she had done. So this was really the nail in the coffin. We have not been a family where the siblings are close to each other. It’s nothing to air in public. It is what it is.

Albarelli: Anything else about Bernstein to get across? Any other anecdotes that would illustrate his character?

Fisher: [00:24:44] You know, when the article came out about his firing, I was certainly shocked. He obviously was sent on a mission to start this. How were they going to get this going again, when Reynold Levy was rebuffed? Levy didn't get that done. He got a lot of other good things for Lincoln Center done, but he didn't get that done. Is the Philharmonic better off for this today? It's still the same building. They haven't gone anywhere. But I don't really know anything about Jed. The lunch at the 21 Club was lovely, following the dinner at my girlfriend's house, and then everything really took off at a gallop. It's over. You know, it's over. The way I feel—I don't know how my brother feels, and my sister doesn't live here, so she doesn't have that kind of contact. She comes several times a year from Paris, but—you know, I always wonder what people are thinking. Is there regret? You know, I guess that's what I'm saying. There is some regret. I guess I felt at the time I was doing a noble thing, casting my vote, but now I need to live with it.

And there is the media center at NYU [New York University]. But I think until the next generation goes through this, like going from the Triborough Bridge to RFK [Robert F. Kennedy Bridge], and can say it, or that they don't know that there was a Triborough—or I lived, in my lifetime, moving from the BMT [Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit] to the N and the R on the trains. It's a matter of language for people. I'm not that—I'm looking for the word—this is not the nine-eleven [September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks] of my life. You know, the impact – not has to be acknowledged, but I'm acknowledging it. It doesn't have to be acknowledged publically. I can't go back on the deal. But once the deal was made, the residue of it was something else, at least for me.

And the good thing to do is to remember what it is. He's known as the father of high-fidelity. Everybody has fathers. He wasn't God, but he had a presence and a name in this city, and I think, judging from the way people have said what they miss, they don't relate to Geffen. You know, Geffen's name is on the hall. My God, while I saw it, it was so different, because the name is illuminated. Who knows if that's what—the back panels on the hall—you can't begrudge somebody [because of] their wealth, and if they do good with that wealth. You know, people have their deep-seated objections to the Koch brothers, but I look more at the exterior beauty in front of the Metropolitan Museum of Art more than the name on what was the State Theater. As a gift to the city, it's exquisite. That gift did good. It's not for me to judge. I don't have the right to judge what David Geffen's gift did, or how they got there, or that they think about it before they go to sleep at night. They were pushing for the money. And should they have done it if the family wasn't going to come up with the hundred million to keep it? That wasn't going to happen. Did they have the right to require—you know, to go in that way? It's morality. Ask me anything else, or this is over.

Albarelli: About Philip's increasing involvement, maybe, and more about the award, now, and the grants. So in light of—

Fisher: [00:30:35] Well, as a mother, I've always been proud of my kid. I don't get to see him as an employee of—WeWork [real estate company] where he is, you know, but when I see him, it's a mother's—it's a gratitude as a parent for having raised a child who has the interest and the presence. And he really is a good kid. I wasn't there for the career grants this year. I was out of the country. I know he steps in, and he's a proud grandchild. How will his children feel about it?

It's so far removed, I don't know. But I'm proud of Philip. I have been, and I certainly always will be. He doesn't have the attachment to classical music that I had by having lived in my parents' household, but neither did I—my parents didn't take me to concerts—I mentioned that in our first session. Well, I didn't do that with Philip, either. We were taking our children to other things, but not to Lincoln Center, not when it was still Avery Fisher Hall. And if he wants to come to the beauty of classical music, then he'll have to do that on his own. The bottom line is, he's somebody I'm very proud of.

Albarelli: I get the impression it's mutual. He mentioned that he feels he's sort of inherited his grandfather's engineering prowess, that he had that something in common with his grandfather.

Fisher: [00:33:05] Well, that's lovely if he has that memory. The way I transfer that to him would be the giving of all my father's gorgeous tools that I have. Whether they're screwdrivers or pliers or whatever, when I say gorgeous, it's because when my dad bought tools for tinkering, as anybody else could have bought, things had wooden handles, not plastic handles. They really were beautiful tools. I have a collection of junk jars—that's what they're called. They're for screws and things like that—excuse me—that I have here. So the choice is to give them to Philip or to give them to Diana's husband Michael, who also is very handy, and who received a remarkable gift from his father about fixing things. It's nice to have two guys who know how to lift a screwdriver. I'm touched if Philip feels that way. It's been a long time since Avery's gone.

But he's a great husband, terrific father, and I know he's a good husband. To watch him, in this day and age, being an involved father, as many fathers are being required to be, to act. It's not

just all women's work anymore. There's a shared responsibility in child rearing. I love to hear him as a father speaking to his boys. There's this little Fisher radio that I have here. It's called the Fisher 100. And I gave it to him. Now, that Fisher 100 plays all day. Sadly enough, it's hard to get [W]QXR, since they moved. The station doesn't come in as clearly. But this little radio that I have here, I gave him one. I do have it on in the house all day long. That's the way I get classical music coming in here. And they don't put it on. It sits on the shelf proudly, but they don't play it. I remember one very tender moment when it was on, and Jonah [phonetic] must have been two years old, not older than that. It was an orchestral piece playing, and he put his index finger up to his lips to shush me from talking because the violins were playing. Where he got that, where it came from, I don't know, but it was a moment in their apartment when the little Fisher 100 was playing, and Jonah knew that they were violins. Jonah will come to learn about it however Philip and Kate talk about it.

I remember my husband's oldest grandchild, Alec [phonetic], asking me, why did I let the name go? He was in high school. He was still in high school. He's in college now. That meant that there was obviously some discussion in the family, but I didn't pursue it. I was so surprised that he asked about it, that I'd given up something.

The only other thing I want to say is, I think about that scene in *Pretty Woman* when Julia Roberts has left the hotel, severed the relationship with [Richard] Gere, and he's returning this gorgeous necklace that she wears the night that they go to the opera in San Francisco. The concierge says to him, "It's hard to let something beautiful go," and then he goes after her. That's that.

Albarelli: Okay. I'm going to pick up the video camera in a second. Any final thoughts? Those sounded like final thoughts, but—

Fisher: [00:37:56] The word high-fidelity will disappear from language, and how we see things, how we hear music. Now it's all so different. It's all so different. I don't know what my— anybody, not just my father, would say about a generation that loved—that had high-fidelity equipment, had long-playing records, what they would say about all this. The artists are still there, and they're producing magnificent music. I will always go and hear the Fisher Strad[ivarius violin] being played whenever it comes out and is given to a Juilliard student. The way we listen to music and the quality that comes through to us is different forever, for the majority of people who don't have systems in their homes. They're very expensive, or whatever. What are they relying on? I'm relying on the little Fisher radio.

WQXR the other day had a fundraising campaign where if you gave ten dollars a month or a \$120 one-time donation, you would get a six-CD set of the Broadway musicals, I guess the most well-known songs from Broadway musicals. That says something to me, because I was taken to them. But what is it? It's a CD set. And then I'm thinking, well, wait a minute. There's no CD player in my Audi anymore. I have one piece of Fisher equipment here that will play CDs. It's mute [phonetic]. And that's the only way I could play—if I gave the \$120. I donate to WQXR, but if I, just for the ability to have that CD set, paid my \$120 and got the set, I could only play those musicals in the house on this particular piece of Fisher equipment that's in the back. I've got one foot in the past, and, obviously, one foot in the future. And Philip is very much a child of

the future. Whatever music they listen to, I don't know how they will listen to it. I've got WQXR on my cell phone. I've got the app, so I can listen to it that way, but it's sure different from having it emanate from a beautiful piece of high-fidelity equipment.

It wasn't just about, growing up, the fame of it. It was loving the music and loving hearing it from a piece of high-fidelity equipment that was a revered product. I was talking to somebody about it this morning, that it really meant you had arrived when you had Fisher equipment. I think Harman Kardon was the only other competitor out there, but the Fisher name prevailed. But we're all in that boat. People don't talk to each other. They only send texts. But the musicians are still learning music, and they're still performing, and there are people who still love listening to classical music.

We can close this out, and let me—because I think these things are interesting. I think these things are very interesting. I know it's an audio interview, but this is really part of the record as well. I don't know if you've ever done that before. And I still have these things here.

Albarelli: No, that's great. Let me put this in—

Fisher: [00:42:05] Also, we've just acquired—I don't know if Philip mentioned that, that we've acquired new members of the advisory board.

Albarelli: He didn't.



Fisher: [00:42:19] Well, there are. The letter was sent out after the last committee meeting.

Pardon me. And people have—so it still means something to people, you know. It means a great deal to be on the advisory board, the recommending board. They're out there seeing and hearing artists. Mary Lou Falcone must have told you. There was only one who refused The Avery Fisher Prize.

Albarelli: Yes, yes, she told—

Fisher: Garrick Ohlsson? Who was that?

Albarelli: She didn't want to say. Or she didn't say his name, and I actually thought I would ask you to say. All she said was that your father was hurt and didn't quite understand it.

Fisher: [00:43:10] I don't know why I said Garrick Ohlsson. I don't know. I'd have to ask. I don't remember. But there was one. I don't remember. It must have been the prize. It must have been the prize. Somebody did. Honestly, I don't remember who it was. I just mentioned the name, but I'm not even sure if that was he. What a mystery. It's an artist. But I can understand how my father would have been—[laughs] it's kind of remarkable nobody else did.

Albarelli: So I'll pick up the camera now. I'm glad I mentioned what should come out of it, because I think something should.

[INTERRUPTION]

Fisher: [00:44:46] It's so funny you mention it. One of the things I love doing is vacuuming. [laughter] You would think—no, we get home, and I—some people garden. I vacuum. I just like—and I have extension cords. I'm always running the vacuum.

[INTERRUPTION]

You know where that recipe came from? My daughter's nanny. She's my daughter's age. She has three kids. She lives near Yankee Stadium. I call her a street kid. I mean, there's such a cultural divide between—I mean, here's Diana, a doctor, and here's—but she's such a strong-minded mother. She's the same age as my daughter, and she bakes, and does all things, stuff with her hands. She likes me because I bake, and we're always exchanging recipes. That recipe came from the Bronx, you should know. That's my icing, but it's her recipe. She'll show them to me where she's piped icing on them. She's way ahead of me. She's so good at heart and great with kids.

Albarelli: You know, one other thing I thought, that you just reminded me. Philip mentioned Rosa [phonetic].

Fisher: [00:47:14] You never got into household help. My parents had a series of—they had women. I remember one of them—he wouldn't remember this. She was tiny. She was Japanese. Her name was Kimik. Kimiko worked for my parents, and she loved going to their Connecticut house—are you recording this?

Albarelli: Yes, yes.

Fisher: [00:47:50] The earliest—it would have been appropriate or expected or normal that my mother would have had a housekeeper. I wouldn't have remembered who took care of us when I was young, but I remember there was a German housekeeper. Her name was Emmy, and she worked for my parents at 1185 [phonetic], and then she died. Then I remember Kimiko, who was Japanese. She just loved my parents. She worked for them until she was too old, really, to work. And then Rosa, who was Argentinian. She worked for my parents. People seemed to stay a long time working for my parents. That's what I'm saying. And I remember their names. My mother had Sophie. She was a nanny for my brother Chip, but I don't remember my mother having a nanny or caretaker for Barbara and me. She may have had these housekeepers, but she was the boots on the ground mother. So Chip had Sophie, and then Sophie left to get married and have her own children. But I remember Rosa. I remember Rosa.

And my mother, in her later years, had people who were there to support her. She had a wonderful Portuguese cook named Emma. They really kept my mother alive with their care for her. They were certainly quite affected when my mother died. I remember there was somebody in the apartment the day that we took my mother to the hospital, to Mount Sinai, and it was pretty clear that she wasn't probably going to survive, and how shocking. Of course it was shocking for everybody, but I was the daughter, and we were living through it for years, and then finally the handwriting was on the wall, and how traumatic it was for this employee—I don't remember her name, one of the caretakers—when we had to tell her that my mother was going to

the hospital. And of course, coming back into an apartment that had such a history to it, and she wasn't there, that was also traumatic. Of course, it happened—there was a space of time between my father's dying and my mother's dying. I have friends who have had two aging parents, and lucky me, I didn't have them both at the same time.

But people who worked for my parents were important, and they really liked my parents. They were proud, I guess, to work there. I don't know why Philip would have mentioned Rosa in particular, unless she was the cook in charge when he was growing up.

Albarelli: When he was growing up, and he said there was a little buzzer or something that as a child he would hit, and she would appear.

Fisher: [00:52:00] My mother never—these apartments came—they had staff. My mother wouldn't ring a dinner bell to summon somebody to come in and clear the table. There was a plug in the floor of the dining room, and it was near my mother, whose photograph is over there, sitting at the head of this table at the apartment, and there's the furniture behind her. That's where I have it sitting there. And the reason that this furniture, this Szoeker furniture, is in such magnificent condition is that the apartment was on the second floor and got very little light thrown at it. Anyway, my mother would press—would stick her toe out to find the buzzer. We all grew up with that sound. It would ring in the kitchen. That's not unusual for a classic cooperative apartment. Isn't that cute, that Philip remembers that?

When we gathered there, there was good food. We ate Thanksgivings there. I remember that. So that's it in the household help department. But Philip knows me. Philip knows me, like my mother, as a doer. My mother didn't bake, but that's what I do. I bake cookies, cupcakes, one of which you had this morning, the Portuguese sweetbread. They're lovely gifts to pass down, and they create memories.

Albarelli: Any holiday memories before we move on? You just mentioned Thanksgiving. Any particular memories?

Fisher: [00:53:59] We had Passover. We would have Passover dinner. Not much religion in the house. Not much observance. I think I mentioned that before. But certainly tradition. And Thanksgiving is always the warmest memory that I have in my parents' apartment, because once I went to college, it was also associated with coming home, you know, those days over Thanksgiving. There was nothing like coming in and smelling it, the turkey in the oven. And I mentioned the musical evenings my parents had in the apartment, and the dinner parties that they had. If you look, your glass is resting on the beautiful cloth doily, because that's the kind of stuff that I received from my mother. I don't think my daughter [laughs] is ever going to give a hoot about all this stuff.

Albarelli: You know, there's the phone there.

Fisher: [00:55:15] I know, I know. But usually when we did this for show, it was on a black cloth. I know that I mentioned, in my going back to California, that I was sitting on the airplane

and I had this edition of the *New York Times* on my lap, and I'm thinking everybody in the plane knows that it's me, that I'm related to this. This is the—are you—is this a video or just a—

Albarelli: This is a video.

Fisher: [00:55:44] Okay. This was the lead article on the front of the *New York Times* in 1973. I was on a plane on the twenty-second of September, 1973. Seeing this today reminds me of this magnanimous gift that was announced the other day for the college where the student debt was forgiven. I forget the name of the donor. Nobody knew it was coming. I'll show you. This cabinet here is outside. You know, in a sense this is still true. This is the way he was referred to, “low key high-fidelity donor.” Beautiful. Oh, there's something else inside. [pause]

Oh, here's the next one. This was about the renovation of the hall. Three years later, he paid to renovate the interior of the hall. That's what this refers to. May 17, 1976. Here, this is terrific. This is the plant in Long Island City [Queens, New York] where Fisher Radio had its business. Twenty-one twenty—2121, I think it was Forty-Fourth Drive, in Long Island City. I'm sure there's a tall apartment building there now.

I wonder what this is. Personal security, Central Intelligence Agency. That may have been—this is '51, so this is not wartime related. I have no clue what this refers to. The CIA. [pause] I wanted to know where he traveled. I haven't looked at this in a long time. I have no idea, given the year it is. Okay. [unclear].

This is something. Well, there you have the birth certificate. And he was born at home. For years, I do know that his birthday was celebrated not on the seventh of March but on March fourth, until—you can see it's Abraham Fischer [phonetic], with a *c*. Who knows if they spelled it correctly? He removed the *c*, but that because it was a home birth, there was a mistake made in his stated date of birth for years. [pause]

This is them celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary at the Ninety-Second Street Y [Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association]. Had to be fiftieth. My God, look at that. They made it to fifty. I'm not going through everything here, but—

Now, my father typed all of his letters. Look at this. Ben would have been Ben Buxton. This is October 2, 1959. He was the head of—this was an internal business—there's something here about stealing company property. But my father typed this letter to Ben Buxton. Look at this.

Albarelli: Could you read just some of it?

Fisher: [01:01:56] “Dear Ben, the events of the past few days have, of course, been something of a shock to both of us. When that sort of thing happens, it places an extraordinary burden on those in command, not only in the matter of administering the company out of the position in which it was placed by faithless employees, but in a matter of even greater importance. That other burden we now carry is the responsibility to do what is right, so far as the guilty parties are concerned.” I mean, this is a beautiful piece of writing. There must have been somebody stealing something. My father really wrote very beautifully. And his closing thing is, “I have taken the trouble to

write all this down because human nature being what it is, you may at some future date face a similar situation without me around to advise you.” Very paternal.

Here is the bird—you know, here it is again. Oh, this is about the artist program. Okay. Oh, boy. His way of doing things, if he had something to say, would be that he would write letters, which he would type himself. My daughter in her bat mitzvah dress is there. That’s me. This is a lovely photograph with my mother at their Connecticut home, which they loved so much. She loved. These are two, clearly, pictures from the ’40s. Look at my mother there on the right, and there she is on the bicycle. [pause] I’m glad I found them, but I haven’t touched them in a long time, so other things are mixed up in here. [pause] Here’s a photograph of my dad as a young man. Very handsome, I think. Later ones, we think of him as aging.

This is in my apartment at the Newport East. This is a cat I owned. And this is a piece of Fisher equipment and a turntable. Not the rhesus monkey I referred to the in the first interview, but she was—

Albarelli: What a great photograph.

Fisher: [01:05:46] [Laughs] It was also things that—it’s an era when things felt good in your hands. I refer to the tools. A lot of other people could remember this nostalgically. I’m not the only one. They made a good-looking couple. There he is just standing outside the house in Connecticut.



And there's a concerned brother. This is 1983. My father didn't call me to tell me this. He's written. He had a sister for whom he cared, and I know I mentioned her, Aunt Sonya [phonetic], in my first session with you. But here he is. "Dear Nancy, I want to express my thanks to you for undertaking the difficult job, on occasion, to call and touch base with Aunt Sonya." And this, he goes on to—you know, anybody. This could apply to anybody going into their senior years. How important is—

Albarelli: [crosstalk] that second paragraph is—yes.

Fisher: [01:07:00] Oh, okay. "Her growing feebleness, deteriorating eyes that keep this formerly avid reader of world affairs from perusing the *Times*, and the sense of loneliness that always overtakes people of her age (whose lifelong friends are either dead or in great medical difficulty themselves) all add up to a depressing existence. You're the only one of my children who can call her with objectivity, and I hope you will do so on occasion. Simply avoid the 'dark cloud' discussion by not being thrown into it. With love, Dad." I haven't seen these in—but my father loved to type. He didn't have anybody do his work for him.

Albarelli: What is that photo under the letter you were just looking at?

Fisher: [01:08:03] Oh, my mother, yes. She's a beauty there. Red hair. [pause] Sorry. There are things in here. What would this have been? This was probably—that was their fiftieth wedding anniversary.

Albarelli: What do you remember of that?

Fisher: [01:08:40] It was at the Ninety-Second Street Y. I don't remember if there was a concert that was part of it. It would seem, probably, that there was. Here's their marriage certificate. Good grief. [unclear] just opened it. I didn't even know I had this. [pause] And following this—and I know where it is here in the dining room—my father—[pause] I can't put my—maybe I can if I go inside. If you want to stop that for a second, I can find it. If you'd just stop it.

Albarelli: Sure, sure.

Fisher: [01:10:07] Because you see, this—so you're not filming. These are all the work of a cartoonist named Otto Soglow. They're all on love and marriage and relationships. These things would appear without a tagline in the *New Yorker*. When my father worked for Dodd, Mead & Company, he gave me—he worked for Dodd, Mead & Company. Here's Otto Soglow. They never had taglines. Anyway, so I got this whole collection. But let me just see if I can show you something, because he—hold on, hold on.

Albarelli: Sure.

[INTERRUPTION]

Fisher: [01:11:28] Look at this. This is—did you want me to hold this?

Albarelli: Yes, yes, thank you.

Fisher: [01:11:34] So there's no reflection. That's my mother sitting at the head of the dinner table at apartment 2G [phonetic], 1185 Park Avenue. And this Szoeker furniture is behind her. The date is actually January 1966. That's the year that I would graduate from Skidmore [College]. I keep it here in the dining room because it's the same table. I did recover. Oh, God. It just sits there.

So now that we've talked about Otto Soglow, and you saw the certificate of marriage, this—you want to see this. This is an Otto Soglow cartoon that my father used to send out a wedding announcement. It's a demonstration of his access to Soglow's work and his sense of humor. What I did was I took this cartoon, and I had a rubber stamp made out of it. And I have used it in my lifetime when I'm sending congratulations to other people's children, because this is the way Otto Soglow saw marriage. It's just beautiful. This is from the 1940s, this thing.

Albarelli: Open it one more time.

Fisher: [01:13:17] Sure. Simple statement. And quietly means there were, like, nine people at a dinner [unclear]. You feel the paper stock. That's another thing. This is the stuff I had made, you know. Anyway, again, without lionizing him, he—oh, this is a great thing. It tells you much more about the man and what was important to him, you know. I didn't do it, but—okay. This is a story about my mother, Janet, and you'll see her. She's holding lilacs. This photograph of her was taken outside 1120 Park Avenue when she was bringing these lilacs to her internist, Dr.

Raymond Matta, whose office is downstairs in this building. Somebody—I don't know if it was somebody from The Gap stores or whatever, but somebody photographed her. This turned into—and I have it here. This encounter outside the building turned into my mother becoming a model, senior model, for The Gap. When I heard about it, I thought, you know, the money's out of the bank, that it was some scam. No, it was totally on the up and up, that they saw my mother, who you can see, in her way, having her own grace and beauty. I have it.

Actually, it appeared in *House & Garden*, which is what I'm going to show you next. There she was. It's not marked. I've got to find it. It would be important if I could. There it is. So there is my mother. Are you getting light on this? There she is. She's wearing a Gap sweater, and she's surrounded by flowers. And the money that she got for it, she donated to charity. That I know.

Albarelli: Let me get a shot of the cover, as well.

Fisher: [01:16:09] Certainly. September 1996.

Albarelli: What did she have to say about this experience?

Fisher: [01:16:22] I don't want to put words—you know. [laughter] You can only imagine the giggles over the whole thing. But as her daughter, I was terrified that somebody had approached her, you know, and done something, or promised her the moon, whatever. But no, it was totally on the up and up. This is us at Lincoln Center. I look like something out of *Working Girl* with

that hairdo. But as I've said, my sister looks very much like my father, and I look like my mom, and Chip is a mix.

There's something else. Oh, wait a minute. This is something from "Dear Diary [Metropolitan Diary column]" in the *New York Times* when they had the Metro section. Monday, August 18, 2008. "Dear diary, the current reconstruction of Lincoln Center reminds me of an incident many years ago during the first acoustical upgrade of Avery Fisher Hall. As we walked past the site, my daughter Jennifer, probably eight at the time, asked what was going on. I told her that they were working to improve the sound in Philharmonic Hall, and that the money for the work came from a man named Avery Fisher. When the work was done, they would rename the hall for him. Jennifer's next question, 'So that's who Avery Fisher is. Who was Phil Harmonic?'"

Something behind this. And this is an article from the [*New York*] *Post*. I think you'd recognize that. Okay. "On one of the hottest recent nights, Mr. and Mrs. Avery Fisher had an informal evening of chamber music in the living room of their home. Three Fisher prize winners, pianist Emanuel Ax, violinist Elmar Oliveira, and cellist Yo-Yo Ma performed two Brahms trios." Imagine that. "About thirty guests, many overflowing into the entrance hall, were listening intently to the glorious sounds which inevitably are more full and rich in the home than in the expansive space of a concert hall, when suddenly, all the lights went out. Amidst a few murmurs of, 'What to do?' the three players unperturbably in the dark proceeded from memory to the end of the movement, as if nothing unusual had happened. Eventually, candles were put on the piano while the music continued on through movements numbers three and four. When just as suddenly, all the bright lights came back on, it seemed like a miracle. Who performed the

miracle by slipping down to the basement to change the fuse? No less than the master himself, Avery Fisher. ‘Every home needs an electrician,’ he said matter of factly when the music had finished.” The fuseboxes were in the back of the apartment, always had been at the back of each apartment, so he didn’t go into the basement of the building, but this happened, you know.

There’s the technician.

Here’s the card that came. “It is a pleasure to showcase you in the premiere issue of *House & Garden*.” That came along with it.

Ah, this is—in addition to the corporate headquarters of Fisher Radio in Long Island City, this—again, you see the bird—that they built a manufacturing plant for the equipment in Milroy, Pennsylvania. [pause] All of these things I have shown you, and some of the stuff in here that we won’t get to, will go to Juilliard with everything else that Mary Lou gave. Okay. Here come—do you want me to—look at this.

[INTERRUPTION]

As I mentioned to you in the first interview, my father would sit my dates down and test out the equipment, and this was the *Fisher Fidelity Standard* [recording] for evaluating high-fidelity equipment, a long-playing record. And what are the selections? There’s some rock music, jazz band, “Rock My Soul,” “Soul Adrift,” “Let It Be,” Lennon, McCartney. And then there’s classical music on the second side. See, here’s Fisher with the bird. That was the typeface. It was

so closely associated with the company. Vivaldi, Stravinsky, Chopin, Mozart, and Bach on the back. I assume that this was just given out—oh, dear, to somebody.

Anyway, this is the last of what I have. These are photographs, these black and white photographs, and perhaps I should take this out so that you can see it without the glare. This must have been at some sale show. That's a piece of Fisher equipment. I don't know who this is, but there's my dad sitting on the table. There were trade shows. That I do remember.

This is the opera star, Victoria de los Ángeles. Many famous people had Fisher equipment. I know that's she. Yes, Victoria de los Ángeles. Maybe there's a photograph here somewhere that shows her with a piece of equipment. This is from *Atlantic [Monthly] Magazine [Press], They Shall Have Music*.

Albarelli: [unclear] maybe read a little of it.

Fisher: [01:24:19] Yes. “When in the course of [laughs] Siamese events, it became desirable for young King Phumiphon [phonetic]”—I can't pronounce it—“to take himself a bride, the international brotherhood of heads of state was thrown into a perplexity, for what does one give as a wedding present to a man who already has everything, including real white elephants? Not among the perplexed, however, were President and Mrs. Harry S Truman.” I'll just say, “The king, was known to be a music lover, and Mr. Truman was the only American president ever to be seen in public following a performance of the Beethoven Ninth Symphony with a score. These circumstances simplified matters. The Trumans called promptly on the man likeliest to

solve their gift problem, Avery Fisher. Within weeks, from Mr. Fisher's New York factory, there went out bound for Bangkok a most magnificent high-fidelity custom phonograph. Set into its hand-rubbed woodwork was a large silver plate inscribed with the good wishes of the donors, 'as if,' says Fisher now with a hint of a grin, 'the king was likely to forget who gave it to him.'"

And I don't know the date of this, but there's a great cartoon of my dad. When he was younger, those eyebrows were—they were always bushy, but they became white as he aged. But this is from the *Atlantic* magazine. This is a roster of distinguished Fisher owners, Isaac Stern, Victoria de los Angeles, Nathan Milstein, Eugene Ormandy, Risë Stevens, and Gian Carlo Menotti. And again the bird. This must have—who knows what this was. Oh, this is so funny. Look at these. You saw the—and of course, this was an era when there were tubes in the high-fidelity. There he is. I don't know what he's doing with these composers.

Somebody [unclear], "Why do Fisher owners keep on being Fisher owners?" There you go. "Engineering without equal, test and inspection, automated electronic test, relentless quality control, iron-clad packaging, instruction manuals, after sales service." See? And I mentioned how he used to test the post office delivery service from Long Island City by mailing me the Fisher catalogs. This is charming.

[unclear] what else I have here. [unclear] there is Philip. Philip at that ninetieth wedding anniversary, celebration at the Y

Albarelli: The fiftieth?



Fisher: [01:27:40] I'm sorry, fiftieth. That would have been a first.

Albarelli: Let me just focus on Philip for a second.

Fisher: [01:27:47] Okay.

Albarelli: That's great.

Fisher: [01:27:55] You know, how could he have understood, really as a little kid, what this was all about? Oh, there's Kimiko. There are my parents in Connecticut. That's Kimiko.

Albarelli: Oh, good. I'm glad you found that. Okay.

Fisher: [01:28:24] It's a magnificent photograph. Devotion, you know, loyalty and devotion. They gave it out and they got it back. Just want you to know, something—nothing to do with me, but—okay. One of my—you know, wouldn't assume alive anymore. His name was Harvey Weinstein, not the one you think. He was a neighbor. He was a clothing manufacturer. I wonder if you remember. He was abducted, and he was put into a hole—up in Riverdale, [Bronx, NY]?

Albarelli: I think I do. Yes, yes.

Fisher: [01:29:08] You know, he was held somewhere in the ground in Riverdale.

Albarelli: Right, right. There was a movie made about it, I think, yes.

Fisher: [01:29:14] November 23, 1993. I made a cake, which I marched around and delivered to the apartment building where he lived. This is so cute. I mean, this is how people express themselves. “Please excuse this very belated acknowledgment of your wonderful gift that my entire family enjoyed so much, and your warm note, which you gave to us a day or two after my release. There are small vignettes of New York that will always live in my memory, which surface as a result of the media attention given to my unfortunate ‘enforced vacation.’ Those episodes which were so touching prove again that our city is not filled with heartless, indifferent people, and it only requires some small spark to bring out the best in us.” And he goes on to talk about some other little anecdote involving a panhandler. “I am happy to inform you that I feel absolutely great with no unpleasant aftereffects as a result of my confinement, although I do have the new and far more positive perspective and am forever grateful for the new life that has been granted to me. Thank you again. It was sensational.”

Albarelli: That’s great. I’m glad you read that, actually.

Fisher: [01:30:37] [laughs] I mean, what a schlemiel. Who would have done that? I did that. I walked the cake around the corner. This is more recent. This appeared—this is, of course, *Wired* magazine, a magazine of the young. I don’t even know what date this is. Isn’t that funny? Anyway, Fisher is in here. I’ll have to find it. It talks about the greatest high-fidelity equipment, and Fisher is in here. Maybe. Let me look in the index. [flipping pages] Look at him, young guy.

Is there no index? There it is. There it is, benchmark, 114. Philip used to get *Wired* magazine all the time. Well, you can even see the pages. Isn't that funny? One-thirty-one, okay. One-oh-six. Wait, there it is. Okay. "Titan of tubes, the Fisher 500 stereo receiver." And of course, this is the kind of Fisher equipment that would have been in a piece of furniture, or it would have a metal grate along the top of it. I don't think it would sit out on a shelf exposed like this. Now I remember. It had a wooden casing to it, with a grating on top. This came out in the 1960s. "A far cry from the big box fleets of modern mega-feature home theater amps, this is still the pinnacle of pure stereophonic sound."

So I'm happy to end this on a lighter note, [laughter] you know, which is [unclear] Harvey's letter, which is a lighter note. But I don't think I have anything else here. I'll put this all back together. Actually, this having nothing to do with anything. My father, the day that we moved from P.S. 6 [elementary school], the original P.S. 6, which was on the northeast corner of Eighty-Fifth [Street] and Madison Avenue, to the new P.S. 6, between Eighty-One and Eighty-Two on Madison Avenue. My father was there with his camera, and that's me. And we walked from the old school into the new P.S. 6.

Albarelli: I was hoping you'd explain what this is. It's a great photo.

Fisher: [01:34:06] No, I know exactly what it is. There are other photographs. I know I have them on my desk. Yes, we walked along Madison Avenue. We would have walked down the east side of Madison Avenue, from Eighty-Fifth, three blocks to Eighty-Second Street. That was the day that the school was inaugurated. And I know I told you that my mother was on the

committee to build that school. I can't find the article here. Oh, I'm sorry. Not finished. This is important. See? This is the Fisher handbook that I mentioned [in] the first interview. My father would test—he mailed it to himself. So this is what a customer who wanted to know—like a catalog—what the company was producing. There it is. There's the casing. You could sit this on shelving. It could be freestanding. "An authoritative guide to stereo high-fidelity." The Fisher Handbook – whatever this was—sorry.

Let's see what's in here. Oh, my dear. [laughs] You'd have to be pretty smart to understand this. See? These were some of the furniture pieces that people would buy and put Fisher equipment into them. There are the turntables. There are the speakers. [pause] Look at the speakers. I don't know what people have today. This is a beauty. I'll be sure to keep this all together.

There's my mother with a very young Yo-Yo Ma.

Albarelli: That's beautiful. Okay.

Fisher: [01:36:40] This is a photograph of my dad sitting with me, behind the chair that's over there to your right, right next to the plug that you're using. That was made by Andrew Szoeki. And this is the night that the hall was reopened. There are my parents. I know that this gentleman was important to Lincoln Center. I don't know if it's Cyril Harris. I just don't know. But there's the hall. Then this is not taken in my—these were all—ah. There's Yo-Yo Ma, there's Emanuel Ax, my father, and I think that's Murray Perahia. They must have been the early prize winners. Look at the—oh, the tenth anniversary of the Avery Fisher Prize. [unclear], Horacio Gutiérrez,

Richard Goode, the pianist Murray Perahia, Elmar Oliveira, Yo-Yo Ma, Manny Ax, Richard Stoltzman, the clarinetist, and my dad. They were all prize winners.

I just want to go back. This is so nice. Here's a picture of my father with Yo-Yo on the stage of the hall. You can see why I wanted to show these to you. They're part of the story. Everybody has memories of their Dad, but this is—or related. This is out of sync. This is way before that, was my dad at a trade show with his equipment. And that is Victoria de los Ángeles. I knew I had one with her equipment. And Alicia de Larrocha, the Spanish pianist. This is dated December 13, 1989. A force of her own. This says, in Spanish, in translation, “For Janet and Avery, with sincere affection. Much love, Alicia de Larrocha.”

Look at this. This is at the New York City Opera. That's Kitty Carlisle Hart. That's my mother. And I believe that's Risë Stevens. Nope, Roberta Peters. Roberta Peters, Kitty Carlisle Hart, and my mother. She was a beauty. This is the first shovel of dirt for the plant in Milroy, Pennsylvania. And this is Ben Buxton, to whom my father wrote that letter about theft in the company. That's Fred Mergner. He [Fred] was his [Avery Fisher's] chief engineer. That was his vice president, Ben somebody. I can't remember. I don't know these other people. I don't know who these people are in the photograph with my dad. That's Fred Mergner, though. That's his chief engineer. I wonder where they came—you know, he was German. I remember that.

This is my father in Spain with one of the two Vieta brothers who sold his equipment in Spain. My father didn't smoke. Again, this is more typical. This shows you what a trade show would have looked like. I don't remember who that is. They may have been an employee. This is

something else from Alicia to Avery and Janet, “with the same love, as always, from a happy mother-in-law [phonetic].” It was taken in Spain. Here’s another—[laughs] look at those cars—another photograph of the factory in Long Island City. This must have been—this was a—I don’t know, somebody—you know, here’s this model reaching into this glass bowl. I guess maybe this was some sort of raffle for Fisher equipment, but there he is. He never gained weight. The man that you see physically in these photographs, he just didn’t change.

That’s what I know. Here’s one other. It’s not far. Hold on. I told you, for example, because—this is Fisher Radio Corporation pencil. I have them. They require leads and erasers. That he, I think, gave out as gifts to salespeople, to a sales rep. This is a knife which has the Fisher logo on it. A slicer, this is a bread slicer. Then the great little three by five trays. My father built his whole business on these three by fives. I hope I mentioned in the first interview. If I came into the bedroom, there would be a pile of three by five pieces of paper by my father’s bedside on the floor. He would think of something and not want to forget it in the morning, so he’d write it down. And these trays—you know, I have these. I now have index cards in them. Look at this. Fisher Radio Corporation, world’s finest audio. [pause]

Albarelli: That’s great. So much of your father lives on.

Fisher: [01:46:23] I know. [laughs] I’ve just got to say, he ain’t gone. But, you know, that’s what I grew up with. I can’t—these things I can give, I can pass on to Juilliard with all this other stuff.

Albarelli: Well, I’m really glad we included it in the oral history.

Fisher: [01:46:39] Because it is, it's—

Albarelli: It is part of the history. It's part of the story.

Fisher: [01:46:43] Well, it's the nicer, it's the sweeter part. You know, in the family, my brother's eleven—my brother was an accident, okay? He's eleven years younger than I am, so it makes him thirteen years younger than my sister. So you can see, it—and my sister marches to the beat of a different drum, and we never had much of a relationship growing up, and she made her step out into the world.

Albarelli: How long has she been in France?

Fisher: [01:47:16] At least thirty years. She left. She left.

Albarelli: That was a—I'm going to turn this off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]