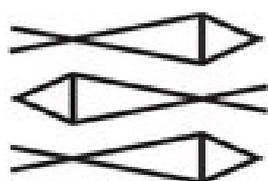


SOME OF MY LIVES

A SCRAPBOOK MEMOIR

ROSAMOND BERNIER



Some of My Lives

A Scrapbook Memoir



Rosamond Bernier

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Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Disgrace](#)

[Some Musicians I Have Known](#)

[Stokowski](#)

[Aaron Copland](#)

[Leonard Bernstein](#)

[Early Mexican Moments](#)

[Some Animals I Have Known](#)

[Up, Up, and Away](#)

[Under the Volcano \(*pace* Malcolm Lowry\)](#)

[Malcolm Lowry](#)

[Paul and Jane Bowles](#)

[The Good Neighbors](#)

[More Mexican Moments](#)

[Vogue—First Job](#)

[Chick Austin](#)

[Virgil, Aaron, and Nadia Boulanger](#)

[Paris Again](#)

[Now It's London](#)

[In Search of Proust](#)

[Visits to Matisse](#)

[René Clair and Vittorio De Sica](#)

[On My Own for Vogue: First Visit to Picasso](#)

[Picasso and Antibes](#)

[L'ŒIL Begins with a Gift from Picasso](#)

[Berthe Morisot's Daughter](#)

[Goncharova, Larionov, and Pevsner](#)

[Wifredo Lam](#)

[Venetian Adventures—*Venice Observed*](#)

[Georges Braque—Lord of the Birds](#)

[Remembering Fernand Léger](#)

[Alberto Giacometti](#)

[My Friend Miró](#)

[Henry Moore](#)

[Max Ernst](#)

[Chanel Comeback](#)

[Visiting Karl Lagerfeld](#)

[Once Upon a Time: Life at Mouton Rothschild](#)

[Louise Bourgeois, a Loving Memory](#)

[Sitting for David Hockney](#)

[Jerome Robbins](#)

[The Editor as Talker](#)

[Lecturing Notes](#)

[Still Talking](#)

[Philip Johnson and Our Wedding](#)

[Some of John's Musical Friends](#)

[About John](#)

[To the Met with Alex Katz](#)

[Afterwords](#)

[Foreword to John Russell's *Paris*](#)

[Janet Flanner \(Genet\)](#)

[Richard Avedon](#)

[Irving Penn](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Also by](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

Disgrace

My English mother, Rosamond Rawlins, left her native shores to marry my father, Samuel Rosenbaum, the eldest son of Hungarian Jewish immigrants, at the beginning of World War I. He was brilliant, the president of his class at the University of Pennsylvania, president of his year at law school, editor of the law review, Phi Beta Kappa. And what did he do but marry my mother, an Episcopalian. His family said the Kaddish over him and never met my mother. I hardly ever saw them.

I was born in 1916, two years into World War I, in Philadelphia. My mother was quintessentially English and patriotic. Her brother Hugh had been killed fighting in the trenches. His photograph in uniform, a handsome sensitive face, hung over our staircase.

I was brought up like a little English girl: riding lessons began at age four. I went for my lessons to Foley's Riding Academy, where Miss Eleanor Foley in admirably fitted jodhpurs guided my effort from a leading rein. I won my first medal at six. A photograph records me on my pony Teddy happily holding my silver cup. It was only second place—but there was a cup to go with it! Two years later there was a blue medal for jumping, first place!

Naturally, I had to have a governess; a French governess would be best. Both parents were excellent linguists. Because my mother missed her family and her country, we went to England several times a year, sailing on one of the ships of the Royal Mail Lines. We stayed at Aunt Queenie's in London. I was very impressed because the toilet in her flat was at the end of a corridor, not part of the bathroom. I had never seen this before. Her daughter was called Aunt Olive. She was always described as the picture of rectitude.

Many years later, in 1949, I opened a copy of *Time*, and there was an article about Aunt Olive: she had been murdered by someone who came to be called Haigh the Vampire—dissolved in a vat of acid. I gained considerable credit with my ten-year-old stepson when I took him to Madame Tussaud's wax museum in London and could point out my family connection to one of the exhibits.

On one of our visits to London, my mother was interviewing candidates for a French governess. I was six at the time and extremely shy. I was called in to meet the favored candidate, and, wordlessly, I stood on my head. This is a skill I had acquired on my own, and I thought it best to show myself to my advantage.

A disgraceful episode dates from two years earlier. At that time English children, boys and girls, were dressed in what were called sailor suits, navy blue of course, and part of the outfit was a metal whistle on a white cord. It was Empire Day, when there was a great procession of various elements of the British army and navy with their bands. I marched along with my mother, following the parade, carried away by the marching music and the sight of a drummer with a big tiger skin bravely making resounding whacks on a huge drum.

The parade ended in a church, where there was a Thanksgiving service for the troops. As I have said, I was a shy child, so it was completely out of character when, intoxicated by the music, I lifted my whistle to my lips and let out a shrill blast. I was hurried out of church in disgrace and never allowed to wear my whistle again.

A few years later, I am ten years old and enrolled, to my dismay, in an English boarding school, Sherborne School for Girls. My mother had died two years before, and this had been her wish. I would come back to Philadelphia for the Christmas and summer holidays. Before these departures, the entire school, at chapel, sang the encouraging words "Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee, for those in peril of

the sea." I was the only transatlantic student; foreign students were still a great novelty.

~~It was time to return for the autumn term. I was booked with my governess, Mademoiselle, to sail on the family's favorite line, the Royal Mail, on the *Orduna*.~~

At the last moment Mademoiselle fell gravely ill, no question of traveling. But my father saw no reason to postpone my return to school. He took me to New York for a farewell dinner, at the old Waldorf. I had black-currant ice and was totally miserable. I kept my misery to myself.

My father knew the purser of the *Orduna* because of my mother's frequent transatlantic trips. I was taken to the boat, introduced to him, and, I felt, abandoned.

I discovered that my cabin had three bunks, which encouraged me. I slept in a different bunk each night. I had my place in the dining room at the purser's table. Each night I would put on my one pair of dress (silk), my white silk socks, and my patent-leather slippers and go down to the dining room. The others at the table were quite jolly, and soon I was enjoying my favorite dish at the time: cold smoked tongue. Since there was no one to curb me, I had tongue at every meal and felt this indeed was high living. After dinner, I would go up to the smoking room and gamble. The gambling consisted of choosing a wooden horse; a throw of the dice would indicate whether the horse could advance along a stretch of canvas marked with divisions or stay in place. I had spectacular luck. People came to see which horse I had chosen. I won my term's pocket money many times over.

It was something of a letdown when my grandmother met me at Plymouth and hurried me away to Sherborne.

A welcome illness ended my English boarding school days and brought me back to Philadelphia and my bed.

This was before the days of streptomycin and antibiotics. For TB patients it was bed rest and practically force-feeding.

When finally I was fully vertical again, it was Sarah Lawrence for three happy years. I had the great good fortune of having Professor Jacques Barzun for my don. Many years later we were both speaking on a program for Glimmerglass Opera, in Cooperstown, New York. As I said to Jacques (by then, he was Jacques to me): I had never expected to share any platform with him, not even a subway platform.

Even later, I was lecturing at the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio, Texas, on Diaghilev. And who was sitting in the front row but Jacques Barzun? His first wife had died, he had remarried, and his second wife came from that part of the country.

After the lecture he and his wife took me out for some memorable margaritas.

Some Musicians I Have Known

I was brought up in a bath of music. My father was a lawyer by profession, but music was what counted for him. His enormous collection of records, lovingly cataloged and constantly expanded, filled my young ears with everything from late Beethoven quartets and German lieder to Stravinsky and de Falla. He used to play the themes from Wagner's operas on the piano before taking me to performance.

As my father was head of the Board of Directors of the Philadelphia Orchestra, I got to go to concerts, even rehearsals, at an early age.

There were archaic blue laws in Philadelphia, which meant that on Sunday everything was closed tight, no cinemas, no restaurants, nothing to do. So, visiting conductors and soloists were delighted to be asked to our house for a Sunday lunch. We had a pretty eighteenth-century house just outside of Philadelphia, with fireplaces in almost every room and a big garden, so it was a welcome change from hotels.

Note: it may be just as well they only came for one meal. The English cook, impractically imported by my father, had shot her bolt with the Sunday roast and Yorkshire pudding. Weekdays, my father away at his office, we alternated for dessert between anemic stewed pears and discouraging stewed prunes.

There was no feminine hand at the helm, so I presided as hostess long before my teens, to a fascinating array of guests.

I was most impressed by Otto Klemperer, not only because he was enormously tall, way over six feet, but also because of the jocular way he threw butterballs at his wife at table.

It seems he became more and more eccentric. I learned from his biographer that while being honored in Australia at an endless dinner followed by dancing, he was excruciatingly bored. Dutifully he danced with his hostess, but desperate, he suddenly grabbed her and gave her an enormous kiss. "Dr. Klemperer, you really cannot do that *here*," gasped his astonished partner. "Then VERE?" he bellowed.

But his *Fidelio*, his Mahler, were unforgettable.

As a young Debussy fan, I was thrilled to meet Walter Gieseking, the incomparable interpreter of that composer. I remember going with him into our rose garden and choosing a particularly pretty bush for his buttonhole.

Nathan Milstein made his American debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra playing an old favorite of his, the Glazunov Concerto. I went with my father wearing my best party dress. The seductive, full-blooded Russian tone really moved me. Milstein was one of the last pupils of the great Hungarian violin teacher Leopold Auer, I learned later.

Sergei Rachmaninoff was the soloist with the orchestra, playing his Fourth Piano Concerto. Not even rapturous applause melted his icy demeanor.

When he came to our house, he could not be persuaded to take off his fur-lined coat.

Another guest conductor was Issay Dobrowen. He was the regular conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic at the time.

The day he came to us, there had been a heavy snowfall, and we were able to hire a sled drawn by two horses, with tinkling bells, to drive us, cozy under fur rugs, through a car-less Fairmount Park. I remember the ecstatic look on his face.

During the ride Dobrowen revealed an unexpected fact: he had played Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata for Lenin, whose favorite piece of music it was.

The pianist José Iturbi, who always crossed himself backstage before going on, was another guest soloist. He was a handsome, stocky Spaniard with an eye for the ladies. He appeared in several pictures in Hollywood, playing himself.

After a Sunday lunch at our house in Philadelphia (I was a college student by then), he offered to drive me back to New York. During the journey, it became clear that he counted on the drive being prolonged by dinner and something more.

I hopped out nimbly at my destination.

Eugene Ormandy was a Hungarian whose real name was Jenő Blau. He took his stage name from the ship on which he had traveled to America: the *Normandy*.

He was a violinist and first earned his keep playing in the orchestra of the Capitol Theatre in New York, which accompanied silent movies.

Ormandy followed Leopold Stokowski as conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra and remained there for forty-two years.

Those were the days before air-conditioning, and we had a screened-in sleeping porch. One summer when we were away, my father lent it to Ormandy, who was conducting the summer season, to escape the stifling Philadelphia heat. But he soon gave it up and moved indoors. He had absolute pitch, and he complained that "those damn birds all sing out of tune."

He was not given to understatement. When he returned from conducting the orchestra on tour, my father would ask him, "How did it go, Gene?"

And Gene invariably answered, "I was a zensation!"

The Philadelphia Orchestra was my extended family. Its members saw me grow up. Every Christmas, the old timpanist, Papa Schwar, as we called him, gave me liquor-filled chocolates from his native Germany.

The greatest oboe player of them all, still a legend, was Marcel Tabuteau. His phrasing was so perfect, so musical, that it influenced all the other chairs. He was a jolly French bon vivant and a superb cook. He asked us back to his apartment for supper after a concert one night and made us kidneys flambé in a chafing dish that have never been equaled, even in Paris. Every summer he would go to Monte Carlo and lose all his money, and my father would wire him the funds for his fare home.

He called his wife Chocolat, and she called him Penguin.

I had been studying the harp for several years and graduated to study with the number-one harp teacher in America, a Frenchman from the Basque Country, Carlos Salzedo—a compatriot of Ravel's. He divided his time between the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia and Juilliard in New York, where he had a few private pupils. I used to come to New York from Sarah Lawrence once a week for my lessons and joined his summer colony at Camden, Maine. He was a short, Napoleonic figure—the old-fashioned music teacher who ruled over us tyrannically. We addressed him as "Maître" and stood up when he came into the room.

My theory was that he married the best pupil and the next best became his mistress. Every now and then there were improvements, so everyone moved up a notch. I was at the bottom rung of the ladder. Many of the other pupils already had jobs in symphony orchestras.

An exception to this pecking order was his most eminent pupil, Edna Phillips. When she was still in her twenties, Stokowski invited her to join the Philadelphia Orchestra as First Harpist. She was the first woman to join an American symphony orchestra. Later she became my stepmother.

We Salzedo pupils were mostly lodged in boardinghouses along Mountain Street, in Camden, and if you walked up Mountain Street, you would probably eventually hear a whole composition—Ravel's Introduction and Allegro, for instance, because Salzedo had us all practicing parts of the same piece.

Salzedo was fascinated by new technology. Radios in cars were the hot new thing. The best radio reception in Camden was at the cemetery, at night. Salzedo would drive up to our boardinghouse windows in his big old-fashioned car and honk to bring us down. We would scurry down, coats over our nightgowns, and pile in to be driven to the cemetery to listen to some uninspiring work he would not have dreamed of listening to under normal circumstances—the Grieg concerto, for instance.

He was a close friend of the composer Edgard Varèse and named his little rowboat *Arcane* after a Varèse composition. I got an allée in his garden named after me. Of more consequence, Salzedo was an early and very active member of the League of Composers, championing new music. In a recent concert of Elliott Carter's music, one composition, for harp and quartet, was dedicated to Salzedo, and there was a warm note about Salzedo in the program.

Salzedo, a quintessential European, did his best to fit in as a Maine summer householder. He joined the local organization of the Lions Club, which met weekly. Proceedings were started by all the members giving their best efforts at a roar, and Salzedo roared away with the best of them.

In my mind's eye, I can still see Salzedo on his hands and knees on his driveway, a woman's comb holding back a lock of very black (dyed?) hair, wielding a pair of manicure scissors as he minutely adjusted the curve of the drive.

Stokowski

I cannot remember a time when I didn't know Leopold Stokowski.

I hardly distinguished myself, however, at my first children's concert. Stokowski, avuncular, asked to have me brought backstage afterward. "And what did you like most about the concert?" he asked me. "My new shoes," I replied.

I played the piano indifferently and at fifteen had taken up the harp, for which I seemed to have a certain facility. Stokowski, who had a genius for publicity, invented a series called Youth Concerts—no one younger than thirteen or older than twenty-one was admitted. As a stunt, he had a few instrumentalists within those age limits sit in with the orchestra for the first concert. At the last moment someone thought of the harp—where was there a harpist of the required age? The Curtis Institute was telephoned—the harpists were all too old. Finally, they thought of the Philadelphia Conservatory and found the only person who qualified for the age limits—me!

So the night before the concert, never having played in an orchestra—or even a duet—I was sent for, handed copies of the harp parts, and told to show up the next evening.

Luckily, the pieces to be performed were all in the familiar orchestral repertoire—*Scheherazade*, *The Firebird*, *La Grande Pâque Russe*, and so on—and we had recordings of them all. I listened to them carefully, marking the score where the harp could really be heard. My technique was not sufficient to play out all the notes, so I learned the passages where the harp sounded clearly and simply placed my fingers on the correct strings in the other sections, where the harp would be drowned out by the orchestra.

Stokowski had his own way of seating the orchestra—first violins on the left, second violins on the right, then the cellos. He placed the harps in front of the cellos, in full profile to the audience, horribly exposed for the novice. Fortunately, I had friends in the cello section next to me, and they would prompt me: "Four, three, two, one, here you go ..."

I apparently didn't make too many gaffes, because none of the other young instrumentalists got asked back while I played in six more concerts, even in Stokowski's orchestration of "The Internationale" that had a grateful harp part.

Through Stokowski's keen interest in new music I got an early immersion in works far from the standard symphonic or operatic repertoire of the time. I heard Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, Prokofiev's *Pas d'Acier*, to name a few.

Stokowski conducted the first performance in America of Ravel's *Boléro*. Afterward, a dear old lady came backstage to enthuse, "Oh, Mr. Stokowski, I so enjoyed your *Bordello*."

He was alive to the technical possibilities of his times. When others scoffed at radio as a venue for classical music, he was working with engineers, twiddling the dials himself, to produce a richer, truer sound.

Stokowski was a fixture in my pantheon. He was the height of glamour, not only to me, but to most of female Philadelphia. He was a skillful showman with a great sense of theater. Careful lighting emphasized his blond mane and his expressive fingers (he was the first conductor, I believe, who gave up the baton).

He had a seductive, caressing accent, entirely self-invented. He was born in London.

And his personal life was delightfully thrilling. How could you get better copy than by going off to India with Greta Garbo? And marrying the young and ravishing Gloria Vanderbilt kept up the

excitement.

However, Stoki (as we called him) took quite a shine to me. Occasional presents would show up, especially made for me: a silver bracelet and ring with my monogram he designed, a set of luggage with my monogram. Pretty heady for a teenager.

One evening when my father was taking me to hear *Rosenkavalier* for the first time, Stoki asked me to come around to his apartment before the performance. My father drove me to the apartment but stayed in the car. "If you're not down in ten minutes, I'll be up to get you," he warned. Stoki was a notorious lothario. My father needn't have worried. Stoki was waiting at his door and gallantly handed me a beautiful rose to hold during the performance.

One can only admire Stokowski's curiosity. He enlisted Carlos Chávez as his guide to hunt for authentic indigenous music in Mexican villages.

To thank him and, to quote him, "as an expression of his admiration for Mexican culture," Stokowski waived his fee for a performance with the Philadelphia Orchestra of Chávez's ballet called *HP*, with décor and costumes by Diego Rivera.

I must have been about fifteen at the time, but I still remember it well. The dancers were transformed into fruits and vegetables, and at the climax they all disappeared into a giant refrigerator.

One can only admire Stoki's zest for the unexpected. He had accepted to conduct a benefit concert in the Mexican town of Morelia. (I was living in Mexico by that time.) The orchestra was barely above the amateur level, but that didn't faze him. The crux of the evening was to be a performance of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, with real guns blazing away at the finale.

Stoki arrived to find that one of the strikes endemic to Mexico had cut off the town's electricity. He was always extremely conscious of his appearance: catastrophe! He only used an electric razor and was not going to try anything else. He stormed. No electric razor, no concert.

The organizers were appalled. The concert was sold out. Total impasse.

I had somehow struck up a conversation in the hotel bar with some engineers overseeing the building of a new highway. I told them about the problem. After a few tequilas they gallantly offered to help me out—and they did. They installed a portable generator outside the hotel, and it was turned on just long enough to produce the current to feed Stoki's razor.

The concert was a wild success, with the roar of the guns eliciting great whoops of appreciation.

At ninety-five, Stokowski signed a five-year contract with Columbia Records. But unfortunately, he died that year, when he was about to record Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony.

His legacy lasted a long time: the glorious, rich, unique sound of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Postscript:

This was written before the sad news of the Philadelphia Orchestra's financial difficulties.

In the 1940s, Arnold Schoenberg's music was still considered impossibly difficult to play and/or to listen to.

Stokowski had heard a private performance of the Piano Concerto (op. 42) and, never daunted, decided to program it for one of the NBC Symphony radio broadcasts that he conducted. Although the performance—on January 6, 1944—went off without incident, it created such a furor that NBC didn't renew Stokowski's contract.

Recently, on January 26, 2010, I heard Daniel Barenboim play Schoenberg's concerto at Carnegie Hall with the Vienna Philharmonic to rapturous, almost frenetic applause.

Now we come to the two glowing strands that illuminated my life for half a century. They were inextricably woven into each other's lives too: Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein.

Aaron Copland

I met Aaron Copland during the summer holidays after my sophomore year at Sarah Lawrence. I had gone to Mexico with a few friends. The conductor of the Sinfónica de México, Carlos Chávez, was one of the musicians who had come to our house several times while he was guest conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra. My father wrote to him that I was arriving in Mexico, and I found a note from him at my hotel, inviting me to come to a rehearsal.

Typically for the times, a strike had closed the usual concert hall, the pompous Bellas Artes, a wedding cake of a building with the famous Tiffany glass curtain, so the rehearsal was taking place in a disaffected church.

I arrived to a wave of jazzy syncopations; Chávez was rehearsing Aaron Copland's early 1926 Piano Concerto, with the composer himself at the piano, a rangy figure with a splendid beak of a nose. He was grinning with delight as he bounced up and down on the piano stool.

The Indian musicians responded instinctively to his made-in-America rhythms. Chávez was obviously completely at home with Copland's idiom.

During a break in the rehearsal, Chávez introduced me. It was love at first sight, at least on my part. I always thought Aaron looked more like a scientist than a musician. He was tall, gangling, engagingly toothy. He gazed out at the world with blue-gray eyes, through clear-rimmed glasses, with an expression of benevolent curiosity.

This turned out to be an epic occasion for me. The only other people sitting in on the rehearsal were Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. We were introduced, we chatted, and to my delighted surprise they invited me to go with them in their box that evening to the concert.

After the concert we all went out to supper with Chávez. I sat next to Aaron. He told me he was living in a small house in a provincial town called Tlaxcala, about a four-hour drive from Mexico City. This was 1936, and Aaron was very hard up. "I've rented a piano; it's very quiet there. The electricity goes off now and then, but you get used to candles." Later in the conversation he said, "Only trouble is, there is no marmalade there, and I miss marmalade with my breakfast."

So the next day I enlisted an obliging boyfriend to drive me to Tlaxcala with a whole carton of marmalade. "The girl's crazy!" Aaron said, with a characteristic giggle.

Aaron was working on an opera for high school kids called *The Second Hurricane*. The manuscript sheets were on the battered upright piano, and he sat down and played it through for me, singing all the parts in that way composers with no singing voice manage to do.

I particularly loved a haunting melody called "Gyp's Song." The words were by Edwin Denby, the poet and superlative dance critic who wrote for the old *Herald Tribune*.

After that it was back to Sarah Lawrence for me, and back to his fourth-floor walk-up loft for Aaron. He was a pioneer loft dweller. It was in what was then a seedy part of town, now transformed by Lincoln Center. It was cheap and practical because there were no residents in the floors below to complain about noise, only workshops of one kind or another.

It was strictly utilitarian—no attempt at softening the bleak space with memorabilia of any kind. Aaron's taste was always austere. He never even noticed the accumulation of dust, but finally he couldn't stand it any longer, and I spent a whole week's pocket money to get it cleaned up.

Even later, when Aaron had money and a good-sized house up the Hudson (now brought back to life as Copland House), his surroundings were modest and sparsely furnished. Only music and books.

mattered to him. He cared little about food—he never learned to cook, and he practically never took an alcoholic drink. His clothes were nondescript—neat but anonymous.

Leonard Bernstein once said to me about his beloved Aaron: “Plain, plain, plain! Can you imagine Aaron wearing a ring or jeweled cuff links?”

Our friendship blossomed. Aaron would take the train to Bronxville to visit me at Sarah Lawrence, and he would come into New York whenever a work of his was performed. I was always Aaron’s “date,” and I would carefully collect programs after the concert for his archives.

Through Aaron, I met a number of young composers: Marc Blitzstein, David Diamond, Israel Citkowitz, Arthur Berger, and Paul Bowles (this was before Paul became known as a writer) and his wife, Jane. And Clifford Odets, Harold Clurman and the Group Theatre people, John Houseman.

Aaron took me to my first New York glamorous evening party, given by the Kirk Askews. Kirk was a fashionable art dealer; Constance was a well-known hostess and an occasional patron of Aaron’s.

There I met such people as Salvador Dalí and his formidable wife, Gala; Pavel Tchelitchew, who painted Mrs. Askew’s portrait with her mink coat as background; and Alice B. Toklas and other celebrities of the time.

Aaron himself cared absolutely nothing about “society” or “celebrities”—his friends were usually young musicians, writers, and artists.

In the months after I returned from Mexico, the obliging young man who had driven me to Tlaxcala was pressing me to marry him. I finally agreed. Aaron wrote to a friend, “My girl has gotten herself engaged—the only girl I could have married.” Then he added (I can almost hear the giggle), “This will confuse the biographers.”

Lewis A. Riley Jr. and I were married in my family’s rose garden in Philadelphia. Aaron came bringing a wonderful present. He had written out all the words to my favorite song from *The Second Hurricane* and orchestrated it; it was inscribed:

all written out for Peggy and Lew’s wedding
for sole performance on Peggy’s Harp and Lew’s Guitar
from their composer friend Copland.

My handsome new husband was a young American who lived in Mexico. He had properties there and had an interest in the polyglot firm (Mexican, German, American) that was developing Acapulco—and eventually ruining the idyllic coastline. He was completely at home in Mexico, spoke perfect Spanish, and even played the guitar.

A new friend from Mexico, the caricaturist and ethnologist Miguel Covarrubias, came up to be my man.

A string ensemble from the Philadelphia Orchestra played a favorite of mine: Mozart’s *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*.

I always kept in touch with Aaron, and in the summer of 1941 he invited me for the weekend at his rented house at Tanglewood, where he was teaching. This was unusual, because Copland, though affable, did not like to have guests under his roof. In fact, he would say darkly “There are guests in the house” the way someone else might say “There are mice in the house.” And I was a female. A first.

When I came down for breakfast the first morning in a very discreet dressing gown, Aaron looked at me, somewhat bemused, and asked, “Is that what girls wear?”

He had invited some students to come by that afternoon. A young whirlwind with a shock of black hair and a strong nose burst through the door and settled down at the piano—it was Leonard Bernstein. He played and played and played, until, exhausted, he flung himself, perspiring freely, full length on the ground.

Lenny, having graduated from Harvard and studied piano at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, was one of the chosen few pupils studying conducting with the great Serge Koussevitzky at Tanglewood. He had met Aaron a few years before and adopted him as idol and loved mentor. As Aaron said to me in an aside, after introducing the prodigiously gifted young man, “We don’t have to worry about *that* one.” It was clear that he already was a star.

How right he was! “That one” in short order was conducting summer concerts. Then, in 1943, as the assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic, he rocketed to fame when, without a rehearsal, he took over the podium when Bruno Walter fell ill.

A close, even at times romantic friendship linked the two—Aaron the older by eighteen years—throughout and survived all the turbulence of Lenny’s personal life and professional career.

But Aaron the teacher was never blinded by the brilliance of his protégé. On being shown some of his early compositions by Lenny (all of his life, in spite of the conducting triumphs, Lenny longed to make his major mark as a composer), Aaron cautioned him, “Stop writing warmed-over Scriabin and write something that’s really your own.” And Lenny, not known for his reticence, didn’t hesitate on more than one occasion to write to Aaron that portions of a Copland score were “dull” and “needed reworking.”

That same weekend Aaron took me swimming to a nearby lake. Rather, I went swimming, and Aaron stood upright, fully dressed, on the shore, leaning against an overturned lifeboat, pages of musical manuscript in his hands. He was orchestrating a piano score—he always composed at the piano and orchestrated later. “Sometimes it’s very tedious. I prefer to do it while something else is going on,” he said.

I came back to New York from Paris, where I was working, as Aaron’s date to go to the gala concert celebrating the New York Philharmonic’s 125th anniversary (in 1967). It was an extraordinary event with some two hundred musicians—performers who had appeared with the Philharmonic and composers who had had their works performed by the orchestra—were seated alphabetically by rows.

There was a photograph in a subsequent program of me in a oneshoulder evening dress by Grès, and long white gloves, walking proudly down the aisle on Aaron’s arm.

By then, Lenny had become conductor and music director of the Philharmonic.

Although I had moved to Mexico, in 1940 I was in New York, where I suddenly fell ill and ended up in the hospital. It was my birthday, October 1, and Aaron came to visit with the most precious gift he could give me. He was always a voracious reader, and two of his favorites were the sixteenth-century French essayist Montaigne and André Gide. He brought me his own limited-edition copy of Gide’s essay on Montaigne, signed by Gide and inscribed to me by Aaron.

I was also in town for Aaron’s seventieth birthday, on November 14, 1970. He wrote me the following on receiving my note in which I tried to say something of what he had meant to me:

Dearest Peggy,

That was a beauty of a letter you sent me, such as only you could write. I loved it!

Can it possibly be more than thirty years since we first met? (Seems like yesterday.)

Anyhow, it warms me just to think of you and I love you dearly ...

Aaron

In the 1970s, Aaron gradually stopped composing; the muse was being elusive. But he threw himself into conducting with what I can only qualify as jubilation. He simply adored conducting, and he received engagements from all over the world (highly lucrative, incidentally). Technically, he was not the best of conductors, and players sometimes complained his beat was uncertain, but most orchestras did their best for him out of respect and affection.

The physical exertion kept him lean and supple, the new challenges were stimulating. But gradually the increasing loss of memory could no longer be ignored.

Lenny and I grieved to see our beloved Aaron's shining intellect dimmed by Alzheimer's. He didn't recognize most people, but he still recognized us. We wanted to be with him for his birthday, so Lenny and I drove up the Hudson to where Aaron had a house, and helpers. Incidentally, driving with Lenny sent one's pulse soaring.

Friends had organized a little event in the local movie house to celebrate the birthday, with performances of Copland's music. We collected Aaron and seated him between us. He sat quietly, showing no particular interest in the proceedings. But at the end, when there were exuberant bursts of applause, with the instincts of the old trouper, Aaron rose to his feet and acknowledged the ovation.

A combination of circumstances in the previous years had brought Aaron and me together in a number of places. Something inaugurated by the State Department called the Good Neighbor Policy sent Aaron to several Latin American countries as a musical ambassador.

Aaron was the perfect choice to represent American musical life: he was tactful, he spoke adequate Spanish, he had unquenchable curiosity about the local composers, and he promoted American composers as a whole, not just presenting his own work.

Our routes sometimes coincided. In Havana we used to go to an enormous popular dance hall, just to listen. Two orchestras played at opposite ends of the room. We sat somewhere in the middle, and Aaron could listen to both orchestras at once. He particularly liked the *danzón* with the bright flute line riding above the violin, trumpet, and piano, and he enjoyed the endlessly inventive rhythmic patterns.

Eventually, *Danzón Cubano* was the result of these evenings. Incidentally, Aaron was never known to dance.

The next month I was back in Mexico, and Aaron was in California writing for the movies. He wrote to me on Thanksgiving Day:

Darling Peggley:

Victor [Aaron's companion at that time] seems to be having difficulties getting this letter started so here I am to the rescue. If I didn't know you were in Mexico I could read it on his face. He keeps urging me to write a symphony in Chapala, so if there weren't a war on that would be the thing to do. Write a symphony with you as inspiration. As it is, life runs along very quietly at Oakland and now I'm more sorry than ever that you never did get up here to see how very nice it is ... Well, anyway, the thing for you to do is to rest up, and come back soon, and continue to be an inspiration to everybody as usual.

Love, A.

Aaron often came to Mexico. He had a particular affinity for Mexico, its people, its landscape, and ~~he had a collegial friendship with the Mexican composer and conductor Carlos Chávez.~~ Chávez performed Copland's music regularly with his Sinfónica de México. Copland dedicated several works to Chávez.

In Mexico, Aaron and I used to go to a sprawling lower-class dance hall called El Salón México. There were three separate spaces, each with a different admission fee. The very cheapest had a sign requesting patrons not to throw their lit cigarettes on the floor because they would burn the ladies' feet. The ladies in question were of course barefoot. Aaron's popular *El Salón México* came out on these evenings.

The gifted photographer Irving Penn took my favorite photograph of Aaron for me, sitting at the piano, in profile, the curve of the sheet music propped on the piano echoed by that beak of a nose. I was pleased that in a recent profile about Aaron (it was his centenary) in *The New Yorker*, "my" photo was used full page.

Leonard Bernstein

After meeting Leonard Bernstein at Aaron Copland's house in Tanglewood, I was to be based in Europe for the next twenty-and-some years (1948–70), mostly in Paris. He had gone on to glory.

Our paths crossed on many occasions, Lenny usually accompanied by his sister, Shirley. He conducted in Paris in 1948, starting modestly with the Radio Orchestra and rapidly building engagements with the top French orchestras. At first he was dismayed by the undisciplined orchestral musicians, who did not always come to rehearsals but would send substitutes. (Jerome Robbins had the same problem when he started to work with the ballet company of the Paris Opéra.) But by sheer force of personality, and his dazzling talents as conductor and pianist, he soon had them playing their hearts out for him.

The doyenne of Paris society, the aged and very musical Baronne Edouard de Rothschild, gave a supper party in his honor, after one of the concerts. Her invitations were prized. Guests arrived, more unusual in Paris, on the nose.

That evening Lenny had a particularly frenzied triumph. Shirley was not there to ride herd. In his dressing room backstage, admirers of various sexes were pressing one more scotch on him, gratefully received. In my role as sheepdog, I did my best to extract him; it was slow going. Finally, embarrassingly late, we arrived at the grand town house. I will never forget the tones of the butler as he announced in a stentorian voice, “La Baronne Edouard ATTEND.”

Of course the usual Bernstein charm righted the situation after a few Bernstein kisses.

Lenny and I were both friends of the French composer Francis Poulenc's. On an unforgettable occasion, Poulenc invited us to a dress rehearsal at the Opéra Comique of his latest work, a spirited musical setting, full of fun, of a farce by the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*.

Poulenc, Lenny, and I sat huddled in the darkened house—it was freezing cold, as there was still very little heating in postwar Paris—while the ravishing Denise Duval, in transparent veiling—how she avoided pneumonia is a mystery—sang from a Folies Bergère-type runway that she was not going to be a housewife anymore. She was going to lead a man's life.

We both loved Poulenc's lilting music, and Lenny was to conduct *Les Mamelles* later in New York. David Hockney designed the engagingly witty sets.

That same year, Lenny was conducting in Holland, and I was in Holland writing some features for *Vogue*. Lenny and his sister were staying at a nearby beach resort, Scheveningen. I was at a hotel in The Hague. I went out to join the Bernsteins for lunch.

It was a glorious day, one of those days when the Dutch light lived up to all those maritime landscapes. “Let's go riding” was Lenny's sudden inspiration.

I had arrived in a town outfit; this was long before the ubiquitous blue jeans. “I'll fix you up,” Shirley offered. We went to her room, and I got into a pair of her slacks and one of Lenny's shirts, and we were off.

Our rented horses responded to the great stretch of open beach and Lenny's urging and galloped *presto con fuoco*. Lenny started shouting poetry into the wind, Auden mostly. “Don't you know any poetry?” he shouted to me. I was too out of breath from holding my plunging horse to respond.

A few days later we went to Amsterdam for a concert, at the Concertgebouw, conducted by Herbert von Karajan. “You know I'm a better conductor than von Karajan,” Lenny whispered all too audibly.

By now it is 1950. I was living and working in Paris, and Lenny and Shirley were in town. Lenny

had come to conduct the Radio Orchestra. It so happened he had a gap in his schedule and I had accumulated a month's vacation time. We were having dinner in one of those little upstairs rooms at Lapérouse and had finished off a diaphanous soufflé. "Let's go somewhere, anywhere, you choose," said Lenny. "All right, let's make it Spain" was my contribution.

So we went. Those were still the Franco days, and Spain was very puritanical. They were dismayed at the Ritz in Barcelona that Lenny and Shirley wanted to sleep in the same room. They were also dismayed by the dachshund puppy the two had picked up en route that was far from housebroken.

Lenny was delighted by the *sardana* that was danced in the public square in front of the cathedral on Sundays. It is the most democratic dance in the world. Anyone can join in. You just step into the circle and grab the hand of your neighbor. The women place their handbags and the cake for Sunday lunch in the middle of the circle, and everything is safe.

Lenny being Lenny, he had to be part of the action. He pulled me in, and being a *músico*, I immediately grasped the structure and when we should stop—the music had a way of suddenly stopping, leaving me with one foot in the air.

He liked best the little bars of the *barrio chino* with its flamenco singers and children dancing outside entranced by the music. There was an old man who sang as if his heart were broken, eyes closed, stretching out his hand. We went to hear him night after night while Shirley sensibly went to bed. We loved his lament for his love who had entered a convent, "She who was most loved had become a nun" ("La Hija de Don Juan Alba," it was called).

From Barcelona we went to Majorca, to a little fishing village a Spanish friend had recommended, Cala d'Or. We settled down happily to the swimming routine, but Lenny missed having a piano. The hotel management owned a little shack across the road we could use, and I managed to arrange for an old upright piano to be sent out to us from Palma, the capital.

So every day we went to what Lenny called "a mansion grand in a foreign land"—(courtesy Auden?). Lenny played everything from musical comedy to grand opera, with Shirley a worthy singing partner, both of them remembering every word of every lyric, including numbers by our friends Adolph Green and Betty Comden—such as "I Can Cook Too."

Both Bernsteins were confirmed hypochondriacs and traveled with a bulging satchel of potions and remedies. Inevitably, Shirley fell ill. A doctor from the nearest village was called in. He arrived in his little horse-drawn buggy. His name was Don Virgilio.

He examined Shirley. "What did he say?" Lenny asked me anxiously (at that point I was the only one who knew Spanish). "He says, 'Either she will get better, or she won't.'"

Some time later Lenny stepped on a bee, and his foot swelled alarmingly. Don Virgilio came back on the double. By this time, he was completely under the Bernstein charm and invited us all to his little house, where he gave us small glasses of sweet Málaga wine and danced and sang to a song called "Mi Jaca," with us providing a clapping accompaniment. Then we all danced.

Our month's holiday over, we headed for the airport, with a few tears. Lenny went on to Israel to conduct; I returned to my Paris office. He took off a heavy gold link bracelet I always wore and put it on.

It was not as usual then as now for men to wear jewelry. A conductor's wrist is very visible. The gold bracelet was the subject of comment. Later, when Lenny married Felicia, she sent the bracelet back to me. I still wear it.

I had not met Felicia Montealegre, the beautiful Chilean girl who had come to New York to study piano with Claudio Arrau. But Lenny talked to me about her often, and the pros and cons of marrying her. Twice he had been officially engaged, but twice he couldn't go through with it.

Felicia hung on resolutely, in spite of what must have been humiliating public rejections (nothing was kept under wraps with Lenny).

He wanted to be a good Jewish family man, but he had an unquenchable, as he called it, “dark” side.

Finally, they did marry in what was the best possible move for him but not all plain sailing for her. She became extremely fond of Felicia. She was charming and talented—both musically and as an actress. She gave him three splendid children. Lenny adored them. She made their apartment in the Dakota a center of lighthearted multilingual hospitality. I owe many happy evenings and stimulating encounters to her.

At one such evening, a fellow guest was the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko. He spoke no English or French but had picked up a bit of Spanish while in Cuba. He rather stuck to me as, aside from our Chilean hostess, no one else spoke Spanish. We left at the same time, and in the elevator he asked me, “What did you think of the dinner?” Somewhat surprised, I answered I thought it delicious. “But so short ...” I understood he meant so few courses. He continued as we exited, “When you come to my house, there will be *platos y platos y platos*”—“course after course after course.” I gathered Russian hospitality involved a steady succession of dishes.

Sadly, Felicia died far too soon, in 1978. I was deeply touched when Lenny and the children asked me to speak at her memorial.

On a happier note, Jamie, Lenny’s eldest daughter, had a baby boy. We were all in the Bernstein box to hear and watch Lenny conduct the Philharmonic. After the concert we rushed to the Dakota, where the baby was left in the care of their faithful Julia. Lenny, bursting with pride, pointed to the baby. “There goes the first Jewish president of the United States.”

Lenny was as generous as he was expansive. Soloists who performed with him have told me that no conductor could be more supportive. When I started my lecturing career at the Metropolitan Museum in 1971, he sent me, unsolicited, this little text to be used for my publicity: “Madame Bernier has the gift of instant communication to a degree I have rarely encountered, and in a field where it is not easy to be communicative without being glib. Indeed, her lectures are richly informed, full of fresh surprise, and delivered with elegance and simple charm.”

And the night after my lecturing debut at the Met, Lenny and Felicia gave me a large party. If it had not been for that, I think only a handful of people might have come to the auditorium. I had been away from New York for twenty years and so was an almost unknown quantity.

Lenny immediately took to my husband, John Russell, when he arrived from England. Typically, he wrote an eloquent paragraph for John’s book *The Meanings of Modern Art*. When John Russell and I were married, on May 24, 1975, Lenny was John’s witness; Aaron Copland gave me away; Philip Johnson gave the wedding. He had arranged a little concert following the ceremony in his new sculpture gallery. And who led me in on his arm? My new husband? Not at all—Lenny Bernstein.

Afterward, Lenny asked me, “Why didn’t you ask me to write a piece of music for your wedding?” “It never occurred to me; I wouldn’t have had the pretension,” I answered. A few days later a musical manuscript arrived from Lenny.

For the Russells, R. + J.

Meditations on a Wedding

With love from Lenny, May 1975

(Marked *Andante con tenerezza* [tenderness] followed by *dolce* ...)

So I own an unpublished Bernstein work.

~~Whenever something important happened in my life, I always wanted Lenny around, and he was~~
always there.

I was given a French decoration in 1980 (Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres). I was told that I could have a few guests but that the ceremony had to start on time. I told Lenny, "I'm inviting you but don't come if you are going to be late." He was notoriously late everywhere. When John and I arrived at the French consulate, there was Lenny, walking up and down in front of the entrance, cap flapping in the wind, pointing to his watch when he saw us to indicate he had arrived not only on time but ahead of us.

When John's book of essays *Reading Russell* was published some years ago, his publisher gave him a lunch in a private room at Le Cirque. Lenny was invited. We sat at the bar together before the tables were seated. "Do you remember 'La Hija de Don Juan Alba'?" he asked me. More than thirty years had passed since we had heard it in Barcelona, and he remembered every word, in Spanish, and conducted me for a duet in his cigarette rasp and my feeble contralto.

I was lecturing in Turkey for an American organization in 1990. John and I were cut off from the outside world for some time, so we did not get news of Lenny's alarming deteriorating health.

The day I got back to New York came the unbelievable headline: Leonard Bernstein was dead (October 14). A heartbreaking note was that I found a telegram from Lenny apologizing for being late with my birthday greetings—my birthday is October 1—and sending love. It must have been one of the last things he did.

We had a cloudless friendship. He inscribed one of his books to me with the affectionate nickname he had for me and added, "who has never given me anything but joy." I could say the same about him.

Early Mexican Moments

When I had met Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo at the Sinfónica rehearsal in Mexico City, they had invited me to go with them to the concert that night. I was to collect them at their house in a suburb called San Ángel.

The house to which I went later that day in high expectation was two houses in one.

There was a big blue cube for Diego and a rather smaller dark pink one for Frida, with a connecting bridge between them.

It was designed and built by a young architect and painter called Juan O’Gorman. It was remarkably daring for its date.

At that time, San Ángel was a countrified suburb in which sedate family houses stood in large leafy gardens. People who walked by the O’Gorman house must have said to themselves, “What on earth is it? Is it a factory? A ship that never went to sea? Why aren’t the stairs indoors, as they are everywhere else?”

But to me the house seemed like a wonderland, and not least for the flamboyant welcome that I got from my hostess.

Although I had done my best with my limited student’s wardrobe, Frida took a quick look at me and would have none of it. “Come on, kid, I’ll fix you up,” she said.

Next thing I knew, I had been transformed from an anonymous college girl to a transplant from Tehuantepec market. Multicolored swaying skirt, embroidered *huipil*, pre-Columbian necklaces galore, and her masterpiece: my hair became a bright tapestry of flowers and ribbons.

Frida laughed a great belly laugh of satisfaction at her work (she could laugh like a trombone player), tossed down one more little shot of tequila, and called Diego over to admire me, and off we went to sit in their usual box for the Chávez concert.

You couldn’t mistake Diego Rivera. He was well over six feet tall. He had been known to weigh more than three hundred pounds. And, as he himself admitted, he had a face like a gargantuan frog.

Frida, by contrast, stood five feet three and was delicately built. An attack of polio in childhood had left her with a withered right leg, and she was never to recover completely from a horrendous traffic accident in 1925 that had left her more dead than alive. Surgical and other painful treatments went on for most of her life.

But she did not strike me as an object of pity who shrank from being looked at too closely. On the contrary, she drew attention to herself by adopting the spectacular costume of the women of Tehuantepec, of which she had made me a pale reflection—full-length swaying skirts ruffled at the hem and the embroidered overblouse called a *huipil*. Usually a big shawl went along with it, a rebozo. I still own a deep blue rebozo Frida gave me, and I have worn it onstage at the Met. Sometimes, as can be seen in some of the self-portraits, she added a face-framing extravaganza of ruffles and pleats that was the traditional Tehuana headdress. And she usually wore her hair entwined in a thicket of flowers and ribbons improvised every time. This was often topped off by garlands of heavy pre-Columbian necklaces. She didn’t stint on the rings, either, on both hands.

She often painted her nails—orange, purple, green, whatever went best with the outfit of the day. Incidentally, Frida had never been to Tehuantepec; she just liked the becoming costume, it played to Diego’s *mexicanidad*, and it made her the most noticeable kid on the block.

I was to discover she had a great sense of mischief. No one was more fun to be around. H

vocabulary in both Spanish and English would have made a truck driver blush.

~~Rare was the man or woman who was not seduced by her, and seduction was her specialty.~~

After such a beginning, how could I not fail to fall in love with Mexico?

Some Animals I Have Known

After my marriage to Lew, my new life in Mexico began.

As a child, I didn't have any pets. No dog, no cat. I'm not counting two personable pink-eyed white mice that my Francophile father named Aglavaine and Selysette (these were characters out of a Maeterlinck play, I believe). The pet shop had guaranteed both were male, but one day Aglavaine or Selysette, I'm not sure which, produced sixteen offspring. That strained my schoolroom capacities. I think they were banished. (I had lessons at home tutored by a French governess.)

My first real pet came into my life in Acapulco in 1938. My young husband and I (we were respectively twenty-one and twenty-three) were staying in a small hotel in the town while our house was being built. This was long before the painful tourist boom that defaced a once-tranquil little port town.

There was a knock on the door. An Indian boy, holding something, said to me, "Buy this, señor, and I will kill it and give you its skin." It was a baby ocelot. I was horrified and without another thought said, "Don't kill it. I'll buy it."

So I found myself in a small hotel room with a little snarling, hissing creature. My husband was out at the time.

By the next day, the ocelot was following me around and arching its neck to be petted. Not a snarl. It turned out that I was an animal tamer.

When the house was finally built, there were also quarters for the various local animals that had accumulated. (There was a large garden.) It got around that there was an American señora who would buy animals, so as time went by, I ruled over a large menagerie.

The ocelot was a favorite, and I dignified it by calling it Tigre (Tiger). I used to brush it with Yardley's brilliantine. It had its box—it was meticulous—in the spare bathroom next to my bedroom. When the door was opened in the morning, it would come bounding out across the room and leap onto my bed to reach me, licking and purring. The purr was louder than a cat's. I found it very soothing when I had a migraine to use the ocelot as a pillow under my head.

Although I tried to compensate for what might be lacking in its diet (raw meat) with limewater, the ocelot developed what I took to be a form of rickets. Its back paws were painful when it jumped onto my lap.

There was no vet in Acapulco, so I took the ocelot to the one doctor in town who treated babies and presented my patient. The doctor was indignant. But I said to him, "Just treat him like a baby, weigh him, and give him the appropriate medication." So he did. A first: an ocelot on the baby scales.

I always took the favorite animal to Mexico City with me, where I had an apartment, although it was forbidden by the fledgling airline. I ignored this and rigged up a basket with a loose burlap covering the top for the ocelot. All went well until a sudden dip of the plane sent the ocelot springing through the burlap and out of its basket, to the terror of the other passengers. But in Mexico a discreet exchange of pesos arranges everything. I went right on transporting my favorites by air.

At one point I had left Tigre in the Mexico City apartment under the care of my Indian maid while I made a trip to New York. At that time, 1940, the Museum of Modern Art was organizing a vast Mexican exhibition: *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art*.

I had become very friendly with the brilliant and combustible Mexican painter José Clemente Orozco. While Diego Rivera was a master of self-publicity and the center of spectacular news of one kind or another, José Clemente, although equally talented, was often overlooked. In fact, he was

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