

Speaker 1: Well, because we were undecided what we'd do. We were having thoughts of relocating on the West Coast, but we weren't sure and there were trunks, suitcases, and so that we did not want to take on tour with us.

So ... The <sup>we</sup>~~case~~ decided to just go. So, we decided to keep the apartment, and mainly because it would give Mrs. Fuchs a place to practice her piano. And also, get our mail and receive any telephone calls that might be important. And, as we looked back, we did absolutely the right thing. Certainly, as far as telephone calls were concerned.

We drove to San Francisco, and I was very excited. I had not been there before. And, Peter loved it and said what a beautiful city it was. He felt it was one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Now, I did not have anything, really, to occupy myself except to be a good wife.

Driving across the United States was a very nice experience. Also, it gave me a chance to practice my skills as a driver. I was a little apprehensive about driving in San Francisco with all the hills and so on, but at least enjoyed driving on the open road.

We arrived in San Francisco and very shortly Peter had to report for his duties. He was assistant conductor and many of his duties was to assist a conductor by the name of Paul Brisac, who he had known. And, as luck would have it, we found a rooming house that Paul and his wife Susie, were also already living in. So, we moved into that house. They were on the first floor, I think, and we were on the second, although it was maybe the opposite. And, I was introduced, of course, and liked Susie immediately. We began a ritual. We would meet every morning at the mail box to collect our mail and then we'd go to either one of our apartments for coffee and talk and open our mail and just generally socialize. And so, that was what we did.

One morning, we met at the mail box, collected our mail, and it was my turn to be hostess. So, we went to my apartment, sat down, and started to open the mail. And, I looked at my letters and there was a letter from AGMA. Now, I had ... When I left New York, I had resigned as AGMA representative for the ballet, for obvious reasons. So, I wondered ... Well, I guess, I was guessing it was a letter of acceptance of my resignation. And, as I opened the envelope, something fell out. I leaned down and picked it up. Susie was sitting there, and I looked at it and my mouth dropped open. It was a check for \$1,200. I looked at Susie, showed her the check and then I read the letter.

<sup>HY BAINE</sup>  
~~lost~~ And in the letter, [inaudible 00:05:06] explained that enclosed was my severance pay, that I thought I had ~~resigned~~ ... I had lost, because I had resigned. But, ~~he~~ explained that Mr. Bing was very impressed with my arguments and with me. And, when ~~we~~ found out I had lost my severance pay, he said, "No, she did a service to the ballet and I want her to have it."

So, there it was, \$1,200. I turned to Susie with tears in my eyes. I said, "Susie, I've heard a lot about Bing. His reputation was being very straight laced and, if I could say, tight-assed and difficult at times. But," I said, "I found him to be a very nice man, of course,

with this. I couldn't be any more than very appreciative."

And, Susie looked at me and smiled and she said, "I'm glad you like him. He's my cousin."

So, there you have a true story and again how small show business is.

I was so excited that I took my life in my hands. Peter did not have the car at that time. Paul had had a car and he and Paul had gone together. So, I took the car with Susie in tow found my way to the Opera House and went in and told ~~people~~ the good news. *Peter* And, several evenings later, when we found time, the Brisacs and Peter and I went out to celebrate. It was a very happy time.

*IN* The season at the Opera ... San Francisco Opera was quite impressive. There were fine singers. Among them, a tenor, Mario Del Monaco, making his debut in the United States and Andrea Chenier. I was in the audience for a rehearsal when he loosened his tie during the first act and sang that beautiful aria. The chorus' mouths went open and so did everybody else. We knew we had been at the beginning of a wonderful career.

At that same rehearsal, there was also a wonderful soprano, who's name I cannot remember but I'll try later on. She and Del Monaco went on, after their debuts in San Francisco, to become icons at the Metropolitan Opera under the Bing regime. She, especially when Zinka Milanov finally retired, ~~this soprano~~ took over all her roles and beautifully. I also watched and listened when she worked with Peter and I notice that she had a very visible limp. It was due to polio when she was a child. Also, accompanying her everywhere, until her demise, was her mother.

*LILY PONS* Another soprano that we knew quite well was singing ~~at the~~ ... in San Francisco and coaching with Peter. And, one coaching lesson ... Peter told me this, I was not present ... After they finished their coaching lesson, Lily Pons asked Peter if she could play the piano for him. Of course, he said, "Yes." She sat down and played Poulenc beautifully. She had aspired to be a concert pianist before, sort of, her singing career took over. A very talented lady.

And so, the San Francisco season came to an end at the end of September going into October and we moved on to Los Angeles. We had been invited to stay with the Ducloux. Walter Ducloux was a very old friend of Peter's. They had both been students in Vienna and had kept in touch with each other all though as their careers progressed.

Walter was living now in Hollywood with wife, also a singer, a very attractive Italian, Jean. And, they had just had their second son. Walter also, along with teaching at UCLA had been in the movies as a conductor in Interrupted Melody the story, that I had told you about, of Marjorie, a singer that got polio. So, it's a small world.

So, we stayed with them. Walter took Peter ... He was working at the movie studios at the time. He took Peter to watch them make movies and Peter was just as unenthusiastic about movies as I had been when we were in California and Todd had let

us see movies being maken ... maken. Such a slow tedious process. Neither one of us were very impressed.

Jean and I worked on her concert appearances. She was going on a short tour including going on a boat, a cruise, as a singing attraction. And, we would work on how she stood, how she bowed, how she generally did physically, interrupted by cries of her new son.

The season in Los Angeles was coming to an end and Peter had one more opera to assist in and that was Rigoletto. And, then we would face what we were going to do with the rest of our lives.

About two days before this, we were to finish in Los Angeles, Peter's mother called him. And said that while she had been practicing piano at our former apartment, the phone had rung. She answered it and it was the head of Columbia Concerts. He wanted to get in touch with Peter immediately. He had a job offer. So, of course, Mrs. Fuchs gave him our number and he did call later. The job was a job at LSU, Louisiana State University, who had had a very good reputation of having a very good opera department.

Louis Hasselmans, a former <sup>MET</sup> conductor, ~~a French conductor~~, had taken over years before and made it quite a very well known opera department. It was now being run by a former tenor, Ralph Errolle and the dean of the school of music Barrett Stout was looking for a conductor and a coach to work with ~~Ralph Errolle~~... ~~Errolle~~, Ralph Errolle to produce opera, keeping up the standards that Hasselmans had set. So, he had gone to New York to get recommendations.

This head of Columbia Concerts, who's name escapes me, recommended Peter, and Peter spoke to him and he said, "Call Dr. Stout immediately." Which Peter did, had a long talk with him. It seems that they needed someone yesterday. Peter said he could not give him a definite answer until he talked it over with me. So, he hung up with promises to call, right away, back.

We discussed it and we came to the conclusion that it was not the New York Philharmonic or any philharmonic, but it was a steady job at least for one year that would give us time to get our breath and keep up with our debts. So, we decided yes, we would take that ... Peter would take the position. He called Dr. Stout back and told him he had decided to come, and Dr. Stout said, "How soon can you get here?"

And Peter said, "I have one more performance tomorrow night. Rigoletto." And he said, "As soon as I'm finished with the thunder and lightning in the last act, we will have been packed and we'll start our trek back to Baton Rouge." And, I made the conclusion that I was like a boomerang. Many years ago, I had left New Orleans and now I was almost back to New Orleans, just about 84 miles away.

And, true to our word, as soon as Rigoletto was finished, we got into our car, was already packed, said goodbye to the Duclouxes, and started out late, and traveled 'til about 2:00, found a place to stay, got a little sleep, and kept on going until we reached Baton Rouge. The only place we could go was a motel.

Of course, by that time, I had called New Orleans and told them the news. My family was very happy. We would be within calling distance, and knew that it was a good thing to have a steady job at least for a year under our circumstances.

So, we got to Baton Rouge, fell in bed in a motel, and the next day Peter started his job as coach and conductor of the LSU Opera. He met with Dr. Stout who <sup>he</sup> liked immediately. And then, he met with Ralph Errolle. Ralph Errolle did not impress him very much. He was nice enough. He had been a tenor and had had a brief career with the Metropolitan Opera but mostly his resumes spoke of small opera companies and operettas. He was nice enough, but Peter said, almost immediately, that this man was an operator. He was certainly not academic material. And, we found out, ~~as long as we stayed on, we found out~~ that indeed this impression was the correct one.

He had immediately made many political alliances. He was very close to the Rotarians and the Kiwanis, who had money and influence. And, even more disturbing, at the university, he had brought in people ... men and women to sing who were really not students. He brought them in on stipends to sing. They were semi-professional and some of them, many of them, from Europe. And, with his connections and money he received from people we didn't even know about, political alliances, he made it possible for these people to sing at LSU as students, but they were not students. They were quite ... semi-professionals ... quite good, but it was not kosher and certainly not academic. Peter found this out as time went on, but he had signed a year contract.

So, we stayed on. We stayed in an apartment. We finally got an apartment close to LSU, second floor apartment, very nice. I did not have that much to do, but I made the reacquaintance of a lot of my girlfriends and even men friends that had moved from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. And, I was so amused. The asked what my husband did and I said he was a musician. And then, invariably it was, "What does he really do for a living?" Musicians still were sort of question marks to some people.

So, 1950 came to an end. 1951, the months moved on to a new contract waiting to be signed. Dr. Stout had let Peter know that he wanted him to stay and was willing make him a very good and lucrative offer. But, we sat down and spoke, Peter and I. And, Peter said he just felt very uncomfortable under Errolle's leadership, that it was, the main thing, not academic at all. It was false and he did not like to continue abetting something like this. So, I told him to tell Dr. Stout we would not renew his contract, and he agreed.

So, in late March he went in to speak to Dr. Stout, Barrett Stout, and he told him he had to resign. And, he gave him the reasons, trying to be very polite, but nevertheless honest. And Stout said, "Mr. Fuchs, would you put off your resignation ... signing your resignation for a few weeks. Give me time. We have a plan going and it might be of interest to you."

Peter came home, said he had to speak to <sup>ME</sup> ~~this wife~~ about it, ~~came home~~ and told me this and I said, "What's a few weeks?" We had nothing really planned. So, we waited.

And, Dr. Stout called him into his office and he said, "Mr Fuchs, we are going to kick Mr. Errolle upstairs. He still has some time to run on his contract, but we want to relieve him of his duties of anything with our students. And, we want you to take over the opera company, full charge. Take over whatever duties Ralph Errolle had, plus conducting and coaching. And, Dr. Stout will give ... Fed will give Ralph Errolle a superficial title and hope that soon he will leave." Which is what happened.

We do understand, in hindsight, that Dr. Stout was aided and abetted by the president of LSU, who was a former <sup>baron</sup> soldier general who had made a big name for himself as the victor of the Battle of the Bulge. We met this gentleman later on. He was quite impressive. But, he had been the catalyst. He didn't like what was going on with Errolle. He felt it was very anti-academic, not fit for a university like LSU and aided Dr. Stout in getting rid of Errolle.

So, now Peter was offered a three year contract with advancement from assistant professor to full professor, and the full charge of LSU Opera. We talked it over. It was a lucrative offer. Again, it was not an orchestra or an opera house, but it was steady work and work that we loved. And, he felt that he might be able to move up, even, in the community.

So, our tenure at LSU started and we stayed in our apartment for awhile. Of course, we went to New Orleans quite a bit, and Peter made the acquaintance of one of the reporters, writers for the Times Picayune, Ewing Poteet and that eventually led, in a sort of round about way, to Peter, the next year, getting a job as conductor of the New Orleans Pops. His predecessor had been a very nice man, whom he had known, Izler Solomon. So, Peter took over for a couple of years for the New Orleans Pops. And also, we saw quite a bit of our family. They would come to Baton Rouge or we would go down to them.

Also, then I sort of started getting antsy. What was I going to do with my time. We talked about it and again, fate sort of intervened. There had been quite a writeup in the paper when Peter took over the opera. Subsequently, Errolle stayed on a few months, but then resigned and disappeared. ~~There was quite a write up~~ <sup>wrote</sup> in the paper about Peter and his background and resume, and talk about me as former dancer, former New Orleanian and choreographer.

And, as I said, fate intervened again. I got a call from a Mrs. Walker. She was <sup>✓</sup>teacher at one of the schools, elementary schools, in Baton Rouge. And, she said she would be interested in talking to me about coming to the school and giving ballet lessons. She would make a studio available for me, a gym and get barres in. ~~And~~, it was not ideal, I went to look at it, but she was so insistent. She said, "I could get you a lot of pupils here. They would be interested." They were from the age of six or seven up to the age of twelve, and she said they're very interested in ballet and most interested ... And, the reason Mrs. Walker was doing this was her seven year old daughter, Sharon, who loved dance. And, Mrs. Walker was impressed with my background, and said it would be a wonderful opportunity for the children to take lessons under me at the school.

So, it was all set. I set up there, and even at the end of that year, I think it was '52, I had a little recital, with great success, and I was getting so many requests for students that I began looking around for my own studio.

Around that time, later into 1952, I got a call from the conductor of the conductor of the New Orleans Opera, Walter Herbert. Walter Herbert had heard about Peter and me in Baton Rouge from some of Peter's students, who took some roles ... some small roles, or even sang in the chorus, in the Opera. So, that was the connection there.

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And, Walter Herbert found out I was a New Orleanian and a former dancer with the Metropolitan. Would I be interested in being a soloist with the New Orleans Opera. The one opera that was coming up was Samson and Delilah, and there would be other operas that I could be soloist in. And, of course, another temptation was that my former teacher, [Leigh Hallow 00:33:19], was at that time choreographer of the New Orleans Opera. So, it was a very nice offer.

But, I had feelings about it. I was almost 33 years old ... 32, 33 ... My dancing days ... I had stopped dancing for at least two years. If I took a job like this, I would have to get myself back into condition with rigorous training and, perhaps, even living like a nun. And, I wasn't sure I wanted to do this, and again, we talked, Peter and I talked, this time about my future.

And, I said that it was time that I'd be thinking about having a child. Peter had mixed thoughts about that, having had two sons of his own, and even jokingly said, "Well, that would be fine if you promised to have a girl." That was a nice statement to make.

But, I still had this offer from Walter Herbert. And, I had to make up my mind whether I wanted to refurbish my dance career, which would mean a lot of work and training, or give it up and look to teaching and perhaps, hopefully, choreography. I chose the latter. I turned Mr. Herbert down, told him for personal reasons I did not want to pursue a <sup>career</sup> dancing. He understood and that was that.

Nine months or maybe a few more months later, my daughter was born. Now, all during my pregnancy, there was this thing hanging over me. We joked about it but it almost wasn't a joke. Peter truly wanted a girl and I didn't know what to do about it. I even talked to my mother about it, and she came back to me with a delightful story.

My sister was living in a very nice home on Napoleon Ave. where she had entertained the Metropolitan Opera people, and she had a maid, Mary. And, Mary was very into telling the future and seeing the future. And, mother talked to her one day about my being pregnant and Peter only wanting a daughter, a girl. Mary didn't say anything.

The next day <sup>when</sup> ~~that~~ she saw mother, she said, "Tell your daughter not to worry. She will have a little girl." Well, of course, what could you say. We weren't into that voodoo, but it was tempting to believe. And, sure enough, in August 27th Debra Diane Fuchs was born.



We had been at a movie, and I was going upstairs to our apartment when my water broke. Peter immediately called the doctor. He said, "Get to the hospital." I got to the hospital, was getting on to midnight, I was admitted, and I had a doctor who believed firmly in natural birth. And, so did I. I had taken exercises, et cetera, et cetera, so I was doing all the proper things, breathing and so on.

But, right at almost the last minute, the baby turned and presented breach birth, which would imperil her life because the head was up and it might injure the neck. ~~So Dr. Landry~~ ... Peter was waiting in the waiting room. Dr. Landry went out and told him the situation. And he said, "Mr Fuchs, if I cannot deliver naturally, will you give me permission to do a cesarean?"

And Peter said, "Anything to save the baby," and his wife.

And Dr. Landry said, "Give me a half hour. If after a half hour I feel I cannot do anything, I will perform a cesarean." He came out 31 minutes later and said that he had successfully delivered the baby and it was a girl.

When I came to, <sup>because</sup> ~~but~~ I had been sedated, Peter was bending over me and, as I opened my eyes, I looked at this silly grin on his face. He didn't have to tell me. We had had a girl. And, from that moment on, he adored her and she adored him.

Before I even got pregnant, it was apparent that I couldn't stay at the school where Mrs. Walker had planned for me to stay, simply because I was getting too many private students. By word of mouth, my reputation was growing, <sup>but</sup> I did have some competition.

A Russian ballerina by the name of Tatiana Semenova had started classes before me, and she had quite a few very good dancers. When I started to open my own studio and left the school that Mrs. Walker had provided for me, she began a real series of very bad publicity and downplaying my ability as a teacher and my background, et cetera. She had been with the Ballet Russe for a short time, but now she was in Baton Rouge, and had a husband for awhile and a mother. So, when I started teaching, she really made my life miserable by bad-mouthing everything I tried to do and maybe even things I didn't do.

In a short time, she left, for what reason, I don't know, but she left. And of course, many of her pupils came to me. So, by the time I had Debra I was teaching quite a bit. I had found several studios and one was not really appropriate. I moved into another one and even I think a third after Debra was born.

I never lost Sharon Walker, Mrs. Walker's daughter. She stayed with me all the time and succeeded me when I left in 1976. But, I'm ... ~~succeeded me as head of my company, but I'm getting ahead of my story.~~

So, I had a lucrative school going and even before Debra was born, another love of my life came into play, acting. I loved acting, as you know, as child and a young adult. And, I

suddenly got quite a few opportunities to do that.

The first one was, a temporary director, Ed Doherty, had consented to direct *Light Up the Sky*, a Hart-Kaufman play, comedy. And, he was only there briefly as director, but it was the Little Theater of Baton Rouge, and he needed someone to play an actress. And, he had worked with Peter, knew me, knew I loved the theatre and asked me to do it, and I did.

Subsequently, ~~Peter~~, while I was in rehearsal, Peter who had never seen me act before, asked if he could come to one of the rehearsals, which I said of course he could. And, he came and sat through the rehearsal. And, then as we were driving home I said, "Well, what's the verdict?"

And he said, "No question you're a very good actress. But, you don't know how to speak." He said, "You are projecting your voice on your vocal chords and if you do that too often, you're going to have problems." And he said, "Let me help you," like he would help a singer.

So, he put me through some routines of throwing my voice from my vocal chords into between my ears, so that it resonated, rather than strain the vocal chords. And, I worked very hard on that, got terrible headaches. But, it was a lifesaver. He really taught me how to speak. And, when I did roles later on, I profited from his coaching very much.

Then, LSU had a very active drama department. And, the head of the drama department had also worked with Peter. In fact, he had done a role, or will have done a role, in *The Medium* for Peter, Menotti's *The Medium*, he did Toby, who doesn't speak. Toby just gestures, he has no voice. And, he was wonderful in it.

Don was also a very progressive thinking director, and he was doing a show called *Laugh, Clown, Laugh*, a Russian drama. It was made famous by Lon Chaney in the movies, I think even in the silents. It's a very fine circus show. And, he was doing it on a raked stage. The stage was at an angle, and so many of his young actors just didn't want to do that. They said they felt uncomfortable, they would lose their balance. They didn't feel as if they could handle it. Some of them, not all. But, he needed one role to be fill-

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