

Milly

An Oral History with Milly Rosner
and Marilyn Rowland
Spring 2001

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INTERVIEWER'S HISTORY

I have known Milly for as long as I have lived in Berkeley, which is now over a quarter of a century! She has dedicated her intelligence, talent, artistic savour, and vast intuitive skills to teaching young cellists and enabling them to experience their full capabilities. She has launched many into professional musical careers. Her generosity has brought a community of people to her home in Berkeley from all comers of this country.

For several years, I had wanted to do Milly's oral history, but our busy lives postponed the project until January 22, 2001. For these interviews, I went to Milly's house once a week around noon. Frequently we had lunch first in her cozy kitchen, which looks into her back garden. This quiet oasis on busy College Avenue is often full of music lovers who are enjoying gourmet refreshments following a recital or workshop in the large living room/music studio which has witnessed hundreds of inspired recitals over the years. Milly's house is a place where good music, conversation and art flourish in constant momentum. She is one of our Berkeley treasures.

I have always known Milly to be insightful and articulate, so I knew there was little prompting needed from me for her story to be told. We met for six sessions from January 22 until March 1.

In the tradition of oral history, the transcription of the spoken word has not been altered to a more "written" style. As such, there are some expressions which occur in spoken language and some redundancies in our interviews. This is Milly as she speaks, not as she writes! The aural tapes are also being kept and are available upon request. At times, our interview seems to turn into a conversation. I apologize for this. Milly, I have known you well and long!

It has been a great joy and privilege to know Milly as a friend and musical and life mentor. I want to thank her for her friendship and kind cooperation to participate in this project. Much gratitude is due to Ljuba Davis, Emil Miland, John Reid and Debra Schwartz, who contributed to this book with their introductions.

Marilynn Rowland, May 2001

I never forgot Milly's words to me (twenty years ago to be exact): "Ljubichke, I teach holistically, not just how to play the cello." She said this to me, I am sure, to let me know that if my son Davie, or I were to be taken seriously as her students, we needed to know what to expect from her in what would quite possibly be a lifetime association. Over the years I came to understand exactly what she meant by that statement and probably because of this philosophy (and, maybe in spite of it!) a friendship was forged that endured many crises and, oh, so many celebrations! Milly became part of my family and, even more important to me, I became part of hers.

It is hard to remember when—and how—my relationship with Milly metamorphosed from that of teacher/student of teacher/mother of student, to what Milly and I jokingly referred to as the "tzibile sisters," the Jewish names given to each of us in childhood. We would regularly rendezvous in my kitchen around 10 A.M. on many a weekday morning, Milly having hiked from the Cowden School in North Berkeley, through the campus and then on to College Avenue and my house in the Elmwood. We'd sit at my little butcher block table in my kitchen and snack on our favorite indulgence: tuna fish salad with a slice of "tzibile" (onion) on a Ritz cracker and a shared diet Pepsi. What a feast! And we'd

catch up on all the news: not just music stuff but the real nuts and bolts of our daily lives - finances (oy!), children, relatives, relationships, fashion (hats, shoes and more hats!) and health (double oy!). We'd laugh over our follies, support each other through hard times (and boy! have there ever been some of those over the years!), and shed tears together during times of grieving and loss.

I seem to be tuned into Milly, for no matter where I am on the planet (physically) I just know if she is ok or if she is not. On more than one occasion I happened to call Milly, because I got the "vibe"; I knew that something was amiss with her. More often than not, it was health-related and my registered nurse radar antennae went into action. I remember one of those occasions when Milly had to be hospitalized. After the critical health emergency had passed, Milly was transferred to a private room for an extended period of healing. (Actually, the doc did not want to let her go home sooner because he knew Milly, one of those people who, when told one aspirin would suffice, would take two or maybe three to speed things along, would not stay off her feet and would overdo walking!) She called me from the hospital one day: "Ljubichke, I am feeling so good now, and I really must teach. And I have this wonderful private room. I must prepare some of my students for very important performances. So, would you do me a big favor and bring one of the Oriental carpets in my living room and a music stand and a floor lamp to the hospital? Then I will be able to teach properly here in the hospital as long as I must stay here." And she did and Alta Bates Hospital has not been the same since!

If I were to state one quality that epitomizes Milly, it would be her humanity, demonstrated by a continuous display of connectedness to the world around her. I've observed Milly in so many different situations and relating to all kinds of people. She is always giving of herself: to students, colleagues, and strangers in need, whether it be offering her little studio or even her own bedroom to someone in need of a place to stay for awhile; or, a ticket to go home to Europe for a family emergency; or, free lessons for a deserving student whose musical potential she believes in and whose family's finances cannot handle the burden of the extra coaching; or just general—and extravagant—thoughtfulness. (A particularly sweet experience was when Milly called me with a request: "Ljubichke, I know you would know where to get a huge (and I mean HUGE!) box of Godiva chocolates for the nursing staff on my floor at Summit Hospital. They were all so wonderful to me and I want to let them know how much I appreciated their good care.") She never ceases to see beauty in every young person she meets. Often I have observed her telling some awkward adolescent girl or boy, "You are so pretty" or "so handsome," and the smile that emanates from the child is worth more than gold! This is not to say that Milly doesn't say it like it is. She is unabashedly truthful

and straightforward in speech (while speaking her mind in that wonderful semi-drawl, often beginning with the phrase, "Waal, you know...") She will not tolerate a phony and I have learned from her that personal honesty goes hand in hand with artistic integrity. With Milly you cannot fake it, whatever the "it" is!

There is a beautiful poem, *Aishes Chayil (Woman of Valor)* that is found in the Bible in Proverbs 31, 10-31: "A woman of worth who can find? For her price is far above rubies...Strength and dignity are her clothing...She stretches out her hand to those in need...She opens her mouth with wisdom...Give her of the fruit of her hands and let her works praise her in the gates." Kind, gentle, brilliant, generous, flamboyant, creative, sophisticated, honest and humble...this is our Milly, my Masha, dearest sister, my friend.

Happiest of Birthdays to you.

Ljuba Davis
12 May 2001

Thank You, Milly

My world changed overnight when I began lessons with Milly. Taking the 51 bus from Alameda, I would arrive in Berkeley and find a house teeming with cellos and cello lovers. I thrived in this welcome world of instant friends with shared interests and the best tuna salad I'd ever tasted.

That first summer we worked together was special, as was all our time together, but I didn't know that yet. Milly certainly got me to gather the nuts and bolts of cello-ing. I observed that her passion for teaching and helping others learn, especially kids, was almost overwhelming and certainly inexhaustible. She gave me such focused attention that I couldn't help but respond.

We all responded. In workshops, not only did I begin to hear the gorgeous cello repertoire, but I was able to share my young colleagues' adventures into the art of performing. So many of us that passed through Milly's door not only chose to make the cello their way of life, but have done it with passion, focus, and dedication. I wonder what is in that tuna salad?

I remember conversations about the way Sinatra might turn a phrase or stress a word. I remember Milly turning me on to listening to what Schnabel was doing, as well as Fournier. I remember taking Tai Chi and getting another perspective on controlled movement and unforced concentration. I remember a friend that was so generous with her guidance and true desire to help that she opened the door to becoming a fine cellist ... she opened the door to becoming. Period.

So ... I know I speak for so many when I say, Thank you, Milly. Thank you for every Minnesota, hippopotamus, and onion soup. Thank you for getting me through the minefield of my adolescence with the seeds of self-esteem and awareness well planted. Thank you for giving me the time to collect my gratitude. (You know what I mean.) Thank you for taking an amoeba and sometimes forcefully nudging it towards the investigation of artistry. It wouldn't have happened anywhere else, or with anyone else. I've been so fortunate to have known your influence.

Thank you, Milly.

—Emil Miland

So we walk in. Don't bother knocking, it's always open. And first there come the textures, then the smells, hats on the walls, James Joyce walking through posters, cello stuff and kids' pictures, rockers and carpets and lamps and file cabinets and book racks and the big well-lighted piano—and the stamp of Milly everywhere.

"We can meet at my house," she said, "having way too much fun with Finnegan to stop now." That was twenty years ago. Oh yeah, I'd heard that before. Two or three weeks, peters out. Even as Milly herself said later one time cautioning: "Listen, I give specialty lessons, but you they can get at Cal."

There are two kinds of famous. The outside kind and the inside. The outside kind is always a little dubious. Are we beamed upon by a face prepared to meet the faces that it meets? Whereas the inside builds slowly, connects patiently over time, glows more than shines. Someone has always done the planning arranging calling cooking and for two decades Milly has been the dependable best. You've got

to love a woman who makes the world work and then dribbles on her bodice.

And if pressed as to her most lovable quality I would say her funnybone. She can tell the most endearing and heartfelt stories of people she knows (most of which few of us have ever heard of) who do the most mundane or dramatic acts of kindness. Helping a poor immigré, boosting a shy student, soothing someone's despair, calming a panic. And yet it's the greatest pleasure of all to reminisce about the jokes and laughter. At least once a year she says, "look me little love me long", and throws back her head and howls. "I think I'm clinically depressed," she says brightly. Then someone asks how many dull people does it take to change a lightbulb. (Sigh) One. And she laughs till she's almost choking. Bonnie stands there in her skin tight outfit and I fumble for a compliment. "You look so, what a great, I mean"—Milly comes by on her walker and out of the corner of her mouth says, "nice ass, huh?"

That was a close shave the last time in the hospital. But thank God Milly's too tough to give in. And finally it's her endlessly good heart that pulls her through. "I'm too weak to talk," she said at a low point to us visitors, "but I love to hear you two discuss things".

Well, what we discuss a lot of the time when you're not around is how you're doing, Milly. But for your house where would we find a second home for ourselves and our books? Yes, where would we be without you?

By John Reid
May, 2001

What can you say about Milly? I remember the first time I saw her, in 1988. I had been living in the Bay Area for a short time and had two small children who were studying the violin. Scouting out the local youth orchestra situation, I went to St. John's Church on College one exceptionally warm May Sunday afternoon to hear a Young People's Chamber Orchestra concert. The people walking in the neighborhood and those going to the concert were mostly wearing skimpy lightweight clothes in bright and pastel colors. Coming down the walk toward the church was a tall, large-framed gray-haired woman theatrically attired in a long black waistless dress, her long black unbuttoned coat flapping slightly as she moved her body from side to side with each step; her huge black hat was tilted just so to the right, and her large black bag trailed behind as she leaned back slightly, taking in the entire scene. She had the satisfied half-smile of someone who owned the place. Everyone seemed to recognize and acknowledge her as she passed by.

Much later I came to realize that the neighborhood around St. John's, the Elmwood, is Milly's neighborhood, not only in the sense that she lives there. Because of her long involvement as a citizen in her community and her presence as a well-known cello teacher and musical force in the community, she does own an interest in its well being.

The local pharmacy, the Elmwood, has traditionally been a neighborhood gathering spot, to a great extent because of its old-fashioned lunch counter and soda fountain. When the long-time owner of the eatery retired, the local citizenry was crestfallen at the loss and wanted to help find a new manager for its beloved hangout. The press did a story on the neighborhood's efforts, and who should appear in the photo but Milly, lending her enthusiasm and cachet to the cause.

That wasn't the first or major time Milly figured in the news. My husband's first memory of Milly dates from a time when she was hospitalized several years ago; the papers carried the story, replete with pictures, that Milly was maintaining her very busy teaching schedule from her room at Alta Bates, even starting a new student in the process.

Several years later one of Milly's neighbors thought it inappropriate for her to give cello lessons in her house. He thought that his position would resonate with the community and the Berkeley City Council. Imagine his and the Council's surprise when over 200 people appeared at the hearing to support Milly in her effort to continue pursuing her livelihood in her home in the Elmwood as she had for so many years. The council chamber was full to overflowing that night with people that Milly had touched, either as a teacher or as an involved citizen of her community. There were people she had recently met on the street who were new in town and whom Milly had invited to one of her famous parties or Thanksgiving dinners, there were legions of old friends outside of music, and people who had lived in the neighborhood for a long time and had become part of Milly's extended family. In attendance at the hearing was a cellist's "who's who in the Bay Area": cellist members of the San Francisco Symphony, San Francisco Opera and Ballet, free-lance cellists from all over the Bay Area, all of whom had either studied with Milly or had worked with her in the cello community as colleagues or as participants or collaborators in Milly's legendary "Cello Bash." There were well-known music teachers, the head and many faculty members of The Crowden School, where Milly had long given of her time and herself, and there were other musicians and well-wishers. A world-famous composer spoke about his first music lessons taken at his teacher's house, and he mused at what a chilling effect an unfavorable outcome would have on the future of music education in our community. A renowned litigator, whose son Milly taught, handled the presentation. Although everyone acknowledged what a fine cello teacher Milly is, the common thread at the hearing was that what Milly gives is much more than cello lessons, and no one wanted to put that in jeopardy. Of course, Milly won her case, and the stories in the press were extensive and wonderfully inspiring.

Never has there been anyone better suited to her profession than Milly. She loves kids, she loves teaching, and she loves the cello (and cellists). You can be in a conversation with Milly about any subject, and somehow it brings to her mind something about one of her students or about a lesson or performance she has just heard (of a cellist, of course)—usually something "wonderful" or something that "knocked her socks off." You can be listening to a concert with Milly, and no matter how many people are on stage, no matter how complicated the music or how impressive the soloist is, the first thing Milly will remark about after the performance will invariably be something about the cello section or something earth-stopping done by a particular cellist, probably someone sitting somewhere in the middle or back of the section that you're too embarrassed to admit you didn't notice.

Another fixture in the Elmwood cello scene, Ruth Hardin, tells about one of her earliest memories of Milly. Milly was relatively new in town, and Ruth, who had been teaching in the neighborhood for years, paid her a call at home, which was then on Russell Street. When Ruth arrived on the particular hot summer afternoon, she found Milly lying on the floor of her living room listening to a tape of someone playing the cello. Upon Ruth's inquiry as to the performance, Milly replied that the tape was of the lesson she had just given. She was listening to see whether she had made any mistakes' teaching or overlooked anything and whether she could think of any explanations to the student that could be clearer.

Ever since I became friends with Milly, I have participated in her extreme pedagogical conscientiousness. I have received many late night phone calls with Milly's voice on the other end full of concern about any number of things that could be going on in her teaching—she relates a whole series

of events and ends with, “Please tell me I did the right thing.” Nothing is more engaging to Milly than what or whom she is teaching. She loves to talk about teaching technique and cello technique, and she feels anxiety and concern about every one of her students and functions as their advocate as they make their way through their early years of musical life. She is demanding of them but never ceases to be amazed by them.

One of the things Milly and I chuckle about is our very different reactions to our students’ progress and performances. I am pleased and delighted by progress I see in my students, but am not surprised by it. I tend to expect progress as a result of good teaching coupled with good practicing—and of course I love to see it when it happens. Milly is like a proud parent with her students—she never loses her sense of wonder at everything her students do and is always “amazed” at their progress. What a wonderful thing it must be to have a teacher so completely enthralled by everything good you do!

Milly is a wonderful colleague and collaborator. We got the idea to try running a summer camp several years ago. The idea was to get all of our students playing their instruments for quite a few hours a day for a couple of weeks during the summer and exposing them to really good coaches and a lot of fun. I think I’m the one who’s had the most fun with Summer Music Berkeley. We have worked well together—the things I cringe at doing, Milly takes on with her usual gusto, and there are things that are my special domain. What is not surprising is that Milly always sticks with the project through the tricky times, always stays cheerful, even when I don’t, and comes up with creative solutions to difficult problems, like starting an intensive cello program when we have too many cellists for the number of violinists who sign up.

Whatever is going on with kids in music, Milly gets involved. She is always available to prepare cellists for Oakland Youth Orchestra performances, and since so many of them already study with her, it’s a really good section. Whenever the question of recruiting cellists for OYO comes up, Michael Morgan, conductor of the youth orchestra and the Oakland East Bay Symphony suggests, with his characteristic wave of the hand, that we “Just call Milly.” When discussing her effectiveness, he says she is like “a force of nature.”

One of the things Milly has done often is travel. In this regard, she has not always come off too well. There was the time she went to New York and came home after having been attacked by a vicious cat. You don’t even want to hear about that!

Our family has its own story about travels with Milly. Several years ago I had planned to play a recital at the National Theater in San Jose, Costa Rica. After that we planned to be tourists for a few days, visiting the beach, volcanoes, and the other things one does there. Since it was spring vacation, Milly agreed to come along. She wasn’t feeling great and thought the rest would do her some good. She made reservations at the hotel across the street from the National Theater, and said that her plane would arrive in time for her to listen to my dress rehearsal in the hall and help with the sound check. When she didn’t appear, we called the hotel and airline, only to find out she had not boarded the scheduled plane in Miami. She finally materialized, several hours later, having fallen asleep in the Miami airport waiting for her plane (she had missed her plane in San Francisco but got to have an impromptu shopping trip on the way to the airport).

At some point a day or two into the trip, Milly announced that she had lost her return ticket but no one was too worried because it was probably in the hotel room and there was plenty of time to find it. The next day we decided to take a stroll in downtown San Jose, which has lovely street markets. Milly bought gifts for friends, but on returning to the hotel, she realized that a pickpocket had found her

wallet, which held her money and passport. To top it off, it was her birthday. The airline suggested a call to the U.S. Embassy. Of course, one would expect that a call to the U.S. embassy on a Wednesday morning would yield some results. No such luck. The security guard who answered the phone reminded us that this was Holy Week and that U.S. Embassies observe all local holidays. The ambassador was gone and the person in charge of the Embassy would not be available until Monday. Milly, however, was supposed to fly home on Sunday. We all went about our day visiting one of the local cellists and her students while Bob, my husband, spent the entire afternoon on the phone back and forth to some of his friends/officials in Oakland and Washington and with officials in Costa Rica. Finally, the Congressman, Ron Dellums, came through with a solution which eventually saved the situation. The solution involved American Airlines going through every boarding pass for the preceding week (with Milly helping) to prove that Milly was actually in Costa Rica so she could get permission to leave. Back in L.A., the U.S. customs officer gave Milly a re-entry test involving questions about the O.J. Simpson trial. After Milly told some fellow passengers on her plane about all her adventures on the trip, they refused to board until they made sure she got on. Milly has always said that experience made her glad Bob was on her side—Bob likes to think that because of him, she's back home, teaching in Berkeley.

Debra Wood Schwartz
Berkeley, CA
April 30, 2001

Interview Number One, Beginnings and Family Background

Marilynn Rowland (MR): Today is January 22, 2001, and we are starting Milly Rosner's oral history.

Milly, I've wanted to do this for a long time and I am really happy that we are sitting down to get it done. And I want first to ask you about your beginnings. Where and when were you born, if you don't mind telling me when?

Milly Rosner (Milly): As I tell my kids, I'll give you the date: you figure out how old I am. I try not to think about it. [laughter] I was born April 12, 1926, in Chicago.

Parents and Growing Up in Chicago

MR: And tell me about your parents, a little bit.

Milly: My mother came from Russia—from a place called Yavankov—which is close to Kiev. My father came from Hungary, near Budapest. They came to America in the early 1900's. My mother's name was Sophie, Sophie—I think—Cooperstein. And my father's name was David—in Yiddish, "Dohvid" Rosner. My father said the name was originally spelled with a "Z," but in English that's usually pronounced "Ratzner," and he did not want to be "a rat" in any language, as he said. So he changed it to "S," Rosner. My father claims that all Rosners are related, even the Catholics, because there was a lot of conversion during times of pogroms and discrimination. My mother had been married before and was a widow when she married my father. My father had been married before; divorced his wife I guess to marry my mother.

MR: Was this in this country or

Milly: This country, and my father had two children from his previous marriage. One of whom—his daughter, Bernice Ham—I became very close to after I came to California. I really got to know her when I'd been here for awhile, and just adored her.

MR: So you didn't grow up with them? –

Milly: No, I grew up with my mother's son, who was almost a generation older than me, and I have a younger brother who is a year and a half younger than I am. His name is Charles. My father's two children from the previous marriage are now dead.

MR: And Bernice is one of them? But she died.....

Milly: Recently. And Emil was the other.

MR: What did your father do?

Milly: Many things. He worked in the garment industry—factory. He went along with my aunt in terms of helping organize unions.

MR: What was his job?

Milly: Button hole maker. And later he owned a junk shop, which meant that as a kid I would get all sorts of remnants, for instance, things from the circus—costumes from the circus, etcetera.

MR: What did you do with those?

Milly: Played with them. They were, you know, fantasy. And then later, they had a grocery store in Virginia. My mother's relatives lived there in Virginia.

MR: And your parents went there to be with them?

Milly: Well, my father did very well during the depression and when, everyone else was making money, afterwards, he went broke, so my mother's family bought a store for them—you know, loaned them the money to buy a store, and they worked in the grocery store and we lived in back and upstairs.

MR: In what town in Virginia was this?

Milly: Norfolk, Virginia.

MR: Outside of working in the store, did your mother ever do anything else?

Milly: She had been—I think her first husband had a butcher shop—and I think she worked for him.

MR: How old were you when they moved to Virginia?

Milly: About sixteen or seventeen.

MR: So you really grew up in Chicago. What is your first memory at all as a young child?

Milly: A funeral. It was very funny: my mother and father leaned towards the Left, and it was a funeral of a comrade who had died, and I remember mentioning it to my mother and father, and they couldn't get over it because I must have been two years old at the time. But I remembered it very, very vividly. It was an outdoor thing—more like a tribute, rather than a funeral and I remember crowds of people, and the elevated train.

MR: What was your first musical memory that comes to mind?

Milly: The first legitimate musical memories came about when I got to high school.

MR: Was there music in your home?

Milly: My mother belonged to a singing society - a radical singing society...

MR: Radical?

Milly: Well, you know, the unions were largely radical at that time, and they sponsored all sorts of cultural things, and they sang in Yiddish. All sorts of radical songs, but also they did classics in Yiddish. So that [hums] Handel's Maccabeus] was sung in Yiddish [hums a bit]. That, I remember, and there were other things. And the first Shakespeare that I saw was in Yiddish: King Lear done by the Yiddish Theater, and, boy, that's every Jewish parent's plea: "Children don't appreciate me!"

MR: Do you remember the community you were living with in Chicago—was it pretty active?

Milly: Well, I was always a misfit, because we grew up in a very orthodox Jewish neighborhood. There was a synagogue—practically on every corner—you know, facing each other, etcetera. And everyone was very Jewish and quite conservatively Jewish, and followed the religion. My parents just openly defied all the religious rules, so that we ate bread on Passover and didn't observe the Sabbath.

MR: Do you know why they were not orthodox?

Milly: Because they were radical, you know. They joined the union and though there were various degrees of radicalism—you know, there was socialism and my father's sister was a Socialist and ran for alderman in her ward and my mother was radical—was more towards a Communist—I don't think she was ever a communist, but she was a "fellow traveler."

MR: Do you think they were this way because they grew up in Europe, and Russia is a Communist country?

Milly: No. Because they left during the Revolution—or right before the Revolution and it wasn't Communist. You know, my mother lived through pogroms, and that's one of the reasons even her siblings, who were not radical, really appreciated the Red Army. There were people in the Red Army who saved them from the Cossacks, very often, because of the pogroms. My mother lived in a ghetto where Jewish people were not allowed to go to Russian schools, and my aunt, for instance, told me about learning Russian—they weren't allowed to write Russian—or speak Russian, or do anything educational in Russian, and my aunt tells stories about going to the beach—to the water—where they could write in the sand and then obliterate it—just rub it out. But in Russia the only way Jews could escape the ghetto was by becoming musicians. There were many, many of them who went to Vilna part of Russia, and they played the violin because that was easily transportable.

MR: But your parents didn't play musical instruments, but they appreciated music.

Milly: Yes. My father grew up in Hungary, near Budapest, which wasn't quite as discriminatory as Russia. He did not live in the ghetto. He lived in a Jewish neighborhood, but it wasn't a ghetto—it wasn't enforced. And he says that his grandmother grew up in a very cultivated, cultured society. What happened was her son, my father's father, almost drowned and he almost died, and his mother promised him to God, if he survived. And he became a rabbi. And always rather resented it—he was always a maverick. Never had a congregation, but people came to him. He spoke out against hypocrisy. "Why do you praise people once they are dead? Why didn't you help them when they were alive and needed help?" That sort of thing. He died when I was nine—he was close to ninety at the time—my brother and I were rather "late" children; my parents were in their forties when we were born. I remember, as a kid, going to my grandfather's house, and there were always people there talking with him, of various religions and ethnic backgrounds. He was a very intelligent man and, you know, part of the Orthodox Jewish religion was not making graven images, and he always loved art, and his way around that was to copy the Torah in Hebrew, with very ornate letters—very beautiful calligraphy. And my father tells a story: my grandfather on his death bed saying: "...and if there is not a God, am I going to be angry!"

MR: Sounds like they were intelligent, rebellious—had minds of their own and a sense of humor too! Did you feel sort of out of place in your neighborhood then?

MR: Oh, yes.

Milly: Did this affect you in any way?

MR: Well, I was a loner. I did a lot of reading. My childhood at home was not very healthy and I escaped by reading.

MR: When you say “healthy,” you mean you were not well, or...

Milly: No, I’m talking about emotional health. Talk about dysfunctional families! I really, really think that my mother was clinically schizophrenic.

MR: And what were her two sides? Usually, schizophrenic people have two different personalities.

Milly: Maybe it wasn’t schizophrenia. She was very paranoid. She always expected the worst of people. No one ever got married because they were in love. Women got married because they were pregnant. My mother was very imposing looking. So that the poor ladies of the Westside of Chicago used to call my mother “the grande dame of the West Side.” She wore a lorgnette, she was very stately, wore cloth coats with Persian lamb collars while she protested poverty. She would go to any extent to support her lies. She always felt that people didn’t appreciate her and all the work she did for various organizations, and she didn’t have anything nice to say about most people, except for her sisters and brothers—her family.

MR: What did she think of them?

Milly: Oh, thought they were wonderful! And the last word!

MR: Was she hard on you as a mother—very critical?

Milly: Very determined that I was never going to have anything she didn’t have.

MR: That’s kind of unusual. Have you ever analyzed why this maybe happened to her from her own family background?

Milly: I had too much trouble just contending with it. I fantasized a lot—I had a blind side—I just didn’t see all sorts of things. I denied certain things. I lied to my cohorts at school by saying—my mother dressed me very badly—I think that is the reason I like clothes so much now—my mother dressed me very, very badly, and what I would say was my mother wanted to buy me pretty things, but - stupid me! I really didn’t want them.

MR: Kind of protected her then?

Milly: Yes.

MR: Was your father also someone that you could not go to?

Milly: My father always came off very sweet, but one of the things I’ve learned—I’ve observed—later, with families: if he didn’t stand up against her—if he didn’t protect me, he was on her side. I realized that later. But I always saw him as someone very sweet. Someone once said that, in a way, I was very

lucky because it was black and white. I could see that my mother—actively—really hated me, and didn't want me. And as someone said, in most cases, it is very hidden, and I began to observe young people—especially as I grew up—who, you know there are many ways a mother can show her hatred for her daughter, and I'm talking about the daughter-mother relationship. This is the woman who is well-dressed, who with a skinny child dresses her in vertical stripes. With a heavy child, dresses her in horizontal stripes. It was that sort of thing. I remember Florsheim oxford shoes, lisle stockings, and old-lady dresses. And bangs and long curls.

MR: Did you feel like your brother was an ally to you, your younger brother?

Milly: Charles. Chuck. What happened was because I read a lot about fraternal love, I loved him. He behaved as if he loved me. And he would say, you know, when we were very young, "I don't understand you—why you argue with Mama? Why do you argue with her? Just say, 'Yes, Mama, yes, Mama,' and go do your own thing?" And of course that's how he lived his life. He came to a pretty bad end, you know, when he grew older. He graduated from law school, top of his class, but started embezzling, started running away, became a really compulsive gambler, stole money, lied about why he stole money, you know, when we were both grown up. He would say he stole it to help his sister, who was having a hard time.

MR: Well, it sounds as if you weren't very close to your immediate family then?

Milly: No.

MR: Although I do remember that your father lived with you in his last years.

Milly: Yes, when my mother died and my father asked me if I wanted to come for the funeral, I said "I am coming to see what we can do with you." And he of course wanted me to leave Berkeley and go live with him in Norfolk. He said, "All my friends are here," and all his friends said, "Go, go." They didn't want to be responsible for him. And he was eighty years old at the time. So I said, "You have a choice. You come stay with me, or stay here with your friends." It was just before I moved into this house, and I made room for him.

MR: I remember him: very white hair, and very pleasant.

Milly: Yes. Very imposing man. I talked him into growing a beard because I couldn't stand watching him shave. You know, I was sure he would kill himself, and I loved that white beard. He came here intent upon ridiculing me. I was the dumb one—I was dumb because my mother had said to him, when she was sick, at the end, "If you go to any of the kids, go to Masha." (which was my name also). "Go to Masha." And he said, "Why?" "Because she's too dumb to steal from you." And, you know, it was very funny—he came around, because he was very impressed with my standing in this community and he once said, "All the things your Mother wanted, you have—all the respect, love, your friends, etcetera."

Musical beginnings and the tin cello

MR: Isn't that amazing!

So we should backtrack a little bit and I would like to ask you more about your music. Was your first instrument the cello? When did you first think you might want to play the cello?

Milly: I entered high school in the middle of the year. I came in January, and what happened was they had indoctrination week. I went to a high school where there were five thousand kids—a big, big school, John Marshall High School in Chicago. They had many activities, all of which presented reasons for joining them during indoctrination week. And the Glee Club sang, and the band played, and the orchestra played, and the newspaper people talked, and the drama society dramatized, and the orchestra played March Slav and my whole body quivered. They said, “Anyone who would like to play an orchestral instrument, a string instrument,” [except violin—they would not start teaching violin in high school], “please come up to the Orchestra Room 411.” What they did was, they incorporated part of the wind players in the band, and then twice a week the best wind players would come play with the orchestra. Both the band and orchestra met every day for an hour and a half, because they had a Home Room period, which was for the music, plus an Orchestra period. I remember, I was a pretty nerdy kid, with my crepe dress and lisle stockings and Oxford shoes and bangs and long curls, and I was the sort of kid who—one of my friends remembers me as coming to school with my galoshes on the wrong feet—I would walk around in a trance and bump into a post and say, “Excuse me” and keep going. But at any rate, I walked up the four flights of stairs to Orchestra Room 411, and anyone who’s played in school orchestras knows Merle J. Isaac, who wrote all sorts of arrangement for orchestra. I remember they had the double oak doors that everyone went through. But I didn’t know that, I stood outside and knocked—which of course no one could hear—and the way I got in was someone opened the door—the door opened inward—and I fell in, just tripped in and Merle J. Isaac and Ralph C. Lewis were sitting at a desk, and said, “Yes?” I said, “I want to play in your orchestra.” They said, “What instrument would you like to play?” I didn’t know the names of the instruments and I said, “Accordion?” And they handed me a cello - it was an all-metal cello. Well, they used to make metal cellos for people who went to the tropics, because they couldn’t withstand the dampness and heat, otherwise.

MR: I’ve never seen a metal cello.

Milly: They were heavy, so quite a burden to carry.

MR: So what kind of metal, do you know?

Milly: No. I don’t know. It was pretty heavy.

MR: What was the sound like?

Milly: It sounded like an echo chamber. Yes, very reverberatory. And, they handed me a cello and it was very funny, the first time I sat—they showed me how to hold it—the first time I sat down to play I vibrated.

MR: Did your fingers vibrate or your whole body?

Milly: My fingers. I just vibrated. I watched the people in the orchestra; my ear wasn’t developed yet, and I remember learning, “Ya dah da dah, dah da dah dah da” [Melody in F, by Anton Rubenstein], and you have to shift to fourth position, and I always hit the wrong note. I always hit the wrong note. And I remember when the Supervisor of Music of Chicago came to the school, they would say, “Milly, sit down and play,” and I’d go “Ya, dah da dah, dah da dah, dah da...,” and they’d say, “That’s enough.” But, at any rate, I loved it. It gave me something to do that I just loved.

MR: Did you pretty much teach yourself, or did you...

Milly: We learned at school.

MR: So your first teacher was who—who was he?

Milly: Merle J. Isaac. Ralph C. Lewis. They just had classes where they added another student.

MR: But what were they like as teachers? Were they very supportive guys?

Milly: Oh yeah, Merle J. Isaac was very gentlemanly. Very thin, with a mustache and glasses. He had two daughters...

MR: Your age?

Milly: Yes, or close to my age. I was young for high school.

MR: How old were you?

Milly: Twelve, I think

MR: You had skipped grades?

Early and voracious love of reading

Milly: Yes, because when I was in grammar school I was obviously a misfit and I tested off the books for reading. And I was big. And they thought maybe I'd be happier in an older grade. What happened was that I missed all sorts of things, like multiplication tables. My math was always bad because I missed primary grade work on it. Of course, I was too young for the older grade, so I was more of a misfit. I stayed more to myself. I just read a lot. In Chicago there are lots of public libraries. We lived across the street from one. I would go to the library right after school and sit there and read all the books I couldn't take out because I was only allowed to take out juvenile books. And I remember starting through the A's and getting through Sinclair Lewis. You know, just reading.

MR: Do you remember any particular books that impressed you in that time?

Milly: Lots of books that I didn't understand. Books that I reread as an adult and I had missed all the sexual parts. Anything that was over my head I skipped over—went on—I was a very indiscriminating reader. I mean, I loved biographies, I loved y...

MR: Do you remember any particular person you admired through reading?

Milly: I remember reading a biography of Rasputin, when I was just a kid. I read History books, I read True Story magazine—it was all equally good to me. It was all equally good. I never read fairy tales. I read those when I got older, because that was a part lacking in my education. I read Dickens.

MR: You were twelve years old?

Milly: No, no, no. I was younger. This was grammar school. Then what I would do, I would love to take

out three juvenile books, and I'd take out three books a night. I left at five o'clock or six o'clock, and I would go home with the three books and read them.

MR: And finish them? You must have been a very fast reader!

Milly: I was fast and, you know, I stayed up late to read. I never did my homework, but I did read.

MR: But you still managed to get good grades, even if you didn't do your homework?

Milly: I don't know. The only time I remember getting good grades was my first semester in high school, when I got two A's and two B's. I just couldn't do math—always just barely slipped by with math. If I bothered to do my work in other subjects, I did pretty well.

MR: I think a lot of times—back then even more so—they thought that girls and Math and girls and science didn't go together anyway, right? They've stopped fighting it now, I guess. Do you remember any teacher or any other adult who was a mentor or some figure you felt you could talk to?

Remembered teachers

Milly: Actually not. The teachers I remember—I remember a Latin teacher. I would sit in Latin with a book I was reading behind the Latin text, during class, and he was very annoyed with me. He couldn't stand my handwriting, he couldn't read it. I took to using script, capital letters, to this day that's how I write.

MR: So people could read it?

Milly: So people could read it and you know, to this day, I have a difficulty signing my signature. I remember, he had my mother come in. He was a rather short man, and my mother, who was only five-five—in those days was rather statuesque, big, and held herself erectly, and they were standing there and he was complaining to my mother and my mother said, "You think that's bad? Just wait until you hear my story about her!" It was just that sort of thing. I remember him, that was Mr. Seligman. Then I remember a Miss Bostrom, who was very fat and very sloppy.

MR: What did she teach?

Milly: English. Very fat and very sloppy and never bathed. She always smelled, you know.

MR: What did you think about her? You liked her? Or you noticed her faults?

Milly: I just never took any teacher seriously. The only people who meant anything to me were the people in the Music Department. I was very undisciplined. I was very undisciplined.

Problems with growing up

MR: So, your parents, more or less, let you bring yourself up?

Milly: Well, I could never believe anything they said, because they lied so much. My mother was just a

compulsive liar, and I didn't know what was right. I developed a sense of ethics through books. *A Tale of Two Cities*: that sort of thing.

MR: Did you have a friend your age that you were close to?

Milly: I had one friend, and I just didn't know how to handle it. I lived on the West Side. It was one neighborhood removed from Maxwell Street, which is like Third Avenue in New York, with all the shops, etcetera. This was one step up, but it was a solidly Jewish neighborhood. Roosevelt Road, with all the kosher delicatessens, kosher butchers, etcetera. And I remember what everyone wanted to do was move out of the neighborhood and move north. Celia's father, who'd become a furrier, started doing very well, and they moved north.

MR: Celia was your friend?

Milly: Sort of, sort of. She invited me over to her house. The public transportation system in Chicago was very good. I went to her house and we went down to the beach and she was bragging. She was talking about how nice it was to get out of the west side and to live where—well, what it was, what she lived in, was an upscale version of the ghetto. It was very Jewish. And she said, "It's so nice to live some place where they don't have unimaginative names, like Moisha and Masha, etcetera. I remember this big lady standing at the beach, wearing a floral print bathing suit with flowers hitting all the strategic points of her body, yelling, "Talloooa, come home and finish yer dinner." Oh, that was it. And I didn't fit in there.

MR: Did you fit in the orchestra, would you say?

Milly: I didn't know. I didn't care. I just did my own thing.

MR: But you were part of the cello section. And were you the last chair and did you work your way up? How many cellos were there?

Milly: About twelve. I sat pretty near the front.

MR: Õ So you must have learned quickly?

Milly: Fairly well. I didn't start taking private lessons until I was a senior.

First Cello Teacher

MR: And who did you find as a teacher?

Milly: I found one of the first women cellists—no, no, no: I studied first with Lois Bichel, who was with the Women's Philharmonic, and then switched over to Alice Lawrence, who was one of the first women ever to play in the Chicago Symphony.

MR: Well, these must have been very serious musicians, then. And you found them on your own?

Milly: Yes.

MR: Did you ever go to concerts of the Chicago Symphony?

Milly: Yes.

MR: Who was conducting?

Milly: Stock [Frederick]. Or was it after Stock? I can't remember, but I do remember I heard Feuermann and I heard Piatigorsky. What they had in Chicago were also concerts at Grant Park in a shell, and those were free. I heard Heifetz and Szigeti—they were outdoor concerts, and that was wonderful. I had this rich cultural environment available.

The hundred dollar Strad

So, although I grew up in the ghetto, I also worked all the time I was in high school. I remember working at a gift shop, you know, just did whatever had to be done at the time. I was at Goldblatt's Department store on Saturday, for two and a half dollars an hour. Wow! You know, I saved some money and there is a very cute story about my first cello.

MR: I was going to ask if you were still playing that metal cello?

Milly: I went to William Lewis & Son, and I had a hundred dollars, and they sold me a cello and a bow and a cake of rosin and the case—and even some music, and it cost me a hundred dollars. That's all I had. And I went home with it, and I was so in awe of that instrument, I wouldn't play it for awhile. It would stand in the corner and I played my metal cello and just admired it. And once I picked it up and looked at it, and looked inside, it said "Antonius Stradivarius faciebat in ano," you know. And I fought with my conscience, and took a bus to William Lewis & Son and went there, and I said, "Sirs, you made a terrible mistake."

MR: They had given you a Stradivarius?

Milly: No. They had lots of fake things.

MR: Oh, but you thought they had?

Milly: Yes, and they were so amused! They were so amused! They took me into the vault and showed me where the Stradivarius were. And Mischa Elman walked in once, and played—and he was very funny. He was a very famous soloist. He was one of those people who came from Vilna, in Russia, and I remember: very dramatic, always to an audience! "People ask me where I get my magic fingers," he said. "Magic fingers, fehfh." He said, "I practiced until blood ran." And you know, he was smart, but I was introduced to all of this, as this naïve kid...

MR: By this time you had been playing cello for a couple of years?

Milly: Yes—three or four years. They were so amused by me that I never had to buy a string—they always gave them to me. I never had to buy a cake of rosin—they always gave it to me. They always let me come in and look at the instruments in the vault. Many years later—this is several years ago, must have been about ten years ago—I went to Chicago because they were honoring Raya Garbasouva. At that time, I was teaching The Barber Concerto, which is very difficult. She was the only one who had a recording of it, and I had called her, I had written to her to ask her about things, and I went to meet her

because they were honoring her. She was very gracious and very, very lovely. At this [gathering], was the “Son” of Lewis & Son. I told him the story about the first cello. He said, “You know, my father came home and told us about you.” Many years later, that was so funny!

Last remarks about early years

MR: Isn't that amazing, because you obviously were—unlike your family—you were honest.

Milly: Well, I read books. I read books...

MR: Is there anything in particular that made you such a bookworm?

Milly: That was my escape. And when I became an adult I read avidly for awhile. Very, as I said, non-discriminatingly... and indiscriminatingly. I just read everything: the labels on cans, you know, books, newspapers, magazines, trashy fiction, Shakespeare.

MR: Do you still like to read a wide spread of things like that, or have you become more discriminating now?

Milly: Oh, I'm more discriminating and I don't read nearly as much now. I associate reading with a very unhappy period of my life. I'm starting to read again because when I became ill I had the time. You know, it's difficult for me to focus, because I remember those years, when I'd lock myself up in a room and just read and eat. And then become entirely disgusted with the way I looked and felt, and would take enough fare to take a streetcar or a bus to the end of the line, so I would have to walk back. You know, that sort of thing.

I was very hard on myself, because other people were so hard on me, I guess—my parents. And also, there's a thing: all through my life, as someone growing up and maturing, people would reach out towards me, and I couldn't accept it. It was a thing of: “if I'm not getting a thing from my family...”

MR: Well, you accepted it from the music store.

Millie: Yeah.

MR: Now, were you starting to practice hours and hours a day then?

Milly: No. I was playing a lot, but not practicing.

MR: And even when you started to study with these cellists privately?

Milly: I was very undisciplined.

MR: But you had enough talent that they kept you on?

Milly: Yes. I never fulfilled what they thought my talent was. Never. You know, I always fell short.

MR: But at that time, did you already have an idea that you wanted to pursue it as a career?

Milly: No, no. What happened later, was that I remembered the only thing that ever gave me any happiness was music. And I fell into it.

Interview Number Two, Eastward bound! Virginia and New Haven

MR: Today is February 1, 2001, and we are doing the second tape of your oral history, Milly. When we talked last time, we got to the point of your going to Virginia. Before we leave Chicago, you mentioned last time that you were able to see many famous musicians playing in Chicago, and I'm wondering if you have any particular memories of any of that?

Milly: Yes. One of the things that to me is very strange—I really understand the ghetto mentality. I understand, for instance, about black people in the ghetto. It may be only a bus ride away, but they never get out of their immediate environment. And a lot of it is you don't do what you are not accustomed to. It feels strange. Because I had music in high school, and because I went to free concerts at Grant Park and heard many famous people, it wasn't unusual for me to save money and go to a concert at Orchestra Hall. It's something like theater. Although I read plays, it never occurred to me to attend one, even after I was working, because it was completely outside my realm of knowledge and experience.

Car mechanic for the Army

Milly: There is one thing that happened before I left Chicago for good. I graduated from high school and my parents saw no reason in college for kids—for girls. Boys, maybe, but not for girls. There were public colleges, but it never occurred to me that I could borrow money from someone for the two dollar registration fee, or something of the sort. My parents said, "No." And so it was, "No." The war was on at the time but I was too young to enlist in the Army or the Navy or anything of the sort. But the thing that they had—I wish I could remember the name of it - it was part of the Army branch, but it was training to become an automobile mechanic's helper in an Army garage. And I signed up for that and went to Indianapolis. All of this is really very vague in my mind. It was more money than I had ever made. I think it came to about two hundred dollars a week. And what I did after a three month experience with money that I made—I think I came home with three red coats. I knew nothing about saving things. I remember I had a friend. Though I'm a big girl, she was really huge. She was at least six feet tall and pretty tough, and she had me sort of dominated. I went on double dates with her, with Army people, in Indianapolis, and I was just so unknowledgeable as to how to conduct myself - what to do. I know that in order to keep "hands off me," in a sexual manner, I learned to dance the polka. [laughter]. I kept dancing all night with anyone who asked me. I don't remember everything that happened. I know that was a part of my life. That there are so many things that I don't quite remember the chronology of when it happened.

But any way, at about that time my father was having financial troubles.

MR: Was this part of the big depression?

Staying with Aunt Esther

Milly: No, this was after it. It was during the war, when...during the depression we did okay. It was after that that my father had trouble. He had a junk shop, he was arrested for buying stolen property, i.e., you know, subway tracks. They were starting to build subways in Chicago. My father claims he didn't know it was stolen property. But at any rate, my mother's relatives bailed them out. You know, they were looking for a grocery store for him, because all of them were in the grocery store business. Meanwhile, I was sent to stay with an aunt Esther and some cousins in Virginia. They lived in Portsmouth. I do

remember I had a “Gone-With-the-Wind” feeling about what the south would be like. When I got to Norfolk and realized that we lived on top—that my aunt lived—on top of a grocery store in a black neighborhood, all my illusions went “boom.”

I was a total misfit in her household. I had two women cousins who were very beautiful and properly reared Jewish young ladies, you know, who listened to Mama, etcetera. Aunt Esther was a widow. Her husband had died before her last child was born. There was a cousin, Oscar, who was the oldest, and he was in the Army working on the atom bomb project, it turned out. No one knew that at the time. He kept saying, “You’ll know about what I’m doing soon.” A cousin, Sarah, who was next in age, who was very, very beautiful. Very beautiful. She didn’t go to college, but my aunt made up for it by—she had the most beautiful clothes in the world. And then, cousin Milly, who was a year older than I was, was sent to college because she won scholarships—was very bright, very bright, very cute. And my story about the three of us girls, is: you know, relatives would come and we would line up and they would say about Sarah, “Isn’t she gorgeous?” And they would say about Milly, “Isn’t she cute?” And they’d say about me—I was cousin Masha—“Oh, you’re healthy.” [laughter]. That sort of thing...

I just didn’t fit in at all. I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know how to behave. For one thing, I was taller than all my relatives and my aunt tried to make sure that I wasn’t taller than the men, and dressed me very inappropriately. I know that when I left I bought three inch heels and high hats. I felt so repressed for the year I was there.

Then my parents came. They [the relatives] were really very, very nice people. I just didn’t know how to handle them.

MR: Did you do something there, like go to school?

Milly: My aunt thought I should go to business school, and I cut out of it and went to movies instead. Then I got a job in a record store, you know, to earn some money.

MR: Were you playing your cello during this time?

Studying Russian at William & Mary and meeting Don Gallagher

Milly: Yeah, sort of. When my mother and father came, they got the store in Norfolk, thanks to my mother’s relatives. And again, we lived in back of the store and on top of the store, in a black neighborhood. It was very, very hard. We all worked the store. I was again unhappy—felt very inappropriate and always felt uncomfortable with my relatives, who were several notches above me in many ways. I remember they had an evening division extension school at William & Mary in Norfolk. I went there and took up a Russian class and was sitting next to a sailor—Don Gallagher, I’ll never forget him. It turns out he was a pianist—a very, very good pianist. When he discovered that I played the cello, he introduced me to an historical house in Virginia, where he had gone and sort of been adopted by the man and woman who ran it. He was the assistant curator of the Norfolk Art Museum. She was the custodian of this house—this historical house. They were marvelous people—they were just wonderful. I felt that I had found my element. At any rate, Donald got me to play again, and we would go there and we would practice. We played Beethoven’s sonatas, etcetera, and it was a lot of fun. Then he decided that I needed lessons—I was working all this time... We played and he decided I should be studying, and he—oh, I think this came after; I’m not sure of the chronology—one of the things I did was to take a job in something called the Institute of Living in Hartford. What it was was a facility for people with

emotional problems and I was what was called an aide. And the patients were “guests.” That was also just a very strange period in my life.

MR: How old were you then?

Milly: Oh, I don’t know. Late teens, probably; possibly even twenty. I have no sense, as I said, of the time. One of the things I did was to register in extension courses at someplace called the Hartt School of Music, which was later incorporated into the University of Hartford. I took lessons there and they were short of cellos and they offered me a scholarship to go to school there, which was totally and completely wasted on me. I was working and going to school—wasn’t sleeping very well. Just wore myself down and somewhere along the line I became very sick—really ill: feverish, hallucinating, all sorts of things. Someone called my parents, and my brother came to Hartford to get me to bring me home.

MR: Maybe you just overdid...

Milly: Well, I was in school full time, I was working eight hours a day [4 P.M. to 12:00 A.M.], living at the hospital, and just trying to go to school. My brother came to get me—my younger brother—and I was really out of it. I came home and I remember sleeping for days on end. I remember the bedroom I was in, that had cabbage roses on the wallpaper and awful conflicting linoleum—this was on top of the store. And I guess it was then that I took this job in the record store and met Don and we frequented the Meyer’s House (a historical inn in Norfolk, Virginia) where I practiced with Don. Well, they all decided I should be studying and they found a teacher for me. Within a short while I learned everything she had to teach me, you know...it was that sort of thing.

MR: What was her name? This was back in Norfolk.

Studying cello with Luigi Silva and starting at Yale

Milly: I don’t remember. And then, her former teacher, who was Luigi Silva, was coming south—someplace in North Carolina. She took me to meet him. I played for him and I really wasn’t very good. You know, I always had this problem when people thought I was much better than I could deliver. I could never match up to what they expected of me. I guess things were different then. He offered me a scholarship in two places where he taught. One was Juilliard and the other was Yale.

MR: Those were quite impressive schools!

Milly: At those times it didn’t mean that much, you know. I chose Yale because at that time it was still, an undergraduate school, all males, and I liked the idea of all those men around. But I spent a summer at Juilliard—you know, going to school there and then to Yale.

MR: How could you be a student there if it was all males?

Milly: Because they had three professional schools: one was music, one was art, and the other was theater. And you could attend any of those as an undergraduate if you were a woman. It was unusual—they were quite small schools. I worked and went to school. Really didn’t learn much at school.

MR: What job did you have while you were working?

Milly: I worked for awhile in a hospital—mental part of a hospital—at Yale-New Haven Hospital. Then I worked in a record store—lots of hours, went to school.

MR: And studied the cello with this teacher?

Milly: Luigi Silva. Again, a lot of it is very vague. There were many, many wonderful things that happened, in retrospect. Like I had classes with Ralph Kirkpatrick, who is a world-famous harpsichordist.

MR: What did he teach?

Milly: Music history. I had classes with Winternitz, who was the instrumental curator of the Metropolitan Museum, and who taught a wonderful class in opera. He was marvelous, especially in Mozart opera. But again, I just sort of didn't fit in anywhere. I was older than most of the undergraduates.

MR: By this time you were in your mid-twenties?

Milly: I was twenty-two or twenty-three. I was older. Most of the girls were eighteen. This was the tail end of the G.I. Bill of Rights, and most of the guys there were older. So I became the most popular woman on the campus, you know. It was just very fantastic. The thing I remember about that period of my life, I felt like a complete anachronism, you know, I felt like an F. Scott Fitzgerald character—living in the Fifties. It was just completely wrong. This was the day of crazy frat parties, of guys who had been veterans, and other guys—there were still some privileged guys going to Yale, you know, who had “names” with “the III” attached to it. I remember behaving very much like someone that I wasn't all the time. It was a great big act that I was putting on.

MR: Who were you trying to be?

Milly: A rich Yalie. You know, I was going out with...I was very much in demand, which I could never understand. I don't know, people tell me I was fairly attractive then—I don't remember ever feeling attractive. I always felt too big, but apparently I had raven black hair and a ruddy complexion, wore no makeup, had awful clothes, but looked very healthy. You know, it was again a wild thing. Somehow or other I got through Yale—I don't know how. I keep telling people I had a series of social promotions until I was out.

MR: Can you remember some of the things that you were studying with Luigi Silva and do you feel that he was your major teacher? Do you remember anything in particular that you learned from him?

A class with Ralph Kirkpatrick

Milly: Well, I remember that I was very aware that I didn't belong at Yale—that I didn't have the background that everyone else had. I was very different. I was working at a record store at that time, while I was at Yale. And I remember a class with Ralph Kirkpatrick... when he asked some question that no one could answer. And rather as a joke, he asked me, and I just rattled off the answer. I knew everything about it. He said, “Where did you learn that?” And I said, “Off record backs.” I was, you know, just guileless. I listened to records, I read everything I could get my hands on. At any rate, he liked me a lot after that.

MR: Were there certain ways that he included you, or talked to you more?

Milly : Of course, of course. He always kept me after class and we talked. He was always interested in what I had to say. I was totally a misfit. There were still girls going there, majoring in music, who really were setting their caps for rich Yalies, you know.

MR: I think a lot of women went to University at that time, and that was the goal—not so much to graduate, but to find a good husband.

Milly: At any rate, somehow I graduated.

MR: In retrospect, do you feel that you were actually up to the level—because of the knowledge that you had through reading and...?

Milly: No, no. I felt completely out of it.

MR: You still think that—I'm not thinking about then—how you compared yourself then. I'm thinking about your understanding as you look back.

Milly: I think probably I was a very interesting person then, you know. And an original—a complete original. Some people found me fascinating.

MR: I think that's true.

Milly: But, I know, I never felt it. And I know friends that I made then and had later always thought at that time that I was very self-confident, realized that I was attractive. Because I graduated before I reached thirty—that I know. But many years later I remember saying that I felt the most attractive period of my life was when I was forty. I said it was just too bad I didn't feel like that when I was in my twenties, and they said, "Well, we all thought you did!" I know I was very depressed at that time. I never spoke to anyone about it. I never had any really close friends, because I felt that my past was so spotty that everything about me was so incongruous. I felt that my life at home was so awful and I was so scarred by it that I couldn't in any way talk to anyone about it. I felt that would be polluting them to come in contact with someone who had this background.

Milly: In those days I guess seeing a counselor was not done very much.

Back surgery at Yale

Milly: No, but what did happen was that in—just before—my senior year at Yale, I developed a bad back. I went to the clinic at Yale, to the Student Health, and when I went to private doctors - I got very good at getting Demerol prescribed for me. I know I got terribly thin that year—you know, I was in constant pain and taking pain medication. I knew that I couldn't possibly finish school, feeling the way I did. I was terribly afraid that if I left I'd never get back in, and I was just full of this feeling that, for once in my life I wanted to finish something I started. And I wanted to finish school. At that time Yale was trying to get students to use the Psychiatric Clinic—to go there with problems. I thought, "Ahhh." You know, I could certainly manufacture all sorts of reasons why I needed a therapist. And that was a funny period in my life: I remember walking into therapy the first time and not knowing where to sit, so I sat behind the desk. The man was very sweet and very good. Finally, the Student Health sent me to the

hospital because my back had to be operated on, and that was a very funny experience. Because across from where I lived was a high Episcopal church, and the clergyman—the man in charge was named, believe it or not, Father Kibbutz. He wore a red cloak, and he looked more Catholic than Episcopal, including the collar. He lied to me; he was very sweet. He said the Church had a bed in the Catholic hospital, and that if it wasn't used they would lose it for that year, would I please use it? What they did was they sent me there. They were very sweet. For some reason or other, people always reached out to me, and I could never accept it. If I was not good enough for my parents, how I could I be good enough for these people?

MR: What sort of back surgery was it, do you remember?

Milly: A disc surgery. The man who operated on me, Dr. Lycurges Davey—marvelous man!! I remember his talking to me—I recuperated in the Infirmary—and telling me my chances of walking afterwards and my chances of walking without a brace were minimal; however, what had happened, I made all sorts of surgical history. They operated on my back, and I had partial paralysis, so I felt no pain, and I got up within hours of surgery and started walking and people couldn't believe it! I felt no pain. What happened—I got out of the hospital in a relatively short period of time. They sent me to the Infirmary and then let me out of the Infirmary, but what happened was that, as it healed, sensation was restored and by that time it was healed, so I never had any pain when learning how to walk. However, to this day, what I had is a tremor—it is in my left leg, in the calf. There was nerve damage—most of it was healed.

MR: So then you returned from this to school?

Milly: To finish school. They had to take me back. That was the deal they made with the student if they left school for psychiatric reasons. They could not be kept out.

MR: So how long were you away?

The Tandem Record Store

Milly: Months. You know, I finished in time. I made up the work. Meanwhile, I'd been working in record stores and made a very good friend of someone who worked in record stores, my friend, Dorothy [Weiland]. People kept offering to put us in the record business. We were really quite successful, but we never had enough money to begin with—to make it go. Someone helped us buy a store in Wallingford, Connecticut, which is outside New Haven, population ten thousand, in which the Choate School was located. It had originally been a gift shop called “The Tandem Gift Shop,” and we thought the name was so appropriate because there were two of us—the bicycle built for two—that we kept it up and we changed it to “The Tandem Record Store.” From the beginning we were pretty offbeat. Someone then found a place right near Yale—in the middle of Yale—a basement place, and they thought this very perfect for us. From the very beginning—from the very beginning—we did things such as, we didn't have any popular records, except for the Beatles. We had a marvelous jazz selection. We had a marvelous “spoken word” collection. We chose very wisely in terms of the classical records we had. We had a wonderful children's section too. So that we became very special and people loved it. We couldn't buck the competition. People would come and ask what the best performance was of so-and-so; they'd go buy it where they could get a bigger discount.

First cello teaching in New Haven

Milly: Some friends who were interested in us decided that we couldn't take money out of the store—that one of us would have to work. Because I had a music degree, someone who was on the Board of a local music school—The Neighborhood Music School - got me a job there. There was no cello department. There was someone who I knew was teaching cello: he had two students. One of the students, who was pretty paranoid, had a family that believed their purpose in life was to convert Jews to Christianity, that's what I was getting mixed up with. Christine had decided that the male teacher was making overtures to her—he was so lethargic I couldn't imagine him doing anything of the sort—so she came to me. She was absolutely such an impossible student, but I had blinders on and miraculously she got better. Word got around about this crazy lady who was getting good results. The director of the school, Lee Howard, was once talking to me and asked, "How come string players drop out so often within the first year of instruction?" I said, "It takes them too long to get any sort of satisfaction out of it." He said, "What do you suggest?" And this was so off the top of my head! I don't know where I got it: I said, "Well, during the summer I would like to start a program—you get hold of instruments—I'd like to start anywhere up to ten kids in class in cello. And I will see them every day for two weeks, for several hours," and just arbitrarily I said, "At the end of two weeks I will have them able to play a C-major scale in two octaves and bow straight." And he said, "You're on!" Oh, and then my idea was that they could go to whatever teacher they want. Well, they all stayed with me, and they got very good, and it was so crazy because at the end of the year they formed the cello section of a new orchestra starting up, a youth orchestra, where they were doing the first two movements of the Beethoven First Symphony. These kids were amazing!

MR: They went from such a short amount of instruction of one year; they learned to read, they learned to play the cello.

Milly: Yeah. All of them stayed with music. Many of them became professionals—it was just very good. Someone, the mother of one of my students, told me a story later. I was, of course, very insecure. I was teaching, as I said, with blinders on: I had to make something of my life, my wasted life. I remember when I first started teaching at the school, there weren't many students, so I started an adult theory class. There, again, I remember saying once, to the ladies, "Do you want to learn something, or do you just want to sit and partake of "cultshah?" They all decided to learn and I taught them to solfege; at the end of the semester they were doing Bach cantatas, reading them and doing them, and learning something about theory, loving it. Meanwhile, the cello was building up, you know. Inasmuch as it is possible for one person to be responsible for the building of the school, I think I was, in that I introduced standards, workshops, all of that. It just worked for me.

MR: Would you call it almost "instinctive"?

Milly: Yeah. You know, never felt secure. Never felt secure.

MR: What were the ingredients as you look back that you put into this kind of teaching—theory, scales...

MR: I hardly knew any theory myself—I had such a hard time getting through Yale—but I was always able to teach what I knew a little of, and learn along the way—keep ahead of the students. And that is certainly what happened with the cello.

MR: So you learned more when you were teaching.

Study with Bernard Greenhouse in New York

Milly: Oh, than when I was studying? Very much so. Meanwhile I was doing some studying with Bernard Greenhouse, who was in New York. I had these very talented kids and I could never trust myself. When they were really good I would bring them to him and he'd say, "Milly, you're doing a much better job than I could possibly do, because of the time you're putting in. What they need is what you're giving them." And I couldn't believe it, you know, I just couldn't believe it. I felt insecure. I felt like I was an impostor.

MR: But you were seeing results?

Milly: Yes, other people were seeing them. I was too busy feeling guilt.

MR: How did you teach sight reading?

Milly: Staying one step ahead. Singing, using solfege. I'd take something that was very simple and go up two steps. Who knows, who knows?

Cello recital to remember

Milly: I remember once giving a recital with a friend of mine who was a pianist: she said, "Let's give a recital." I said, "Great! I have between five and nine in the morning." She said, "You're on." She had a child. We had a key to the school. She would come pick me up, drive to school, practice individually, then we would practice together, and then she would go home—I had another hour—and then I'd go open the store. After store hours, I taught, and after that I had New Haven Symphony, that I played...

MR: Very busy!

Milly: ...and we gave a very good recital. I just can't believe it!

MR: Well, you had a method. You had four hours a day to commit to it, even if they were the early morning hours. Do you remember what you played?

Milly: Beethoven's Second Sonata, a Bach gamba Sonata, and I remember playing it with a friend of mine who is a gambist: we did it in two parts, with a harpsichord. One of us—we alternated—one of us taking the bass line, one of us taking the melody line. The Brahms E-Minor and, I think, a Shostakovich Sonata, something like that.

MR: Sounds pretty ambitious! I think you are being modest! That you could do all this and play like that. I can certainly believe that you may have had these feelings of inadequacy, but at the same time...

Milly: Robert Berlin will tell you the story of my recital at Yale. I played every other note out of tune. He could never understand it, because he heard me. You know, I was just shooting myself in the foot.

MR: Not this recital, though.

Milly: No, this recital was good and everyone loved it.

MR: Where did you do it?

Teaching cello to inner-city kids

Milly: We did it in a library and one of the very nice things... By this time I had become involved with working a program with inner-city kids. Again, I was very successful in the work I was doing. I got those kids to play pretty well; I got the parents to become involved.

MR: How did you get the cellos that they had?

Milly: The school gave us the cellos. What we did, I finally won all the parents over, and they prepared the food for the recital, oh, it was really fantastic! The food was wonderful, the music was good, the whole feeling of it was very, very good and nice—the way I feel music should be: in the neighborhood. The people from the Jewish Home for the Aged came, because I'd stop by and speak with them in Yiddish—you know, they all came! These people in the program came, and the Board of the school came - it was just a marvelous mixture of people.

MR: Sounds like the perfect way to share music—with food and community—you might call it “homemade music,” non-professional.

Milly: Then things become a little vague. I had some very, very good students. Oh! One of the mothers of the kids told me, years later, that after a year these kids formed a cello section of this orchestra and everyone was amazed. No one could get over it. The parents met, and many of them decided, now that they realized that they had very talented kids, maybe they should get a real teacher. Lydia told me that her husband, who was a very gruff and tough man, said, “You know, I have a son who's supposed to be the talented one. How come my son, the cellist, is doing much better than my son, the violinist? Maybe the teacher has something to do with it.” But I didn't hear the story until years later.

But my life seems to be full of that sort of thing. People not understanding how I was producing results and deciding I was a phony. And my wondering, “...maybe I am.” Part of me feeling like a phony all the time, and part of me not letting go—sticking to my convictions.

Coming to Berkeley - the Greenspans, Margaret Rowell and Colin Hampton

Two of my kids—their parents got jobs in Berkeley, or in California. They moved out to Berkeley. Danny was studying with Margaret Rowell; David was studying with Colin Hampton, and they both missed me. They would take turns calling me once a week. The parents of Danny sent me a ticket to come visit. One summer I was part of a music camp where the two boys came. Danny played for me and I knew that he had been working with Margaret, and he didn't like her. And yet, he came, and I knew he hadn't practiced much, but his playing was miraculously improved. I took long walks with him to find out what she was doing, and what I realized was she had arrived at some conclusions that I hadn't reached yet. I was on the way, but not there and I thought, “Wouldn't it be nice if I could meet her?” So, Danny's parents sent me a ticket over Christmas and I met Margaret and it was all pretty fantastic. She wanted me to come out for a year. I said, “I have to earn a living.” She said, “I'll find you students, don't worry about it.” I sold a diamond ring someone had once given me, to get money for the fare and I

came out to California. David and Danny met me.

That's how I got to Berkeley. I stayed with the Greenspan's, Danny's folks, for awhile—until I had enough students to get my own place.

MR: What year was that?

Milly: 1970. I came August 15, 1970. There are a couple of dates that are firmly embedded in my mind. Not many: one was the year I went to Yale, the year I graduated (1952-56), and August 15, 1970, which was when I came to Berkeley.

Interview Number Three, Teachers, students, friends

MR: Today is February 8, 2001, and we are getting together for our third meeting on Milly's oral history.

Bernard Greenhouse

Milly, last time you mentioned some things I'd like to ask you about, before we get to the Berkeley years. You mentioned studying with Bernard Greenhouse and, of course, he is a very well-known cellist in this country and the world, as a member of the Beaux Art Trio. Could you tell more about meeting him and studying with him?

Milly: Okay. Bernard Greenhouse: I studied with him after I graduated from Yale. I had heard a concert in which he played with the Bach Aria Group, and I was just knocked out dead by his playing. I was just absolutely knocked out dead.

I sent him a letter which he misinterpreted, or I miscommunicated, in which what I wanted to say was that that's the sort of playing I'd always wanted to do—I've always wanted to play like that—that it was just perfect as far as I was concerned. I don't know how he misconstrued it, but he thought that I had said something like I played very much the way he did. I asked him if I could come play for him, with the thought of studying with him.

So, he called and I came to New York. There were all sorts of wonderful things about it. At the time, fairly embarrassingly, I played for him and it was pretty bad. It was pretty bad, and he stood there smiling through it all. He said, "Well, you do play very much the way I do, and if I did all the things wrong that you do, I'd sound as awful as you do. Yes, I will teach you." And then I was very insistent about paying him—this was when? This was 1958, or something of the sort. He said, "But you know, you come from New Haven...train fare...all of that..." I said, well, I insisted upon it and I settled on fifteen dollars. My first check to him bounced, incidentally, due to my carelessness. I did make good for it.

I was very receptive to absorbing things, but not learning—not learning, so that I could reproduce. I mean, stuff that I thought about later and used very, very much so. One of the first things he said to me was, that when he went to work with Casals - he told me many wonderful Casals stories that I will cherish the rest of my life—but he said that Pablo Casals said to him: "Bernie, I am a big player. You are not. You are a miniaturist and a beautifully wrought interpreter. And that is what you should do. Don't try to play like me." And he told me this story because he said, "You know, Milly, you are a naturally big player. Don't mimic me. That's not part of your personality." And I think that was one of the most important things I ever learned. In terms of teaching, also. I'm very proud of the fact that my students do not sound alike, because I really try to find out what their personality is.

I learned a great deal about interpretation. I learned mostly from listening to him—going to concerts and hearing him play—and he just really knocked me out all the way through. There was one year I went to Indiana to work with him during the summer. That was a fantastic summer for me. It was a "moment of truth" summer. I don't think I had ever spent so much time behind the instrument as I did that summer. I was listening to music, playing music, practicing—so often that, for one summer I developed perfect pitch. I always knew what every note was. I call it my "moment of truth" summer because what I realized I was doing was deciding that there are certain things I should know, ergo, I did know them.

The fact of the matter was that I didn't. And to face up to what I didn't know—I worked that out carefully—was one of the most painful experiences I ever had. The corollary to that is that if you face up to what you don't know, you have to face up to what you do know too, and that takes time. Repeating that—that was important.

The other very amazing experience I had was working out Schelomo in one week. I worked on the forty Popper Etudes for the first weeks I was there and the last week worked on Schelomo. I always knew I had a good sound, so I didn't work on sound while I was practicing. I just worked on the technique of it, and feeling, well, if I have to open up, I will. I came and played for him and he said, "Well, that's good—very good work you've done. Now what about some sound." And I discovered I couldn't play it big, because I'd been practicing it small all week. What I did—they were building a new auditorium at the University of Indiana, and the ceiling wasn't up yet, but I went into it and practiced there—as loudly and as big as I could—this open space—trying to fill it, which was impossible. But the effort was incredible—it helped me a lot.

MR: So, when you changed from "small" to "big" did the same technique you worked so hard on have to change?

Milly: Well, I had to practice it differently. You have to practice it with big sound.

MR: And one thing you said a little earlier was that when you find out what you don't —know, you also find out what you do know?

Milly: No, I said that if you are honest about what you don't know, you also have to be very square with yourself as to what you do know, so that you don't waste time.

MR: I see: You have to be awake when you're practicing. What year was that?

Milly: I think it was probably 1948 or 1949.

MR: Well, I'd love to hear more of the Casals stories, if you can remember any of them.

Milly: Well, some of them are very famous at this point. He tells the marvelous story about how he was the first student to work with him after the war, and he went to Prades. He said the lessons started at noon, after lunch, and maybe a little after noon. He said he remembers very vividly that he was working on the second Bach Suite, and he said they went to a room—separate from Casals house—a sort of cabin, that had no electricity of any sort. He said he sat in one corner and Casals sat in the other—katty-corner of each other. An °d for a solid month, they worked on the second Bach Suite—you had to have everything memorized you brought in. He said he would play and Casals would say, "Bernard, listen." And he'd repeat and he said "I would finally get what he was going at." He said after a month of really practicing very, very hard he came and played it for Casals and he said, "That's wonderful. Now listen to this." And he played the suite or the movement of the suite for him, and it was totally and completely different and equally good. Equally good. And what I got out of that, is when you are working with a teacher, you do what the teacher asks you to do. I've never had enough chutzpah to insist about this completely. You learn what you can from the teacher, and as Greenhouse said, he worked on the Beethoven Third Sonata with Casals, with Emanuel Feuermann, with about four other quite famous teachers, and he did whatever they asked him to at that time and he said that after learning what everyone had to say, he was able to do his own thing, which was very different—it was unique—it was different from what they did. You know, I asked him about "nerves" and he said, "You know, I feel that

I've satisfied Casals, I've satisfied Feuermann, I've satisfied Leonard Rose." He mentioned other people's names that escape me right now. He said, "If I satisfied them, I felt I can satisfy an audience." And I thought that was fantastic. I thought that was fantastic.

MR: That is great to keep in mind. Now, where was he teaching when you studied with him?

Milly: I went to his house.

MR: And he was teaching privately.

Milly: Yes. He taught at schools—at the end of the summer he tried to get me to come and do a graduate degree with him, and ...

MR: At Juilliard?

Milly: No, he wasn't at Juilliard. He was at Manhattan, I think. I can't remember where he was. He was at one of the schools. I couldn't do it. You know, I was very funny. I said, "If I could give a recital with all of the slow movements, then „I'll do it," but you know...

MR: He was already playing with the Beaux Art Trio?

Milly: Oh, yes. I used to go listen to them rehearse in Indiana. This was near the beginning. And that was a wonderful experience.

A very memorable concert with Feuermann

MR: Well, I don't want to leave Bernard Greenhouse, but I remember your telling me how much a concert by Feuermann impressed you—you were much younger...

Milly: Yes, I was in high school and I cut class to go to an afternoon concert, in which Feuermann did the Haydn *D-major Concerto*. It was so beautiful—so ravishing, the thought of it remained with me for a long time, and every time I thought about it I cried—I wept—it was that beautiful.

MR: Could you explain it to yourself at that time, or you were just wrapped up with a feeling?

Milly: I was wrapped up with his sound, his interpretation...

MR: You knew you were in the presence of "something," but you couldn't explain it to yourself.

Milly: Yes, I couldn't explain it.

MR: But it was a big moment...

Milly: Oh, dear, yes.

MR: Do you think that sort of made a turning point, where you said, "I want to be involved with this?"

Milly: No, I just fell into things musical. Nothing was ever plotted.

Luigi Silva

MR: And your other teacher, whom you mentioned, was Silva?

Milly: Luigi Silva. When I was at Yale. Again, everything I learned from him, I learned in retrospect. I fought with him constantly. There are all sorts of things about him of which I did not approve, and I was arrogant—I was snotty. I remember when I started teaching and had some success at teaching, and I thought of different ways of doing things, I remember saying to myself, “Oh, how good I am” and, “Isn’t this wonderful!” And then I happened to come across some old notes and he had said it all. He had done it all. And it just...I could never acknowledge it at the time. But I learned all sorts of things about technique from him, working on technique.

Margaret Rowell

MR: I guess we’ll get to this later when we get to the Berkeley years. Do you feel that both—I know you were impressed with Margaret Rowell in Berkeley, and her methods. Did Greenhouse and Silva—their methods—just feed right into that same idea?

Milly: Not really. She had a totally different and pragmatic approach. Silva had a very good pragmatic approach, but it was much too intellectual for me. I was much too disoriented, and not quite organized to take what he was saying. Greenhouse, I think, was and is a “natural.” What he would do is—he knew there were things he wanted to do and he’d sit and work on them, until he could do it and then he would try to teach it, and it wasn’t the same. He found it very difficult to explain. It wasn’t until later I was able to analyze a little better and understand what he was doing. All I know, is that he was one of the finest, neatest, most meticulous, most musical and moving players I have ever heard in my life.

MR: To get on to other teachers that you mentioned, one, Kirkpatrick from Yale, and another teacher, Winternitz. Some of these teachers at Yale must have left memories.

Milly: Kirkpatrick: I had a class in Bach with him and he really inspired some very imaginative work from people. I remember a fellow classmate of mine, did this scroll which you unwound, and what he had pictorially, graphically displayed was a Fugue of Bach. When he opened it up and Kirkpatrick looked at it, he whistled it. You know, you could tell from what he did in the entrances of the different lines.

Milly: Yes. He sang it, I’m certain, in the correct key. I learned to look at things a little differently from him. What did I work on? I edited a movement of a Bach suite, you know, interpreted, edited and spent a lot of time. He was very physical with things. He felt, first of all, that Bach had to be danced. He thought it had to be felt very physically. He would do things, like “Walk this movement. Walk it. Sing it in your head, and walk it around the room. Dance this movement. Ride a horse with this movement.” And it really, really made a lot of sense. I loved it a lot. He was very witty, very witty. Actually, very caring and loving. He used to come into the record store where I worked, when I was at school, and I remember once saying to someone, talking about Dinu Lipatti, and I said, “I think if he had lived he might have become the world’s greatest pianist.” Dinu Lipatti died relatively young. I looked up and there was Ralph Kirkpatrick, and he said, “I’m not sure that he wasn’t already.” Which was just very, very nice. There was such a limited amount of recorded repertory by Dinu Lipatti. But he really did share my

admiration and love for him.

And Winternitz was the curator of instruments at the Metropolitan Museum and I learned so much from him. He had an afternoon class and everyone was tired, and there was too much sun coming into the room, you could have fallen to sleep during that hour, except that he was very, very interesting. He used wonderful stories to illustrate a point that he was making and one of my favorites was, he was talking about bombast—the fact that we are so often impressed by display of bombast. He told a story of himself as a young man, walking in the Square in Rome—when Mussolini was there—and he had bought a round bread from the bakery and had it wrapped in newspaper and he was carrying it under his arm. Everyone was yelling, “Il Duce, Il Duce,” and he realized that what he was coming upon was Il Duce speaking from his balcony and—first of all he was examined to be sure he didn’t have a bomb under his arm—but he said at any rate he stood there. He said Il Duce made three statements: one, and the audience roared. He made his second, and the audience roared. And he made a third, and they went crazy! And he said, “I along with them!” He said then he went home and analyzed what he had said. It was, “Yesterday was the past, yay yay yay; today is the present, hoorah, hoorah, hoorah, and tomorrow is the future.” And everyone went wild. And then he also illustrated Mozart so beautifully in terms of how sound he was psychologically, and he talked about the Marriage of Figaro, the first scene, and he said, “Susanna has her theme, and Figaro has his theme, and Figaro is very strong about his theme, and she is very strong about her theme, and he said somehow or other he had become very aware that Figaro is losing the argument, because while he is singing his theme, the orchestra is playing Susanna’s.” That was such a revelation. That was so beautiful to me. His course on Mozart’s opera was wonderful. His course on old instruments didn’t interest me that much, but I would just listen to anything he said, if he would recite the alphabet that would be fine.

MR: He was European?

Milly: Yes. German, or Viennese.

Remembering first students

You asked if I had any memorable students at the time. That first bunch—I don’t know if I mentioned it—the first bunch that I taught as a class had eight kids, and I saw them every day for two weeks. They were a very memorable class. Most of them went into music, or at least have gone to music school, might have gone into other things later. Debbie Davis, who was my one female that year, really became very good—played professionally and now is teaching very well. It was awfully nice, one of her daughters came and spent the two week session of summer camp with me, where she participated. She plays cello, but she’s also interested in so many other things, but she is a very interesting kid and I liked the process of teaching her. I liked her as a person. She’s into all sorts of things, and her mother is someone who is very dear to me.

MR: Where does her mother teach?

Milly: She’s in Allentown, Pennsylvania. I could look it up and tell you. She has started a music camp and she’s teaching teachers how to teach, and she is very idealistic—very wonderful. I just adore her. Who else? David Gabrielson. He didn’t grow up to play the cello, but he has remained a friend for life...absolutely wonderful. That was a very lovely experience for me. Nick Anderson, who later came here, was part of that group. He is now in New York. That’s about all I can remember.

MR: How did you get that group together? How did you find them?

Milly: What happened was, I think I told you, that the directors of the school said something about why do string instrumentalists stop so soon after such a short time and I said, "Because they don't go fast enough. If you get me together a group of eight people, no more than eight, and some instruments, I will see them every day for two weeks. At the end of which time, they will be able to do... Then they can go study with whomever they want to." They stayed with me.

MR: You still use that method when you start someone, don't you, in seeing them every day?

Milly: I try. I try, when possible.

English Department Friends

MR: Before we leave Yale and the east coast, are there any other people or Yale memories that you'd like to tell?

Milly: I socialized mostly with the people in the English department. And my friend, Bob Berlin, goes back to those days. It was wonderful because they read a lot. Whatever they read, I read, and they educated me.

MR: Of course, you were well-read.

Milly: Not really. It was very helter-skelter, undisciplined.

MR: Would you say that literature is your second love, after music?

Milly: Well, you know when I read James Joyce sometimes, I think, you know—especially there are a few scenes that are marvelous in *Ulysses*—and I read it and I say, "You know, words do it almost better than music." And then I have to say, "Oh, what am I saying? What am I saying?" You know...I can't. Yes.

MR: I know what you mean though, because in Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* he describes the Beethoven Opus 111, and also something about a cello sonata so well.

Moving to Berkeley

MR: You mentioned last time, that you arrived in Berkeley, because of a student who moved out here.

Milly: Yes, and he studied with Margaret [Rowell]. This was Danny Greenspan. He's now playing jazz bass very well. And Danny complained about her bitterly, and yet I knew he hadn't worked and he was playing much better. He was playing things I couldn't get him to do. I said, "Tell me about this lady." I was fascinated. So, Danny's mother and father sent me a ticket to come one Christmas, to meet her. Margaret and I hit it off and I said, "If I come to Berkeley, could I watch you teach? Could I work with you?" And then I said, sassy as I was, "Well, you know I'm going to have to earn my living." She said, "You'll get students. Don't worry." And I came, and stayed with the Greenspans for one month, then I had enough students to move out.

MR: That was quick!

Milly: Well, David and Danny came back to me. At that time, Bonnie [Hampton] wasn't in town and Margaret was a teacher and Colin Hampton was a big teacher, and there weren't too many other people teaching at that time. So I would get all of the castoffs.

MR: My neighbor down the street, Julie Feldman, tells me she was one of your first students.

Milly: Yes.

MR: So, that was 1970 when you moved to Berkeley, and you have lived here, then, thirty years plus.

Milly: Yes, I came on August 15, 1970.

MR: I've always thought that to study cello in Berkeley was to have a social life set up for you, more so than other instruments, in a way, and I think you are one of the reasons for that.

Milly: No, actually Margaret Rowell and Colin Hampton started The Cello Club before I was here. I remember when I first came here—Margaret was born in 1900—and they were celebrating Margaret's seventieth birthday, and they had this mass cello playing, with small groups doing other things. The sound of all of those cellos was just wonderful. Then when cello club sort of disintegrated, I started doing it very quietly for my students, and it got bigger.

MR: Do you know why it disintegrated?

Milly: It just did. People got too busy. Too involved in their own thing.

Learning from Margaret Rowell

MR: How long did you watch Margaret teach?

Milly: Well, all of the rest of her life, on and off. I'd go to hear her students. I'd go watch her.

MR: What did you think, in particular, were the strong points of her teaching?

Milly: It was very physical, you know. She compared everything you do on the cello as something you do sort of instinctively and normally—physically. An example: (she was very cute) I remember saying to her, I was trying to get a student to balance, sit and balance, and sort of sway back and forth, with the bow. If the bow goes to the right, sway to the right; it goes to the left, sway to the left. And I compared it to a student being on a swing, or on a boat—going that way and then moving this way. And she said, "Well, you'll have to be very careful. You have to make sure your student has experienced being on a boat." You know, it was that sort of thing. She spoke about the hand being a bear's paw—the whole hand—so that if you used your second finger, the other fingers had to be closely grouped around it, so that you are playing essentially with your whole hand, but with the finger that's out—all of the weight of it being on that, but you get the strength of all the other fingers. Her work in bowing was marvelous. Her work on weight - the shoulder being down and feeling the natural weight on the bow, going back and forth. Her inventiveness—I remember once hearing this session where she was coaching a cellist of

hers, and a very arrogant young pianist, doing the Bach gamba Sonata, and the pianist said to her, “Margaret, you can’t do that.” And she said, “Why not?” She said, “It’s not in the style of Bach.” And Margaret, who was too kind to say, “Look, you know, you’re not using a harpsichord, you’re using a piano,” just said to her, “I am so glad I didn’t live in Bach’s time and I can do what I want now with this wonderful music.” She had a great love for nature, a great love for animals and the way they move. She talked a great deal about balance—balance was very, very important to her.

MR: Do you think she just had that instinctively?

Milly: No. When she was very young she had started playing professionally quite early. She was with an NBC trio, you know. There’s a picture I have of the trio, and she developed T.B. and she was bedridden for a year. She was absolutely bedridden for a year and she thought all sorts of things through—about playing, of course, of course. She was just wonderful, because she could be such a character. I always became very angry at people who said, “Oh, what a crazy character she was.” The fact of the matter is the lady was a genius—the lady was an absolute genius. All of the great cellists of the world, talking to her, appreciated it.

MR: Well, in a way I think Berkeley is the cello capitol of the world, and she is one of the reasons. Casals came here, Rostropovich, Yo-Yo Ma, frequently...

Milly: Absolutely, so she was very influential. Of course, the Greenspan’s, who got me here, were very important.

MR: Were the parents musicians too?

Stevie Corcos and Jean Chastain

Milly: The father played the violin, but at any rate, when I was in Berkeley for a very short time, Lydia Greenspan took me to meet Stevie Corcos, who was living in Lafayette. Stevie had a daughter studying violin, and her friend, Jean Chastain had a girl studying violin. At that time I was already doing workshops and they pulled their two kids in and asked if I would work with them at workshops. Those two parents were so supportive of me and what I was doing, that it really gave me a great deal of confidence. The other thing was, I was going to be here for only a year, and I told everyone I took on as a student that I was going to be here for only a year and I came here very Yalie—wearing tweed jumpers and pumps, stockings—and one day one of the parents brought a patchwork skirt—and I said, “This is very beautiful, but what’s the idea?” And she said, we felt that if we could get you to dress “Berkeley,” you’d stay in Berkeley. Which was very cute. I had such good parental support all along, that it was just very, very marvelous that we did it.

MR: And Stevie, herself, taught violin, right?

Milly: She started teaching later, but she and Jean Chastain were just absolutely wonderful.

Colin Hampton

Milly: And then Colin came a little later and I often called him my rabbi - I’d call him and say, “Is the rabbi in?” And he’d say, “The rabbi is teaching, try again later.” And I’d call him and he’d say, “The

rabbi is in for you.” And I asked him questions about things that bothered me and he was so fantastic—I learned so much. One of two things stand out in mind: I remember asking him about the Third Beethoven Sonata, and I said, “There are two measures I just don’t understand. They are so craggy, you know, I’m trying so hard to fit them in with the rest of the movement.” And he said, “What makes you think that everything in Beethoven has to be easy to listen to? That’s part of the map, part of the music.” And that was so wonderful, it was such a revelation. When he was talking about filling out a note, playing a note, so that you fill it out to the end, he called that “coloring to the edge,” instead of leaving a white space before the edge—coloring all the way to the edge.

MR: And all children understand that.

Milly: Yeah, and that really, really stuck with me—many, many other things stuck with me. The thing that I did know is that even if I disagreed with him, I always listened to what he said, because he never said anything at random. Really, it was always thought out that way. And I felt that I had to do everything I could to understand what it was he was trying to say.

MR: I know he, in his own right, was a famous cellist and was brought to the University at Berkeley—his quartet—as the quartet-in-residence. The Griller Quartet.

And he came from England, right?

Milly: Yes, and he stayed on and the thing about it is, if you listen to the old Griller Quartet recordings—and I have some—I can’t speak that much about the rest of the Quartet, but his cello playing is some of the best quartet playing I have ever heard. Just in terms of its fitting in with others, not being aggressive, but right there—was just wonderful.

MR: Who were his teachers, do you know?

Milly: I have a book in which he mentions them, but they mean nothing to me.

MR: And he stayed on in Berkeley after the Quartet left?

Milly: Yes, he went back to England once shortly after I arrived, because there were things about America that bothered him. He went back to England and realized the same things bothered him there, so he might as well come back to where there was a nice climate and lots of good friends.

MR: I know that he married Bonnie Hampton, who was then Bonnie Bell.

Milly: Yes, Bonnie Bell—which is wonderful. ♪

MR: Did he teach her, by the way?

Milly: Yes. He was considerably older. He kept leaving each wife for someone younger and when he and Bonnie split up, they remained good friends—they remained good friends. Bonnie was also, later on, a big influence in my life. I love the way she plays. She has high moral ethics about things. I just cherish her as a colleague and as a person.

Anne Crowden and The Crowden School

Milly: Of course, there is Anne Crowden, who I met at about the same time I met Stevie. When Anne started her school after awhile, I was just so impressed with what she was doing with her courage—with her foresight. After awhile I volunteered to teach there—mostly, I needed a walk. And that gave me a walk. And I taught there for nothing for a couple of years and the Board decided that I had to be paid, that it was absolutely necessary. The School has grown so beyond any one person—it's just fantastic, I must say, now since Benjamin Simon has taken over the school. First of all, Anne chose him; second of all, the transition was so wonderful. So wonderful that they are still working together on things. He has to face the parents. They are very different, very, very different, you know! She is left to do the things she does best of all. I really know no one who coaches chamber music as well as she does, and her teaching through the years has become so good, so refined and fantastic!

MR: She was a professional violinist too.

Milly: Yes, she played in a quartet.

MR: From Scotland, right?

Milly: Yes, or England—London, I don't really know.

MR: I think she told me once her parents were headmasters of a school, so she had that behind her as an experience to start a school.

Milly: Yes, and she has a brother who is quite a famous English actor, Graham Crowden.

MR: When did she start the School, do you remember? Its been more than fifteen years, isn't it?

Milly: I think about that.

MR: And now I've heard people say that there isn't another music school in the world on that level which is as fine.

Milly: Yes. It's innovative. I think its good academically. I watch these kids, these young, grade-school kids, especially during Bach time [Jr. Bach Festival], learn the intricacies of a Bach fugue, of a Bach concerto. I sit there thinking: "They can really absorb this and understand this. The theory of relativity has to be easy!" They'll always have music in their life, but not many of them are going to go into music professionally. But I think its such a good addition, and to wit, the kids who come out of Crowden are sought after by the private high schools around. Depending on the year, what happens—there are certain lapses in certain subjects, but the general all-around experience is just fantastic.

MR: Well, studying music, too, takes a lot of self discipline and that, of course, applies to everything people do.

The James Joyce Group

Milly: And, of course, the other very, very, very, very important thing in my Berkeley life is the James Joyce Group—just very important. That's been going on for about fifteen years.

MR: I remember I was in on it in the beginning, but...

Milly: We keep going back to James Joyce—during the summer we do other things. I've been fairly sick and not able to concentrate, so though it meets at my house—and I love it!—I fall asleep to their reading.

MR: They're a great group of people.

Milly: Yes, they're a great, great group of people, and very non-exclusive. It is very inclusive...

MR: You've had the same teacher the whole time.

Milly: Yes, John Reid, who has taught me so much about thinking, and literature, and about teaching. For instance, I remember when he was talking about Shakespeare's kings, and he was talking about Macbeth—you know, who did he start with? He started Macbeth, who wanted everything yesterday. Then he said, then came Hamlet, who couldn't make up his mind—he couldn't make up what he wanted. And then came Henry IV, who later became Henry V, Prince Hal, who is just the perfect blend of things. He had his wanton, crazy life as a young man. And then he matured and he took time to mature, and he matured into becoming a really good king. In many ways, he was the perfect one. I tell this to the kids: "Don't play it like Macbeth. Don't play it like Hamlet. Think about Henry V and evolve it that way." It is such a perfect example of all sorts of things.

MR: When you say don't play like Macbeth and Macbeth wanted things yesterday, is that an approach that a student would understand?

Milly: Yes, they want to play everything fast!

MR: Well, that's really interesting. Milly, we've had a wonderful time today. We'll have to continue the next time.

Interview Number Four, Teaching and Bashing, First Studio

MR: Where did you live and where were your studios in Berkeley?

Milly: I lived with the Greenspans for about a month. I had enough students to move out with Lydia [Greenspan] lending me money for the down payments, etcetera. First I got an apartment on Dwight Way, west of Shattuck. I was asked to leave because the “noise” (might have been noise to them not to me) bothered people there. I found an apartment on College Avenue, across from what is now a parking space. It used to be an athletic field. I remember the rent was something like two hundred dollars a month, and I had never paid that much for anything. It just seemed like so much at the time, but it was actually a very nice building—very nice place. It had a big room with an attached kitchen, a bathroom, and a bedroom. I had no furniture when I came to Berkeley. I was originally to come only for a year, to check out Margaret Rowell, and I had visions of my living places with inflatable furniture, and when I went, just deflate it—that’s all there would be left of me and my stay in Berkeley. Well, what I did was buy a couch that I could sit on and sleep on. Lydia gave me a table, and I had two chairs. That was my furnishings.

I used the bedroom for the kids to go in and practice. I didn’t own a bed or anything of the sort. I had my workshops there, and what I did was play second cello to everything. I played bass lines to their pieces or improvised something to play with them. That lasted for a little over a year. It was very nice; it was very sparse living.

Moishe

Milly: It was during that time when I acquired Moishe, who was a black Lab. He was a pup, and apparently, someone decided I needed a dog and they brought me Moishe. I brought him in to have him inoculated with shots and a week later he developed distemper. Obviously, he had already been infected, and too late for the shots to do him much good. I nursed that dog through distemper for a whole year.

MR: What did that take?

Milly: He sat on my lap while I taught. I spoon-fed him. Went to see the vet often. I house-broke him during that time by taking him outside every two hours—setting him down, you know...nice dog.

MR: You mean you didn’t walk him when he had it?

Milly: He could hardly walk—very sick—I carried him every place. I remember: at the end of the year, I said something to the vet about, “...Look, if he’s going to die, let’s do away with him. I can’t stand prolonged deaths.” And he said, “Milly, if you can get him to eat better, he’ll make it—possibly.” I made chicken soup for him and spoon-fed him. It was wonderful. He was really a very, very nice dog.

MR: I remember him!

The house on Russell Street

Milly: He lived for about seven years. Well, what happened is I had more students and the workshops became bigger, and I realized I needed bigger space. So, that’s when I found the house on Russell Street

to rent. It had this huge downstairs, big living room, it had a kitchen downstairs, and upstairs there were three bedrooms and a bathroom.

MR: That must have been expensive.

Milly: It wasn't much more than two hundred dollars—two hundred fifty.

MR: It was a whole house?

Milly: Well, it was a house that was divided. That was my part of the house. You know, it had downstairs and upstairs and there were two places in back. The thing I was so worried about were neighbors and cello playing. People loved having the kids around, loved having me there, and they would do things like bring cookies for the kids, which was very, very nice.

MR: Classy neighborhood!

Milly: Very, very nice. At which time, someone who was moving to Australia had a piano they wanted housed and taken care of, and gave me this Steinway to take care of and use. I really took good care of it: I had it tuned, I had it fixed always—it was just that sort of thing. Then I started hiring pianists for workshops and it grew bigger and there were always kids staying there, because there was spare room. It just kept growing. My big problem that I had financially—when I moved here—was I expanded always before I was ready to financially - moved into bigger places... It must have been more rent—I don't know what I paid, but it must have been more. I guess I was there for about two years. I loved the neighborhood, I loved the place, you know. It was possible to have kids there without their getting in the way.

Summer workshops and live-in students

Milly: During the summer there were three girls who came for the whole summer because I had workshops every day. One of them came from Castro Valley, one of them from the City, and one of them from something like Danville—not quite that classy, but around that area. They were quite talented and very wonderful, and they'd come stay with me.

MR: How did they find out about you?

Milly: Someone was teaching Jenny Culp, who is now with the Kronos Quartet. Someone was teaching her and said Jenny got beyond her and she sent Jenny to me. Claire Lee was living in Chinatown and members of the Symphony used to go to the public schools and she had public school music. One of the cellists in the Symphony thought that she showed a lot of promise and called me and asked if I would take her. I said, "Of course." I don't know how Theresa [Esparza] found me. But the three girls were wonderful. They stayed from Monday through Friday - up till Friday night. Their parents would come and take them home. Then they would come the next week. We had workshops every day. There was places for them to practice throughout the house. They were fantastic kids! I remember coming in once, after being out, the three girls were sitting there reading...

MR: They were about fifteen?

Milly: Younger—thirteen and fourteen. Jenny was reading the Bible. Theresa was reading Black Beauty,

and Claire was reading about witchcraft. [laughter] And I thought, “Oh, isn’t this marvelous!?” They had daily lessons as well as daily workshops. It was really quite fantastic.

MR: I’m sure you cooked well for them. You’ve always been a good cook. That’s another aspect of your whole life.

Milly: One of the things that happened: I once got a big grease burn and obviously my whole system went into shock, and I went upstairs to sleep. The whole next day I stayed in bed and I said to the girls, “Look, do the work you have to do around here. Do your practicing. You are going to have to take care of yourself today. I’m really incapacitated. ...Until I feel better...then we’ll get back on schedule.” I remember, that night they were outside, playing, right underneath my bedroom window. I heard them talking about how awful it was that I was sick, and how lost they felt, and Claire saying, “This is the worst day of my life.” I knew I had to do something, so that night I got up and sat them around the table and taught them how to play poker—which they loved! They got very excited about it! I kept thinking about their church-going parents—what they must think... [laughter]

MR: Wonderful opportunity for those girls!

Milly ...this evil woman teaching the kids how to play poker! And Jenny, who was always very beautiful, as anyone who goes to the Kronos Quartet can attest to now, sat there with eyes like saucers, and said, “Milly, if we’re very good and do all of our practicing and all the work we’re supposed to do around the house, can we do this every night?” [more laughter] That was absolutely fantastic!

There was also the summer that, whether they were ready for it or not, I had them all work on the Fifth Beethoven Sonata, because it had a sonata form, first movement; it had a cantabile, second movement; and a fugue for the third movement. I had people teaching theory—I’ll think of his name in awhile—it was just fantastic: the kids all worked on theory in theory classes, and Ben Simon would come across and teach theory. The kids learned about sonata form, about song form, and about fugues. They, incidentally, learned how to play the Sonata too, but that was coincidental. I just wanted them to know about the form, etcetera. We had a lot of kids coming to the house taking lessons—lots of daily workshops at different levels. I had this piano—this very, very nice Steinway—that I took very good care of.

That happened for a couple of years. This was on Russell Street, and I loved the Street and, of course, we were right close to Sweet Dreams, which had just opened, and the kids loved it as a candy shop. That was fun. And of course my class kept growing, and the workshops kept growing. It was really quite remarkable. I had many, many memorable students during that time. There was Jenny, and Claire, who later wanted to go into music, but she had been offered a scholarship to Barnard, and I said, “Ask for a year’s leave of absence and decide.” (this was later). She went to England; she studied at the Royal Academy; at the end of the year she took the exam at the Royal Academy and, what’s the other school? The Royal College of Music. She was accepted to both. Then she sat down and sobbed and decided she really couldn’t live without academics, so she accepted it. But that was such an important year for her and, for me, that’s such a success story—for that to have happened. Theresa later went to New York to study, so that’s those three.

During that time Robin Bonnell started working with me; Emil Miland; Dawn Foster...

MR: That was about when I met you. That must have been about 1973 or 1975.

Milly: Was I on Russell Street then?

MR: You were already in this house.

Milly: So, that comes later. That was the next step.

MR: But they were still your students when I got to know you.

Milly: Yes. Danny Malkin was always in my workshops, and who now, unfortunately, is dead. He was doing really very well. Danny Malkin. And many, many, many who didn't go into music professionally, but music became a very important period of their lives. I spent a summer working with Peter Shelton, who came and worked with me one summer. There was all of that. That was also the time when Stevie Corcos and Jean Chastain brought their violin kids. She thought it would be good for them to be in my workshops. They were really quite fantastic.

MR: Where did you get the workshop idea? Was that your own?

Milly: Well, I hated the term "master class." I did not feel I was a "master," I just didn't like it. I thought of it as a "workshop"—that this was the place for kids. I wanted it to be non-threatening, but challenging. I wanted the kids to know this is the place to "fall on your face." This was the place to disagree with me, but not to be afraid of what you thought. Because if you might have had a point, or if you didn't, I had to know what you were thinking if I was going to guide you correctly. That was a wonderful, wonderful period. I must have had a 99% scholarship rate, I don't know. But I know I was always going to the bank to borrow money.

MR: Because all these things took refreshments, too!

The house on College Avenue through the generosity of friends

Milly: It was a long time before I really earned a living teaching. I had a long apprenticeship. After a couple of years I got an eviction notice: they were going to sell the whole house [the Russell Street House]. There was no way I could think of buying it. Several people got together and decided that the thing to do was to buy me a house; they would put up the down payment and sign for it; and as part of my mortgage payments I would pay them back for the down payment. Justin Simon decided that he really didn't like working in groups—that he would do it himself. So, he bought this house [College Avenue] and paid money to have the three small rooms in front made into one, which was fine. I operated out of that. I think he charged me four hundred dollars a month rent—the idea being that when I could afford to buy it, you know, I would. So I moved in here and started operating from here.

MR: So he did this for you, or for himself?

Milly: He did it for me. It was a very, very kind, good gesture. Then, a little later—and, you know I could understand it—he became a little nervous with it. He began to realize that—believe it or not—there were houses on Woolsey Avenue that were for sale for a long time and no one was buying them. He had four kids, you know, and he began to worry about getting stuck.

MR: So first you were renting from him?

Milly: Yes. Then what happened—he was very kind, he gave me a year’s notice to find someplace else—I can’t remember the exact sequence of events) - but during this time, my father came and stayed with me. He came when he was eighty and he stayed until he died, when he was eighty-five. When my father died, he left me ten thousand dollars and that was the down payment on the house. What happened—I can’t quite remember what happened—Justin decided that he didn’t want to finance it, or something of the sort. He was having his own financial problems. He made a lot of provision for me finding another place. He was very kind, very lenient. Several of my friends said, “Why don’t you ask people for money and pay for it?” Meanwhile, I had used the ten thousand dollars to get out of debt, to do some repairs that had to be done—all sorts of things. I must say, I always took care of the house as if it were mine. Always. At the time when Justin decided—no, this was before I was told I had to move—that—well, I decided! (because I had people come in to appraise it and it was appraised at much more than what he was going to charge me for it) and I said, “I can’t do this to you. And I don’t know if I can afford the other.” A ten thousand dollar down payment would have been okay for the original price of it. So he set a price for a hundred and forty-eight thousand, which I couldn’t think of it! I think by then the ten thousand dollars was gone. Several friends asked, well why didn’t I give my friends a chance to put up money for a good down payment and for whatever I needed. I wrote a letter, sent it to thirty people and raised fifty thousand dollars, which took care of down payment plus all the repairs that had to be done. I remember people were very generous. One person contributed fifty dollars, someone contributed fifteen thousand. There were several who did five thousand...fifteen hundred...two thousand...you know, it was that sort of thing. There were about twenty people who contributed. My stomach was in a turmoil all that time. It was a funny sort of transaction, particularly in terms of getting a mortgage, because I had twenty people...

MR: It was set up in a businesslike way.

Milly: ...so that they would all...the idea was, no one expected me to be able to pay them back during my lifetime, but they decided that at least it would go into their estate. Well, I don’t quite remember the chronology of it. Meanwhile, I was teaching. The community was really very kind to me. I think that is why I always feel that my house should be open to anything that is community-minded. What happened was that after about seven years, property value went up and interest rates went down. I decided to refinance and pay them back—everyone that I owed. No one expected it. Most of the people would accept the money without interest. There were several people who wanted interest for business reasons, or whatever. But almost all of it was interest-free. It took about a year for it to come about, because meanwhile certain people had died, we had to trace down certain things. It was just a holy mess. It took about a year before I had the money. I borrowed enough so that everyone could be paid off.

MR: Then you could act on your own decisions.

Milly: I had a trip to Europe and I had a little cushion for repairs, etcetera, and resumed mortgage payments. So, I guess that’s what happened at that time. It was always a little difficult for me to make mortgage payments, but I knew I had to.

MR: Do you remember what year it was that you moved in? I guess it had to be before 1975. You were living here when I moved here.

Milly: Yes. I taught really hard, had some pretty hard times, had to borrow some money several times—all of which I paid back. I remember thinking that no matter how hard it is, I have to somehow make these payments and keep going.

MR: It is such a great house for music teaching. I think the auditorium-like living room and then this long kitchen for receptions...

Milly: ...And the deck and the yard...

MR: It is really a beautiful place.

Milly: It is perfect for me...

MR: ...Centrally located.

Getting finances in order

Milly: It was then that I started worrying about getting my financial affairs in order. I had a good friend. I sat down with him—he was very smart about money—and I said, “Look, I want you to go over my finances with me.” This was John Lauritz, my friend who was killed in the earthquake. He sat down with me; he said, “Look, Milly, I’ll bail you out whenever you need it.” I said, “That’s not it. I’m not discovering a cure for cancer. If it’s not working I have to find something that does work. I just want to know: is this problem soluble?” He sat down and figured it out and he said, “You know, you don’t have a money problem, you have a time problem: the times the money comes in are bad for you.” And that’s when I started the tuition system. I mean, getting very adamant about when I was paid, and how I was paid. What I did was charge a tuition for a ten-month year and divide the payments in ten. Everyone was guaranteed a certain number of lessons a month, but this meant that when Christmas came—sometimes there was just one week of teaching—I still got the same amount every month. And that made it more possible and for the first time I could almost breathe easily. I was working very hard. I worked very, very, very hard for the money I made, but I was making money. That was for sure. And I discovered that I could be very strict about payment and still be good to people who couldn’t afford it. I never turned down anyone just because of the money. There was that sort of thing—and that was a revelation—that people were willing to allow me to earn a livelihood.

MR: Well, by this time you had quite a reputation, I guess.

Walking to the Crowden School

Milly: I suppose so. But at any rate, it was also about this time when I decided I really had to exercise. And the Crowden School at this time was on LeConte Street near Holy Hill, that particular section of town. I volunteered to work there because I needed the walk there, which was about a mile and half—and the walk back—that meant three miles a day of walking. I worked there for nothing for several years and the Board decided I had to get paid. That was fine, you know, that was really fine.

MR: I remember seeing you often out on the street, walking.

Milly: I knew the whole city!

MR: And I remember on Christmas Day you used to walk all over—way up into North Berkeley to visit people, just to say Merry Christmas to them.

Milly: Yes. Just to say, “Hi.”

Cello Bash

Milly: Then, while I was teaching here, I started what we now know as “Cello Bash.” I did it really for my students and for students of students. We had between fifteen and twenty, sometimes twenty-five, kids. I’d find cello ensembles, I’d give challenging things to students, in terms of working ahead. I tried arrangements of things for solo instrument, a cello orchestra, accompaniment. There was a lot of material for ensembles playing, etcetera. And I used to do this every year.

MR: I remember going to one at the Berkeley Piano Club with Emil Miland’s sister singing the Villa Lobos and—is that arranged for all cellos, anyway?

Milly: Yeah. She did a Mozart aria that I had arranged for cello orchestra and soprano. You know, we did the Bach *Double Violin Concerto*, on two cellos. There was that sort of thing... And then, what would happen...it really became very popular among students and people thought this was quite good. Now I got the idea of so-called Cello Bash—I think Robin Bonnell was the one who named it Cello Bash—because the first year I came here (I think I said something about it in the previous tape) was Margaret Rowell’s seventieth birthday and they had a cello ensemble thing. Cello Club did that—to celebrate her birthday. I was part of it and it was so wonderful and it was so exciting. As Cello Club disintegrated, fell by the wayside, I decided to do this for my kids. When I started working at the Crowden School, I thought, “Well, why not do it as a benefit for the School and invite all the cellists in town?”

MR: Up until then it had been mainly your students?

Milly: And students of students. People jumped on the wagon. We got good people to conduct.

MR: Yes, I remember. George Cleve one year, Michael Morgan...

Milly: Yeah. Dennis DeCoteau, Colin [Hampton]... It was really very exciting. A lot of work, but very exciting. Eventually, it grew too big for me. It just grew too big for me and it became a moneymaker for the Crowden School and, really, it didn’t make that much money. It never made that much money, particularly in terms of the effort that people put in, such a vast amount of talent who invested time in it. Besides, it began to lose my original intent, which was that it be educational—that the kids learn from it. That these aren’t Carnegie Hall recitals. I wanted people to learn and I remember Robin said that when he—there were a whole bunch of kids I had who went to the New England Conservatory—said when they got to New England Conservatory they were way ahead of kids in experience; largely, because of Cello Bash—the sort of thing they tried together—which I thought was just fantastic. And the violinist who used to be part of my workshop said the theory they did put them ahead of a « lot of kids when they went to music school. So that was really very gratifying. I was truly a non-profit organization, I think; but I think those were some of the best years of my life, in spite of the struggling through financially. That was very exciting.

MR: I just remember I went to quite a few of the cello bashes, even got involved in the chair moving from time to time. That was actually some of the tough part of it, just getting the stands and chairs set up for so many kids, because some of them were so little!

Milly: We grew to the point where there were a hundred participants.

MR: And so, just moving things so that everybody could play. But it was so sweet to see these little kids who were six years old playing with the big orchestra. That must have been such an unforgettable experience for them.

Milly: I think so.

MR: And it sounded good. It was that Amen or something that they always did at the end...

Milly: The *Dresden Amen*.

MR: Yes. I was always moved by that.

Milly: Well, the thing that always made me cry was “Now the Day is Over,” which was the thing they did before the Dresden. I would always cry. I would always cry when I heard that. Emil Miland said the thing that always made him cry was hearing the little kids playing, “Go Tell Aunt Rhody.”

MR: Just sitting there so sweet, and doing it with a serious look on their face and getting a good pitch and sound together. And those little pint-size cellos...

Milly: Yes. It was really a very, very nice thing. Unfortunately, you know, when my leg got bad and my health became a little more delicate, it just became impossible for me to do it. In many ways had to be—you could ask for help, but it always ended up being a one-person project.

MR: I remember, three months before the start you were starting to get out the arrangements and work things out. You know, it was a big thing, like a research paper μ every year.

Milly: Very good. Very well-put. It became very, very hard and the toll became too big for me. But I look back on it as something wonderful. We’ve tried to revive it and we just can’t...it needs one person, always, at the helm, doing it and we can’t get anyone to do it or get it worked out with committees.

MR: Well, at least the idea was there. Maybe someday somebody can do it again.

Milly: I really think once in awhile it will be okay to have a cello bash organized with all the cellists in the area, but I think in terms of an annual thing it should be a teacher’s thing for his or her students, with maybe some associates’ students who would like to be involved in it.

MR: Well, it was a real Berkeley happening. I still remember people in the audience, you know, just sitting there with their families and soaking it up. And you had it in the Masonic Auditorium one time, which was gigantic. And Zellerbach Playhouse, I remember, and a lot of times at St. John’s.

Milly: St. John’s was my favorite venue, but it was really getting too small for a hundred cellists. We had them sitting down the aisle.

MR: That was great. Then there was the t-shirt—that went on for many years where there was a Cello Bash t-shirt every year. For how many years was that? I know there was a big article in the paper. And when the media got wind of it, it was already huge.

Milly: But you know, it became too big for the things I believe in, you know. That's just that. I like it as an educational thing, and I'm going to start doing it again as soon as I become a little stronger—in terms of a smaller venue.

MR: I can remember you'd try to get people in their right chairs and you were right in the middle of everything. Sometimes you'd kind of get a little bit annoyed with people who were not getting into their chairs on time. [laughter] Yes, it was a nerve-wracking experience for you in many ways. And you always underplayed yourself. I remember people really wanted to give you a big ovation and nobody could find you at the end.

Milly: You know, I remember saying my favorite statement to the kids: "I mean what I say. I speak English very well and LOUDLY TOO." That became a favorite statement.

Trouble from next door

The other event in terms of my living here was that someone has bought the building next door to the north of me, but didn't live in the building—rented to people. And I had been teaching here for close to twenty years when he moved in and decided I was a nuisance—that my students were clogging up the traffic on College Avenue, that the noise factor was just very annoying, and he went around trying to get petitions signed by neighbors at which time a team of my friends went around to get petitions signed saying they liked having me in the neighborhood.

MR: I remember signing that one.

Milly: There was that sort of thing and it actually went before the City Council and Victor van Bourg took me on pro bono to represent me and when the case came up at City Council, the place was so swarmed with people I didn't know about.

MR: Wasn't there a group outside playing cello?

Milly: No, a cello section of the San Francisco Symphony agreed to play outside in protest and in support. And my lawyer said he wanted lots of support but no demonstration. So they didn't do that. But all sorts of people came—people I've known years ago. Also, a lot of music teachers who were afraid of getting into the same sort of problem. I won—we came to some sort of agreement about it—you know, certain stipulations. You know, the big thing is who ever heard of all the kids of many years and ages who started piano or violin. They went to a teacher's house to do it. I must say on my behalf, I didn't want to irritate him. I did everything I could in terms of sound proofing, double pane glass on that side of the house. I remember a newspaper reporter coming to the house and talking to him and he was talking about the noise was driving him nuts, and the guy was underneath my window—it was a broadcast with the microphone there. And all you could hear was the traffic go by on College Avenue.

MR: He obviously made it his *raison d'etre*.

Milly: You know, I said to someone, what he did was he heard with his eyes. If he could see something happen he decided he heard it. And he made stupid statements. Like, the kids after workshop would go out in the backyard and play. And this was just children playing in the backyard! And even the City Council said, "Come on! This is Berkeley!" On the whole, I have a bunch of well-behaved kids. It was very fine. I know I annoy him, and that bothers me, but tough! on that.

MR: Well, he should maybe get something to occupy his time so he doesn't obsess about it.

Interview Number Five, The Crowden School, S.F. State

The rare phenomenon of the Berkeley cello community

MR: Today, Milly, is February 21st. This is our fifth session of your oral history. Last time we talked, you told a lot about the Cello Bash and I'm remembering from many times when I went—I did go many times—but in particular, that it served not only a rare musical opportunity, especially for young students to get together with the experienced professionals and be able to play together, but it was a wonderfully warm community feeling. And when two very important people in the cello community died, and that is Margaret Rowell and Colin Hampton, it became a memorial service for them and it was music, but with many memories of them also included. I wonder if you could talk a little about that?

Milly: Well, this is a very, very fortunate and rich cello community. There are many very good teachers in the area. There is also a marvelously cooperative feeling amongst the teachers and there is always a concerted concern about students. We all seem to know all the up and coming cellists and all the sincere cellists who are not so up and coming in the area and it's a very inclusive, rather than exclusive, community. People from all over, when they have come and visited the community, are very impressed with that. Margaret Rowell was, of course, the fount of it. She and Colin Hampton started Cello Club and introduced mass playing around here. People then went to their sections of the country and started cello societies. But I think, I believe, it all started in Berkeley. It's just that cellists from all over the world love coming here and meeting the people. We, of course, love having them. We've been fortunate with visits. Before my time, Casals came and spent time here and gave master classes that are recorded. I think U.C. Berkeley has the tapes. I remember when I was on the East Coast, before coming out here, seeing broadcasts on public television of the cello classes in Berkeley. So that I came to Berkeley with a tradition already set—and loved entering into it.

MR: I know Rostropovitch came the same way.

Milly: For a week of master classes and concerts and recitals. He was very generous and very wonderful. And there are all sorts of funny stories about his being here. He once asked me how come I called him Mr. Rostropovich? I said, "Because I can't pronounce your first name... Mstislav, I guess it is... you know I can't pronounce your first name," and he said, "Oh, just call me Slava," which I thought was wonderful.

MR: So it's one of these very famous people kind of letting their hair down? Became reachable by everyone.

Milly: Yeah. To everyone, attainable.

MR: Well, I guess Margaret Rowell had quite a place in the cello world. Everyone seems to know about her.

Milly: And Colin also. But Margaret is a little older.

MR: Did Yo-Yo Ma come under a similar way?

Milly: Well, he knows who everyone is. What I remember when he came to speak to the Chinese society or organization in San Francisco, the mother of one of my students asked if we could organize some sort

of cello ensemble for him. I put Colin in charge of it to coach the quartet of kids—who were Chinese American. It was just fantastic. Yo-Yo Ma was so appreciative and so wonderful.

MR: He does have a wonderful personality. Are there any other teachers who came that I don't know about that you would like to mention?

Milly: Well, Bernard Greenhouse has been here; Leonard Rose has been here; I'm sure there are others, but slip my mind. [Paul] Tortelier was here with his daughter. Pierre Fournier has come to play, and also came to visit. And so it goes.

MR: Well, I know that Colin wrote many pieces specifically for Cello Bash.

Milly: He did some compositions that are very good, but he also made some very beautiful, meticulous and responsible arrangements of things for mass cello [orchestra]. What's so wonderful about his stuff is his economy of notes. You know, he does with a few notes what most people do more massively. They're just meticulous and responsible to the music.

MR: Well, I can remember as you used to get ready for these things which usually happened in May or something...

Milly: ...Memorial Day weekend...

MR: ...it was always that, huh?

Milly: ...it became that, yes...

MR: Because I can remember you having your kitchen table full of scores and scotch-taping things and getting it all ready for all the students. That was in February, or even earlier, when you were busy with that and it was a huge effort.

Milly: Oh, it certainly was.

MR: And even if you say it didn't raise as much money as you hoped...

Milly: It didn't matter. It did not matter in terms of the spirit it evoked and the experience that it gave people.

MR: Is there anything else you want to say about the Cello Bash before we move on to talk about the Crowden School?

Milly: I'm glad it was a part of my life. I'm sorry that I just can't do it anymore. It requires a sort of effort and sacrificing one's teaching, and a large part of one's life to get something like that together. As one gets older it becomes more difficult to ask some of the professionals—such wonderful professionals—who participated and gave of their time and effort for something like this. It just became more and more difficult to ask people to make those sacrifices.

MR: Well, you are so generous, I guess that's why other people are to you.

Milly: Well, it was my baby. But I never make the mistake of expecting people to feel as strongly as I do

about things.

The Crowden School

MR: That's a good thing to keep in mind. Well, the Crowden School is another incredibly unique phenomenon in Berkeley. I heard at least one person who considers it to be the finest musical school in the world—an opportunity for young people. And he's been around! This is Grisha Freiden. He says there's just nothing like it in the world.

Milly: That's what John Adams said - and his wife.

MR: So, maybe its true.

Milly: It is a unique experience. I've had people come visit who went through the whole Juilliard experience - the prep department, all the way through, and said actually what they needed in their life was something like the Crowden School. For one thing, we operate on the premise that very few of the kids are going to go into music professionally. It's the same thing, you know, if you study mathematics it doesn't mean you are going to become a mathematician - or if you read literature it doesn't mean you are going to become a writer. It's just an important aspect of everyone's life who enters the school. The kids learn so very well. It is very possible to do in groups, in orchestras, in chamber music, that which is much too difficult to accomplish alone as a soloist. You can really be part of a good group and good performances without being a virtuoso soloist, which is important. But, on the other hand, we feel that we have to be able to accommodate those kids who are headed for a professional track—that way—to have it be a good experience for them. I remember, I just feel, in terms of my own teaching, but it's the same spirit that is evoked in the Crowden School, I remember when a very, very talented student of mine, before he went off to the New England Conservatory, came to say goodbye and we were talking. He was talking about the experience of studying here—this was before the school existed. I remember saying to him, “I think its so incredible, this never was my aim, how many of our kids have gone into music professionally.” He said, “Equally important were those kids who decided not to go into music.” That it was wonderful knowing them, that was such a good experience, a wide experience, and I think that is important at the Crowden School.

MR: Well, even those who didn't go into it professionally probably played chamber music in their spare time. They had those experiences that are so superior to anything they could get anywhere else, I'm sure, at that age. I've been to some of the concerts and I think the sound of the orchestra is just divine. When I heard the choir sing with Steven Rumph conducting, I thought, “These are such young children, to be able to sing this kind of music—and well, and to have that experience of what it feels like to make music like this.” It's just unbelievable, really, that the professors and the faculty know how to present it in such a way that they can do it. I think most people would think it much too difficult for that age group. Because it starts in the fourth grade, doesn't it?

Milly: Yes. And we have a ninth grade also. Five very talented kids in the ninth grade. It's the best ninth grade we've had.

MR: The ninth grade has only five kids?

Milly: Well, this year. We have had as few as two. People who want another year of being around the Crowden School—and with such a focus on music. The faculty devotes a lot of time to the ninth grade

and gives them such individual care.

MR: Doesn't every day start with two hours of playing music—that's how they begin their day. Is there music later on in the day, too?

Milly: Sometimes. It depends on what happens. Before concerts, you change schedules. Before important performances we try to get the faculty to cooperate and not give a lot of homework...to be a little more flexible.

MR: Well, the kids look to be very supportive of each other.

Milly: Oh, the kids are wonderful, they're very generous.

MR: But, they've been given a lot, obviously, by the school and their parents. It is just wonderful to see children look that fulfilled.

Milly: And happy! They're happy kids! It is quite fantastic.

MR: Now, were you involved in it from the very beginning?

Milly: No. Anne Crowden, who is a friend of mine, started it and they started with very few kids.

MR: This was in a church basement.

Milly: Yes.

MR: What was the name of the church?

Milly: It's the First Christian Church.

MR: Theological Hill.

Milly: It was a nice place, it was a nice venue, for what it was worth. Now we are in the old Jefferson School. That, of course, is marvelous. And part of the property is a nursery school and within two years we are going to take that over, giving them a chance to find other digs. We need the room. That will give us a library, etcetera. You know, we were talking...parents just wish that it would extend through four years of high school, but when you sit and think of the number of faculty you'd have to hire for a full high school program, and how many kids you'd need to pay for it, it just becomes unfeasible.

MR: Well, it certainly gets them through middle school years.

Milly: Uh-hmm.

MR: And by then I guess they can join youth symphonies.

Milly: You know what is wonderful: we have a teacher's lounge—except when we have to kick teachers out when we run out of space and have to use it for rehearsal space or for classroom space—but you sit there and you listen to these people talk about the individual kid and what has to be done. The sort of statement that's made: "This kid is such a pain, but somehow we lose our credibility if we can't manage

this, if we can't incorporate this sort of child in our program." It is that sort of thing, and such appreciative, loyal parents—it's wonderful. Obviously the school is doing something right. The whole concept was Anne's. The whole idea of doing things—she truly is a great lady. It is so absolutely fantastic. And what I used to say about Anne is: if she has a plan in her mind, I'm not always aware of it—not until it is fulfilled. Then it comes through and you hear a concert. And in the end: "Oh, that's what she meant!" She is too busy being productive to bother to have to explain things to everyone. It just somehow gets done and it truly is remarkable. It truly is!

MR: She didn't have anything as a model for her to do this?

Milly: Well, she knew about the Menuhin School in London and there is the Purcell School that emphasizes music at an early age, but there is nothing quite as productive, in spite of informality, as this school.

MR: Well, I've been to a few of the faculty concerts too that go on, on Sunday afternoons, and the audience is full of entire families, you know, the children, the parents and

Milly: ...their friends...

MR: I'm always amazed at how the children, even young ones, are able to sit and look as though they are enjoying it and listening to a long adult concert.

Milly: Well, they get a little restless and the wise parents come in pairs, so they'll walk the restless ones around the block...

MR: But especially the Crowden School students. They're usually up there together in a group and totally glued to what's going on.

Milly: Oh, yeah.

MR: Well, it is just a wonderful school. And the faculty too, I understand, are very dedicated.

Milly: Oh, yeah...

Milly: We've been very lucky, because Anne always used to feel we pay so little...that you can't be too fussy about certain things. We've been so fortunate in the quality of teachers that we have come teach there. It just is fantastic.

San Francisco State University

MR: Now, since I've known you, I think there has been just one other school that you taught at, and that was San Francisco State for a time.

Milly: Yes, for about three years.

MR: What was that like?

Milly: Hard. I don't drive and I used to carpool—wait outside Safeway to get over there—and then take

the streetcar to San Francisco State. I must say, one thing I'm proud of. In the course of time I was there, I had four students and I got them all into graduate schools. I worked very hard. And loved working on the chamber music with members of the Alexander Quartet, which keeps getting better and better.

MR: They're in residence there still, aren't they?

Milly: Yes. And they're also involved and very interested in what happens at the Crowden School. They have participated in Debbra Schwartz' and my Summer Music Berkeley program.

MR: So you were teaching mainly privately there [S.F. State]?

Milly: I had cello classes and cello students and worked with the Chamber Music program.

MR: And then that was the time when you met the Arlekin Quartet too, this group of young men from Moscow, who came over. Are they also still at San Francisco State?

Milly: No. That was a very peculiar situation. There was a group of actors in Moscow—they had a company. They called themselves "The Arlekin." I guess it was Sergei [Riabtchenko] who was in charge of the music and organized this quartet of four guys. Somehow or other they came over to America on a visitor's visa. They had a prospect of one job - somehow they thought it would happen. The story is that when they hit New York, they were starving. The Arlekin Quartet went out in the streets to play and made enough money to feed the entire acting troupe. They used to play at the BART Station in San Francisco.

MR: Did they make good money there?

Milly: They made enough to feed themselves, you know. And then they started gigging—they started getting jobs gigging and members of the Alexander Quartet heard them and brought them over to San Francisco State as students and as assistants. And watching them become accustomed to America was something else! They never knew they were going to stay. But they decided they wanted to. And someone like Sergei—he left a child and wife behind—it took five years to get them over here. But it's so marvelous to watch them doing really quite well.

MR: And I think you were their Russian mother, weren't you, when they got here, you sort of looked after them a little bit?

Milly: Well, Sergei came and asked if he could study with me. He spoke no English. The rest of the quartet spoke for him. I became involved with all of them—it was a very happy association. Then Colin Hampton became involved. When I refinanced my house, I borrowed a certain sum of money and I gave it to Colin and said, "Coach them. They need you!" He said, "Don't worry about money running out. It's my pleasure to work with them as long as they want me to work with them."

MR: Now, they all had trained at the Moscow Conservatory, but I remember you telling me they felt that they had not had the kind of training that you were giving them.

Milly: Oh, well, not quite that way. The Moscow Conservatory has been a very wonderful place, producing very, very wonderful players, but it started going downhill towards the end, so that the quality, for instance, of cello instruction that Sergei was getting was not really good. As a matter of fact, he switched his major to composition at that time and he came here and worked very hard, did very well.

He was just a wonderful student.

MR: And didn't you help him find a good cello?

Milly: That all goes with being "a Jewish mother."

MR: Okay! Well at that time, it must have been about fifteen years ago or so.

Milly: No, no. Maybe ten years.

MR: A lot of Russian people came at that time, just as the country was kind of falling apart.

Milly: Well, look at the opera orchestra. We have a very strong Russian community in the Bay Area.

MR: To our great advantage here. Well, are there any other memories of San Francisco State that you would like to talk about?

Milly: Well, as their budget was cut down, I found myself more and more teaching for nothing, because I wasn't going to let down students whom I had started and were on their way there. None of them were beginners, but I worked very, very hard with them and I thought, "Well, if I'm going to teach for nothing, I might as well save myself the commute," and I stopped going over. It was very good for me to get out of the house and not just teaching in the house.

MR: Even though people come and go, it sometimes is isolating, I agree, from my being a private teacher too. Let's talk about your students a little bit. I know that many of your students—not only have you sent them to graduate school, but many students have won competitions and scholarships and, last time—I'm not sure if you said this off tape—I commented that you actually did not perform that much on the cello, really, in your life, and you said, "My performance is teaching."

Milly: My product is my students.

Workshops

MR: In addition to the private lesson, are workshops. You do more than any other teacher I know. You obviously believe in them.

Milly: Well, I believe in kids learning a piece and having a chance to play them with pianists, often, often—really often. There are kids who never worked with a pianist until they get to Conservatory and give a recital and it is too late to learn easily some of the conventions of playing together, of ensemble. I've been very, very fortunate with pianists I've had for workshops. I call them workshops because I don't feel that I'm important enough to give master classes. I give these workshops and, unlike most people who have them, they have only the best students perform and some of the lesser students never get a chance. This is how people learn. They all develop at different rates of speed and you have to really listen to their time clocks, and, you know, you can nudge a little here—hasten certain things a little bit, pull back a little bit—but you can't run contrary to a student's time clock.

The other very marvelous thing—as much as I don't work on a "star" system—there are always stars, people that other students look up to. As soon as they leave, other people emerge who've just been lying

there dormant for awhile. They suddenly come up and I just love that process. I've always said I spend as much time with the student who isn't impressive, as I do with the impressive kids. Mostly, I feel so strongly about a one-on-one educational experience of the music lesson. I feel any one who is willing to put time in and wants to study deserves the best possible instruction I can give them—give him or her. (We must be grammatically correct!)

MR: When these dormant students come forth as stars sometimes, do you have an idea who they are going to be, or do they surprise you?

Milly: I am forever surprised. I am forever surprised at how people are capable of learning, and how some kids sit there and seemingly have not moved forward and they are absorbing. And as they grow and their muscles get stronger and their coordination gets better, they've been learning all along and all of a sudden they can do it.

Competitions

MR: What do you think about competitions?

Milly: For me, competitions are a form of a way of taking a certain body of work and working at it for a long time, perfecting to a level. I prefer recitals. I prefer that kids give full recitals where you have a whole program to work on over a period of time, and getting the chance to play at workshop for people before giving a full recital.

MR: On average, can you say how long you allow a person to get ready for a full recital?

Milly: It depends—it just depends. Sometimes people go on studying for years and they complete certain things and then finally we say, "Well, let's prepare a recital. You pick out some old pieces, and we'll do some new things." It just depends on the kids. Usually you work on things and, somewhere along the year, I'll say, "Would you like to give a recital? Let's plan the program, let's start working towards it and see what happens." It's a wonderful experience for the kids - just marvelous. My feeling about competitions is that there is an art to winning competitions...

MR: What kind of art?

Milly: Well, the piece you choose, the sort of thing you do, the people you contact, the people you play for beforehand who tell you what the judges are looking for—all that. And that's all very, very fine. I know people who've gotten through music school by entering competitions and winning certain sums of money, so that they could support themselves going to school. And that's fine—if you use it just that way. People who win competitions are not necessarily the people who go on to big careers.

MR: Well, I worked awhile at the Committee for Arts and Lectures [U.C. Berkeley] many years back. It seemed to me that if you hadn't won some major competition you'd never get taken on by a major manager.

Milly: I don't know: Peter Serkin, Rudolph Serkin, they never won a competition. There are all sorts of people who didn't and some people win the Moscow Competition and they're assured for concerts for one year, but if they are not rehired, if the audience doesn't want them, then that's that.

MR: Yeah, it does seem to me a little bit negative to get so ready only to be judged, but, of course, that's only part of the competition—usually there is a concert.

Milly: If I have a child who wants to enter a competition, or if I encourage a child to enter a competition, very often, it's an ego booster. I don't expect, I don't demand of the kid that he wins or she wins. All I want is a lot of work on their part to make up for the work that I am putting in, to something like this.

MR: So it gives you and the student a chance to refine and refine more than you might—give you the impetus to do that.

Recitals

Milly: Yes, yes. The reason for student recitals is more for the teacher than for the kids because you can go along feeling very good about what your student is doing and, when they have to perform in a recital, sometimes you realize they are not ready and that's important to know. I learn from these mistakes. You learn to tell a kid, that the time to worry about a recital isn't a week before the recital, but it is the day after you've played the last recital you worry about the next recital you are going to play.

Scholarships

MR: What about scholarships? How has this happened to some of your students?

Milly: You mean scholarships I give them?

MR: I know Emil Miland, for instance, went for a year to England on a scholarship.

Milly: He won a competition. He was with the Youth Orchestra, they went to England, and there was a international competition and he entered it and won and got a year's worth of study with William Pleeth, who had been Jacqueline Duprés' teacher. And living expenses in London.

MR: What an opportunity!

Milly: Indeed.

MR: And I know he is a professional cellist.

Milly: Yes, and composers are composing works for him. He is very charismatic. I said, "Like Reagan, you're the Great Communicator, whether you enjoy being compared to Republicans or not."

MR: Were there any other students like that, who had the opportunity to study abroad?

Milly: I've had students who have done that. I've students who have won the Hertz Award at Cal, which gives them enough money to go study abroad. I've had students whose parents have moved to Europe and they've gotten in with some good teachers there, and studied abroad—or studied in other parts of the country.

Travel

MR: Well, speaking of Europe, I want to shift now to your travel experiences.

Milly: Oh, it hasn't been that extensive. The first time I went to Europe was when I was fifty, and I had friends who were going abroad—taking vacations like that—as just part of their lives. I remember my good friend, Bernice [Chase]—she and another friend of mine were going to Oxford to do a summer program and she said, “Why don't you join us when we go to London?” And I said, “Because I can't afford it.” She said, “Oh,” and she'd come every week to ask me to give her fifty dollars or, if it had been a good week, she asked me for a hundred dollars, and she put money away for me. Before she left she said, “Here's the money for your fare, come join us.” And the first time I took a flight to London, I couldn't sleep, I was so excited because it was my first time in Europe. They met me at Heathrow and their story of me was I was bug-eyed, as I walked out wearing a high orange hat. Absolutely exhausted, but very, very cute. We went to Paris.

MR: California Gal comes to prim and proper England in an orange hat!”

Milly: It was wonderful. I walked every place. I would get up early in the morning and just go exploring, walking.

MR: I remember when you went on that trip.

Milly: It was fantastic. And after that it became easier to go.

MR: How many times did you go, altogether?

Milly: About four or five times.

MR: Did you get to most countries in Europe then, or did you keep returning to your favorite one?

Milly: Well, I love England, because of the museums and theater, you know, and also the language. For my seventieth birthday, my friends threw a party and I got round trip tickets to London and to Amsterdam. And I walked miles, I walked for miles. I just loved it. I have no great desire to travel now, because I can't walk.

Dealing with lack of mobility

MR: Right. I can remember on that last trip was when something happened on your foot and you came back and had to deal with that. There was an infection, or something that got started. And you've been through a lot.

Milly: Oh, yes. I've been through a lot. I still have a foot. Isn't that amazing! For a healthy lady, I've been sick a lot and had some pretty bad illnesses. But, coming back strong and mean as ever.

MR: Well, I remember the first time you had to be hospitalized to get intravenous antibiotics for this foot infection. You actually taught from your hospital bed.

Milly: Well, I was well, but I needed intravenous and the only way I could get it was by remaining in the

hospital. They wouldn't let me go home and teach and come once a day to get intravenous, because I had to be hospitalized. I was so healthy at that time. They gave me a space there where I could teach and I had the kids come and I taught them.

MR: I remember the room—it was quite nice. And we played Scrabble and you became the center of the life there—whatever ward it was, I don't remember. I remember you and I took a Saturday morning walk every Saturday for years. We started from your house with one of my dogs, and up to Rick & Ann's for an outdoor breakfast, which we shared. Do you remember we chatted about everything under the sun? Those were such wonderful walks. Then, you were not able to walk as easily. But, all that walking energy has gone into your teaching. I remember specifically an evening a summer or two ago when three different students played the three Bach gamba sonatas. I couldn't believe the level of performance that both the piano and the cellos had, and they were high school students. You know, I've come to a lot of your recitals over the years, and it seems like you are enabling people more than ever in your teaching.

Milly: That's nice.

MR: So, I can see that our tape is about to run out and we've been working here—it's not really work, it's a lot of fun, I think. But you need to teach soon and you probably want a little break, so we'll meet next time.

Milly: Okay.

Interview Number Six, Other pleasures, more on teaching and cello, and final thoughts

MR: Milly, today is the first of March. We are meeting again to do your oral history and I would like to talk about the other pleasures in your life, which I know are clothes and food and entertaining. Which one do you want to talk about first?

Milly: You choose.

Clothes

MR: Well, let's talk about clothes. I can remember one time you gave me a beautiful jacket and I said, "Oh, I can wear it for good," and you said, "Don't wear it for good—when do you ever do good?"
[laughter]

Milly: Wear it every day.

MR: You've always loved clothes. I think I remember the White Duck days, when there was that wonderful shop up the street. Have you always been interested in clothing?

Milly: Not really, not really. As a matter of fact I was rather messy about clothes. I could always manage to do something effective, pull myself together, when I felt the need to do it. But it wasn't a constant—it never was a constant. Then, as I got older, and especially as I started suffering from various illnesses, I found it almost impossible to pull myself together. The solution seemed to be to have nice things that were coordinated. It took a lot of time and I spent money buying clothes so that whatever I pulled off the rack looked decent, and I never had to worry about looking messy or uncoordinated, etcetera. I really was rather amused at myself with my growing interest in clothes and effect and color, etcetera.

MR: Yes, when I first met you, you were kind of in the patchwork quilt stage. Remember when patchwork skirts were so popular?

Milly: Yes.

MR: When I first met you, which is about almost twenty-five years ago, you had more of the casual Berkeley look and later you became quite sophisticated, I thought, in your dressing.

Milly: Well, I think a lot of it was being a bit more permissive to myself and deciding that maybe there are things I'm entitled to, so that at first it was a matter of, "Well, if you're going to do something, do it right." So it was sort of patchy at first. After awhile it became easier to always have something decent.

MR: And it was part of the fun - of things that you did for fun.

Milly: Oh yeah, like I once said to someone, "Life is so difficult that the living of it has to be fun." Clothes are a part of it.

MR: I remember several times when I'd tell you about a concert I'd gone to, you know, I'd describe the music and how they played, and then you'd say, "Now to important things. What did she wear?"

[laughter] And I remember when you'd get ready for a trip. Months before, you'd hang your clothes up that you thought you might take. You'd have some sort of a coordination idea of stuff you were going to put in the suitcase that would fit and make sure it would. And you handed me many things that I still love and wear. You've been very good to me with your castoffs.

Milly: Oh, My!

Food and entertaining

MR: Yeah. Let's go over to food and entertaining. First of all, you are such a fantastic cook, especially with roasts that are surrounded with dried fruits and apple juices. I've never known anyone who cooks like that—with such panache. I can remember many times the sit-down for a hundred dinners that you served in the backyard, tables covered with tablecloths...

Milly: ...or sheets.

MR: ...but it was a fully elegant, not-a-paper-plate kind of a deal. Wonderful food, celebrations of July 4th, Memorial Day, I don't know. We did it at least once a year, if not more often.

Milly: I don't do that anymore.

MR: Yes, but you did it a lot. You really loved doing it. People came and had a marvelous time.

Milly: I think a lot of it is my love of people. I just enjoy people so much, so that—also, people have been very good to me—all during my stay in Berkeley. People have been just marvelous to me, so that that was my appreciation. I feel very strongly about privileges I have enjoyed. Somehow, those dinners were tokens of appreciation.

MR: Well, you certainly gathered together a wonderful community around you, who came to those dinners—wonderful people and not just adults, but children. I know there was a children's table—you took special care to have something appropriate for them. Balloons and all kinds of things. You really put a tremendous amount of energy into those occasions. I remember often thinking you must be exhausted by the time the first person walks in. And your Thanksgiving dinners! Which, unfortunately, I didn't attend much because I have a family in Berkeley that meets, but I walked through when your living room was full of people feasting together.

And then I remember this High Tea you decided to give once for, I can't remember how many, but you went to great lengths to make it elegant. Across every plate was a long stemmed rose. I'll never forget that.

Milly: That was a lot of fun, where people brought their favorite teapot. I think we had very many teapots and it was fun preparing the food for the tea—and everyone had such a good time. I just loved it. I like themes. I loved the party I threw—a Depression Day Party. We ate depression food.

MR: What was it? I forget what depression food was.

Milly: Beans, lots of beans. Hot dogs, things made with hot dogs. And we had a Depression era band in back. People danced to it.

MR: I think there was a wine store that even had Depression wine from Jackson's on the corner of Domingo and Ashby—they're not there anymore. Their label was Depression Wine.

Milly: That was just a lot of fun, and I loved the party I gave when I paid back everyone the money I owed them for the house.

MR: There was a big poster or something up.

Milly: Someone painted the side of the garage, before it was converted into a room. It had the names of everyone who loaned me money, who I paid back—it was a thank-you party and that was a lot of fun. The invitations were fun, too, when I said, "This is to thank everyone for the help they gave me in purchasing this house and to announce my vow of never getting into debt again." And I was pretty good about that. I haven't gotten into deep debt.

MR: I like that word, "deep debt." Plus, you threw a lot of after-concert receptions in a supportive way to young people playing—Sergei's recitals and the Alexander Quartet when they were new in the area, and I don't know how many others—I can't even begin to think... You went out of your way to provide that. Then, in addition to all the entertaining, you always do...

Milly: ...or "did"...

MR: ...with people coming, playing workshops, recitals in your house—all that music-making. Music and food, of course—they all go together.

Taking a new student

MR: We should get back to music a little bit again—and the cello. Now, many people want to study with you. You can't take every student, I know that, but every once in awhile you do take on a new student and I was just wondering what makes you take a student?

Milly: By having the place and space for them. I'm not a selective teacher. The only time I become selective is if I have a gut feeling against a student, or a parent, that I don't have time to work out. Because, if I sit down and think about it very often, the kid that I don't respond to, might be the sort of kid who made me miserable when I was their age, or something of the sort. I feel very strongly about the awful effect a negative teacher can have on a kid, so that one of two things happen, if I take on a kid like that: either I put up with stuff I don't have to put up with in an effort to fight my instincts about it, or the alternative would be to be miserable to the kid and that just is against my whole philosophy. But usually I will not take on a kid who is jockeying for position, or is overly competitive. I don't take on kids just because they are talented very often. I feel that if a kid is reasonably intelligent and is reasonably motivated, and that I'm a reasonably good teacher, any kid studying with me can learn to play. As I think I've said before, in these interviews, I feel that the music lesson is one of the very, very few one-on-one educational experiences a child has—even therapy is done in groups these days and I think that's very important where a kid is pushed to his limit or can go more leisurely at his pace. Kids develop at different rates. And again, I feel there is something I'm very slow about—trying to set good position and good habits, playing habits, and it seems to go slowly at first and then, all of a sudden, they're way ahead.

MR: I remember, when you start a student you generally see them every day.

Milly: If I can, if I can. I think that's ideal—to see a young kid fifteen minutes a day, you know.

MR: That goes on for about a month or so?

Milly: Yes. A good time to start a kid would be during the summer and to a child who lives close by, because it is hard to travel a half hour for a lesson for fifteen minutes.

MR: Do you ever—if you have taken a student and you think, after awhile, that it's not going well—do you ever discuss this and have him go to another teacher, or do you wait for them to make this decision?

Milly: Sometimes I don't think it's a good match. Sometimes I think the child would do better with someone else. My fees are comparatively high and I sometimes bring up the fact that perhaps they are spending too much money for what the child is getting from me—that the child could do equally well, and possibly better, with someone younger who doesn't charge as much. I do not like teaching a kid—I refuse to teach a child—who does not want to play, but whose parents are ~ambitious for the child. And I hate to be considered the “fashionable” teacher—anything of the sort. And I do worry about the kid much more than about his or her progress on the instrument.

MR: Yes. When you work that closely with someone it is bound to be more than a music lesson. What would you tell a beginning student? Do you go into any philosophy with them about what they are getting into?

Milly: No—that comes up with the doing of it. Stevie Corcos, who is one of the best beginning teachers I ever knew—violin. She would do things—she would talk with the child and have, say, a small violin, or a toy, or a book, and she said, “Choose something.” The child who chose the instrument was in. A very patient, very patient lady and marvelous with kids, marvelous with kids! They all adored her.

Advising students who want to become a professional

MR: How would you advise a student who is older who thinks they want to become professional?

Milly: Well, if a student says to me, “Shall I go into music?” I say, “No.” If a student says, “I would like to go into music, what sort of advice do you have?” We sit there and discuss the options, discuss the difficulties, what they have to face up to—that you don't go into something like music because you expect to make money. You go into it because this is how you want to spend your life earning your livelihood, and talk about the options that they have in the future—playing, teaching—of what the life is like.

MR: And what do you think it takes in order to live that life?

Milly: Extraordinary dedication and judging success by fulfillment, rather than by other monetary or social things.

MR: So, when you said that you would tell a person “No,” if they said, “Should I go into music?”—is that just a sign to you the initial motivation from inside isn't there?

Milly: Yeah. They want a guarantee. While I think it is okay to say, “I would like to go into music. Do you think I have what it takes?”—that’s something else.

On talent, commitment, practicing

MR: What, in the realm of “talent,” do you think is indispensable? Do you think a person has to be able to sing perfect pitches—not have perfect pitch, but just know intervals. Some people sound like they can’t really carry a tune, and they still are quite advanced on an instrument.

Milly: I think most people can be taught good intonation. It is a matter of really very, very solid training. I love Casals’s statement that good intonation is a matter of conscience. Very often a kid will play a note that is not in tune and will go on—I think intolerance is the first step to success. If you can’t stand something, you do something about it. It’s a matter of training, it’s a matter of discipline, it’s a matter of willingness to put time in. It’s a matter of learning how to practice and I tell kids that learning a musical instrument isn’t like going on a diet that you do as a temporary measure where you suffer and deprive yourself of a great deal for a result, like being able to fit into a dress, or something of the sort. You have to really enjoy the process if you are going to be successful at it. And we all go through different modes—times when we don’t—but there is also a matter of commitment. I think one of the things I tell a student is: you don’t have to commit yourself for life, you know. Commit yourself for the period of time it takes to learn this step of the way and then reconsider what you want to do.

MR: Speaking of committing time in practicing, do you have some ideas? There are many ways people practice: some make a time commitment, others make some other way of sitting down to work?

Milly: Well, I think that what happens to me with kids is: you’ll find—particularly in the beginning stages—kids who have “talent,” who learn things fast, don’t have to put in as much time as others. That’s why the individual lesson is so important with a good teacher, because a good teacher gauges this and pushes a little harder—gives them things they can’t possibly do without practicing, without applying themselves. I believe that my lessons are really supervised practice sessions. I practice with them and hopefully it begins to mean enough so that they start practicing on their own that way. Sometimes I go very slowly. Sometimes I go very fast and we make calculated leaps. You take a child by the hand and just leap a great distance. But I try—I don’t know that I always succeed—to backtrack and fill in the gaps along the way. One of the most technically gifted kids I had just couldn’t stay on a piece long enough and I felt that she never really completed anything to my satisfaction. And she went through a great deal of literature very fast and then we hit a piece that meant a great deal to her—it was the *Barber Concerto*—which is fiendishly difficult—and that we worked at for a year. The piece is very new to me too so I had to go slower than I sometimes go with repertory. She worked everything out perfectly, just perfectly, to her and my satisfaction to winning competitions with it, etcetera, to being accepted by Leonard Rose as a student, because someone sent him a tape of her performing it with an orchestra, and because she had that sort of mind and that sort of ability—you know, perfect pitch, etcetera. She had this backdrop of stuff she had learned—at least the notes of—to which she applied everything she learned from the Barber, and she had this fantastic repertory consequently. And we reworked things. And it worked faster, but for the right reasons, not because she got bored with it.

MR: I remember reading in Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*, I think, where he talks about the two kinds of learning: one is *gradus ad Parnassum*, where you do one step and then the next; and the other is anticipatory learning ∞ , where you do throw out the lifeline and you bypass a lot of steps in order...because they are somehow emotionally ready to experience that, and then you are doing it for

those reasons. I have given students things that are too hard for them also, because they want to learn them so much, thinking that they will learn so much from trying to learn them that they can go back to things they are more capable of playing at that level.

Milly: Well, now I have something very interesting happening: I have three students—one is ten and the other two are eleven. At different times, I put them on the *Saint Saëns Concerto*, thinking we'll do just small parts of it. All three of them have gotten to this point where they have learned at least the notes of the complete concerto. But it is very strange, because I have one girl who is her own worst enemy—to this day, you know, I will say to her, "Okay, let's try it four to a bow," and she will do it separate bow. She doesn't listen to what you say and she used to drive me nuts. I would look at her after experiencing or expressing anger, I'd say: "Honey, do you suppose we'll ever be friends?" And she said, "I hope so!" Well, at any rate, what I discovered with her is that she loved new grounds technically. She became all involved with mastering certain techniques and I was just so afraid it would become technical and not musical. But as she became more secure and faster at doing this sort of thing, her musicality set in. I know I spent a lot of time saying to her, "Honey, I can't change my personality. I know sometimes it seems abrupt to you, but can you once stick out your tongue at me?" And it took months to get her to be able to stick out her tongue at me! I said, "I don't expect you to do it physically, but inside you should be able to do that. You should be able to say, 'That's not important.'" "

In a way, it is so hard as I said to determine what talent is. The two boys: one is eleven and one is ten—one of the boys I think grew up with music all of his life. He grew up in my workshops because his brother was older than he and is also a cellist. He played in many workshops and he would accompany him. He learned the entire repertory and can tell you what each of my students played, which piece and when. So he had this sort of experience. He is not a big practicer—he's only ten. It is amazing what he does: and he learns the rhythms and he's really quite sophisticated in what he does, but doesn't have the depth of technique that this girl has. The other student I have is one of the most talented kids I have ever seen, and in this case I use the word "talent." There is no doubt about it, in that once he understands how something is done, his hands can do that. But this can go on only so long. It is like the bright kid who can get all through school with an easy A, and can sometimes even make it through college. Where they begin to suffer, is when they get into graduate school and they don't know how to work. They haven't figured out how to work. Now what I do, and sometimes it works (it's a big price to pay for me and the parents, not so much for the kid) but I try to see this sort of child as often as possible to go through all the processes and say over and over again. And I know sometimes I say something and it is not registering. The time certain things registered with this child is when he heard another student do it. He knew what to do. And in that case I say, (I try to save some time at the end of a workshop): "Now, would you like to take some time and do it again?" And he will always say yes, and it is always much better, because he has really heard how it fits in and what it feels like. I'm not going to rest easily until he really works a little more systematically. Right now I just enjoy him. He has a marvelous concept of sound and I remember saying to my friend, Stevie Corcos, who heard him do the first movement of the *Saint Saëns*—you know, he is a sixth grader, eleven years old, terribly undisciplined—she was knocked out, as was everyone. And I said, "It is such a hard struggle to get him to obtain some discipline without breaking his back. I like the fact that he is experimenting for certain sounds. I don't want to break his back, but he has to gain discipline." And she said, "Remember that! Remember that!" Because I can sometimes become impatient.

MR: I think you told me that sometimes you actually give students a practice module, you called it.

Milly: Yes. Especially when a student is preparing for recital and they have many pieces, and you divide the time—I write down on a piece of paper. This doesn't dictate how much they practice a day. It is a

matter of what they cover during a week, and you put down...say, they are doing scales, an etude, Bach, maybe, a sonata of some sort and a concerto. What you do is divide practice into modules. Each module has to have part of the scales, part of the technique, part of the Bach, part of the sonata, part of the concerto and, say, you make it a forty-five minute module. They have to complete a module before going on to the next—depending on the age of the kid. If they are not giving that ambitious a recital, sometimes they are half hour modules. The idea of modular practicing evolved when I heard someplace that when a child practices, or learns something, and spends a certain amount of time on it, when you get back to it you've lost some of it, and the shorter the module, the less you lose in the next time. And say, in the case where you divide things into six modules, so somehow or other, you have part of everything in each module, you complete a module and then you go on to the next. The next day, you start with the next module, because most kids, when they practice, they start right from the beginning. They do their scales, they do their etude, they do their piece, and then they start over again the next day.

MR: They start from the same place.

Milly: Yes—without having covered certain things sufficiently. So if in each module you have some technique, as well as some of the musical things, you cover that and I devised that at a time when I was preparing a recital for which I had little time, no time at all, to prepare. I got newsprint paper and divided things up that way. At that time, I was smoking and, when I found myself not concentrating, I'd stop, walk around the block, go smoke a cigarette, do something, but I wouldn't practice non-productively. And with a limited amount of time, I covered so much material over the week. And that is hard discipline for a kid, and they won't do it unless they have a recital coming up or a competition coming up—something of the sort. One of my rules is: you have to learn to do “in addition to,” and not “instead of.” So that if you are working on shifting and you can't all of a sudden stop working on sound, or other technical aspects of what you are doing. Practicing—one of my favorite stories about that was Bernard Greenhouse, who heard someone and then a year later heard her after she had started working with me, and he took me aside. He said, “C'mon Milly, now what did you do?” So I explained to him the bit about modules, and I said, “Also, I practiced with her until she learned how to do things, because practicing is very lonely. Practicing alone is very lonely.” Later, we were talking about other things. He said, “If I were going to play a recital right now, what program? I would expect you to sit down and write out a program. I'd be interested in what you would like me to play?” And I said, “Bernie, would you like me to write out a practice module for you?” He said, “No. Practice with me! It is SO lonely.” So that is something we all understand.

MR: I notice, when I walk in here sometimes, when you are teaching, you are often playing the piano with the student so they hear pitch.

Milly: Not only the pitch—it is a good way of subtly introducing a musical line, because that is how they hear it. And as a piece gets closer to completion, I don't use the piano at all.

On teaching

MR: How long all together now have you been teaching, would you say?

Milly: Well, I did a little teaching when I graduated from Yale—I graduated in 1956—but I think my real teaching started in 1960.

MR: When you came to Berkeley?

Milly: No, I came to Berkeley in 1970. And that's when I really started teaching.

MR: Would you say that, in terms of understanding, recognizing certain things in the students, at what point did you feel that you could really help people? Did you always feel that way, or was there a time you weren't sure?

Milly: No. I was very unsure. If I had a kid who got to a certain point, I would have Bernie Greenhouse listen to them—bring them to New York. He's the one who said, "What you're giving them is much more than I can right now, because it is a matter of time and effort." I was very unsure of myself. It took me a long time to gain any sort of confidence and I am still very open to the possibility that I'm not doing things correctly.

MR: It is part and parcel of teaching, I think.

Milly: I think so. It is for me.

MR: Everybody's different.

Milly: Yeah.

MR: If someone told you that they are mainly interested in teaching—they know they won't become a professional, what qualities do you feel you would tell them you would hope they have?

Milly: Confidence. I mean, I think if someone is really serious about teaching and worries about the students that way, they are already fifty percent ahead of a lot of teachers and an openness to learning how to do things. And to do things their own way. They might learn from me and other people certain things, but they can't imitate style. They have to develop their own style. They have to be true to themselves.

MR: How do you define style?

Milly: Well, I deal with examples a great deal. I'm one of these people who uses anything I've ever learned in trying to find a way of defining how to do something, how something feels. I'm also very apt to speak colorfully—that's my style. I yell very often, and tell the kids that this is a survival contest: if they can survive me, they can survive anything, including audiences, playing. And they all develop a sense of humor about it. They all learn to stick out their tongues at me, and to laugh at me.

MR: And you have that sign that says, "Question Authority" right over your head.

Milly: Yeah, I keep saying I think it is so important that students, that people generally, learn the difference between informality and taking license. They just have to learn that.

On accompanists

MR: What do you look for in a good accompanist?

Milly: Someone who can read, someone who understands the children, and really enhances their

performance at whatever level. I have been very fortunate with accompanists. I've had accompanists who know the literature, who might not be the greatest pianists in the world. Then you get someone like Miles Graber, who not only knows the literature, but plays so very, very beautifully that it is extraordinary. And the kids learn so much from playing with pianists who are good musicians, and not just hackers. It is so marvelous when you find a pianist like this, who really gets involved with the students.

MR: And yet doesn't intimidate them.

Milly: My kids just adore Miles.

MR: You can tell that.

Milly: They just adore him, and why not? Why not?

MR: Yes, I've always enjoyed when he has accompanied your students—he turns what is already there into more.

Milly: Yes. Spins gold out of straw.

Older cello students

MR: Can a cellist pick up the instrument after years of lapse, do you feel?

Milly: Sometimes. Some of the best adult students I have had—I don't teach that many adults—are people who played cello when they were young, and now that they are more settled, have taken it up again, and they have done very well. For one thing, they understand how to learn, especially if they have been successful in another disciplined career. They understand how to learn. They are easier to talk to that way and unless they have a physical defect, I don't believe that hands get too old to learn. They can if they have the time.

MR: What about the person who may play another instrument quite well, and then wants to start cello as an adult?

Milly: That sometimes works out very well. I have an adult student who is a reasonably competent violinist, but who had some pretty bad training and was uptight about certain things, when she started on the cello, she started without the hang-ups that she had on the other instrument, and could put to work everything she had learned, in terms of discipline, and went fast and did very well, and very naturally.

MR: What about someone who is coming from a non-string instrument?

Milly: It depends. It just depends. One of the things I do, if a student comes to me say, having played piano, studying piano, I ask to hear them on the piano. What I listen to is musical line—a feel for it. And sometimes they come from not too good teaching, but there is still a lot you can learn and hear.

Casals

MR: Maybe you have more than one, but I was going to ask you if you had a favorite cellist?

Milly: Casals. Absolutely Casals. No doubt in my mind. Just a couple of weeks ago I listened to several of his Bach suites, and I am always so re-impressed with how musical he is, and so naturally musical, and I know the agony he went through in terms of practicing. You know, there are stories about people who went to visit him when he was in Prades, and they'd walk by the place he was practicing early in the morning, and he was doing open strings, and they'd come by a half hour later and maybe he was doing a scale, you know. He would go through everything laboriously and work through everything. And he revolutionized cello playing—loosened it up. I think he really introduced the extension. There was a time when—when you put your hand on a cello, your fingers naturally lie a half step apart; so that, say, if you started on the D-string, you put down your first finger on E, your second finger will be on F, your third on F-sharp, and your fourth finger on G, and if you wanted to go to G-sharp, you shifted. Or if you wanted to go E-flat, you shifted back. And what he introduced is extension, whereby you put your second finger where your third finger was (F#), then you have half steps plus whole steps, so that gives you the G-sharp.

MR: That would be revolutionary.

Milly: Also, in old-fashioned books about pedagogy on the cello, cellists were told to practice with a book under their arm against their body so that their hands opened up from the elbow. Casals introduced the entire arm opening up from the shoulder. You know, integrity, such integrity in his playing. I remember someone—I won't mention names, he's quite a famous chamber musician at this time—saying to me, “Boy, if anyone got on the stage and played the way Casals did,”—this was about forty years ago—“he'd be laughed off the stage.” I said, “If anyone can get on a stage and play the way Casals did, they wouldn't be laughed off the stage—it's just that they can't. They can't.” People aren't willing to put in the sort of work he put in. You know, I'll say when someone's working on a composition, “It's like buying an automobile. There was a time when you could buy a Volkswagen for about \$1,500 dollars and if you wanted a car that was twice as good it went up to \$3,000 dollars and then if you wanted something that was twice as good, you went up to \$6,000 dollars, and something twice as good you went up to \$12,000. After that, for every bit of improvement, you'd have to go up three times the amount, and you have to be willing to put that effort in to get that little bit of improvement—that little bit closer to your ideal.

MR: Did you ever see Casals live?

Milly: No. Just on tape, and I'm so grateful for those tapes.

MR: Who were his teachers?

Milly: I don't know. I really don't know.

MR: Sounds like you have the inspiration and confidence to change a lot of things.

Favorite cello works

MR: Well, I'd like to know, too, what your favorite cello pieces are, if you can tell me that.

Milly: For concertos, I think the *Schumann Concerto* is my favorite. Also one of the most difficult to

carry off. I like—actually, I like them all. There aren't that many concertos. You sometimes become a little jaded from teaching Saint Saëns too much, or [Edward] Lalo too much. But when you are working with a student you are not teaching music, you are teaching the kid, the student. And that to me is very interesting. But in terms of gut reaction, the Schumann is just my absolute favorite. I, of course, adore the *Bach Suites*. And I always—maybe as I get older I can approach teaching it to a student without fear and trembling. It is very hard for me to say thus. I'll say listen to Casals. In terms of the other literature, I love—I just absolutely adore—the *Beethoven Sonatas*. I'm not that fond of the *First*, though I like the rondo movement—and that's an easy movement to start a student on—but the *Second, Third, Fourth* and *Fifth* are wonderful. Possibly my favorite is the *Fourth—C-Major*—it just is wonderful. I love the two *Brahms Sonatas*. And then there is the whole realm of things like the *Rachmaninoff Sonata*, which is quite wonderful, it's quite wonderful. And they don't sound that contemporary now: the *Shostakovich* and the *Prokofiev Sonatas*, which are just wonderful. And I happen to love the *Barber Concerto*. I taught it to two students and it really is quite difficult to teach, you know. But I quite adore it—it is really a very good Concerto and so different from the violin concerto—it is so different from that. I'm starting to become familiar with Schnittke, whom I like very, very much.

MR: Is he a contemporary? I haven't heard him.

Milly: He is a Russian. I think he just recently died. Very, very wonderful. The older I get, the more appreciation I have for Shostakovich—his first concerto—I don't know the *Second Concerto* that well—and his *Sonata*. I used to think that they were pretty ordinary and they are not. They are really quite extraordinary. It's like Tchaikovsky, who I adored as a kid, and then went through an anti-Tchaikovsky period. As I get older, I realize how wonderful he is—how absolutely wonderful he is.

MR: Do you think there are a lot of Russian composers for cello? I mean, is there any particular nationality?

Milly: No. But there certainly are a lot of Russian composers who compose for the cello, because of Rostropovich, you know. They had someone to write for and that's quite unusual.

MR: Well, you have had quite a lot to do with the Russian musicians who come to the Bay Area: Sergei is one of them. Are there certain etudes or works that they brought with them which you now use because of their influence?

Milly: Well, one of the things Sergei uses—a collection of pieces in a Russian book—that are quite wonderful. You know, they are rather interesting musically—for the kids. And it is fine, but you know I use the Suzuki pieces because the kids like the pieces. I don't necessarily use the Suzuki method. But they have an interesting line of pieces that the kids like doing. And that's OK.

On technique

MR: What do you want to be sure you get covered with a student to enable them to play, in terms of technique? Is that a difficult question?

Milly: Yes. I keep using different things technically. I think scales are just so important—so absolutely, incredibly important. Arpeggios and broken thirds, and there are various scale books I use. I use *Klengel, Volume One and Two*, technical studies. And they start with straight scales, 2, 3, 4 octaves, arpeggios, broken thirds. *Klengel Two* has variations on the scales. The first half of the book deals with

the first three octaves and the second half of the book deals with the second through fourth octaves. And the first half of the book and second half of the book are correlated, except they start as different octaves. And those patterns are very important and some of them go up very high—just very important. I use various technique books: Schroeder has a series of three books: Book I, Book II, Book III, that have etudes of various people in it. Book III covers a lot of the *Piatti Caprices*, which are very important. Some people will say to use *Dotzaur*, *Grutzmacher* and will use someone else and they give the kids a lot of the same thing. I like the fact that it skips around and different people emphasize different things. And lately, what I've been using as soon as my kids are advanced enough, is the Carl Flesch scale system, which is a violin method which was transcribed for cello. And that is awfully good—scales on one string, arpeggios on one string, forcing you to listen, making you move, and also thirds, sixths and octaves, which are very important. I remember Luigi Silva used to say if your hand can play thirds—open closed, etcetera—you have your pattern for technical passages, except for that. But I also love the story one of my Russian friends told me, that he met this young lady at the Conservatory, who practiced the scales three hours a day, and I turned to him and said, “But how does she play?” and he said, “Well, she does scales very well.” You know, you have to watch out for that too.

MR: Do you ever find yourself making a technical exercise out of a hard technical place in a piece you are using?

Milly: Always, always.

On insight

MR: I've always thought that you have a great talent for insight—both in response to not just musical things, but the psychological stuff of life. Do you know what I am talking about?

Milly: I think insight and intuition very often is a matter of experience. It's like I know often at night I think of the correct retort I should have made to someone, a response to a certain situation. I've discovered that if I live long enough, and as I've lived longer, you get another chance. A similar situation comes up and you are ready! Because you have practiced all those sleepless hours. I think very often it is, you know—sensitivity to it and ability to bring to bear what you have experienced in the past. That's if you are interested.

MR: We're coming now to almost the end of this tape and the end of our oral history.

Milly: That's nice.

Looking back

MR: I had two things that I wondered about as you look back over all these years of teaching, maybe all through your life: is there anything you are very glad you did?

Milly: I'm very glad I came to Berkeley. I'm very glad I got into teaching. I'm very glad of my association with the Crowden School. I'm very glad of my involvement with the reading group I am part of, where we do mostly James Joyce (we do other things also, especially during the summer). The people are incredible. And I'm very glad that I own a house!

MR: Yes, especially in Berkeley! Are there some things that, as you look back, you would now do differently?

Milly: I don't know that I would have done them differently—I would have done them sooner [laughter] without going through the prolonged, agonizing period of learning, you know. A very wise older student I had once said, when I said to him, "I just wish I had achieved maturity earlier." And he said, "That's ridiculous. The longer you take to learn, the more you learn. You don't have a cutting off point." Most people get to a point where they say, "Well, I don't have to learn anymore, this is it, this is how I am going to live my life," and whereas it is very painful, I don't feel I have reached that cutting off point. It would be so marvelous to be able to say, "Thus!" and end it. Learning is one of the most painful experiences I know. You have to admit you were wrong.

MR: And yet, one of the most exciting parts of life. Well, it is hard to end this oral history because it has been such a pleasure for me to talk with you like this. You are such an articulate person.

Milly: I've had all these years of experience of having students. Answers to questions!

MR: And it is hard to say, is there any final word that you would like to say? It is a hard question, I know.

Milly: Well, that really is a difficult question. I think I've said perhaps too much. You know, I don't think so. When the occasion comes up I'll find the right thing to say, I hope.

MR: Well, thank you very much for your enthusiasm and cooperation to finish this, Milly—thank you for your interest. It has been a huge pleasure to do this.

Milly: Thank you. Likewise.

THE END OF THIS ORAL HISTORY [but not of Milly herself!]