

San Francisco Film Society  
Oral History Project

**Interview with Irma Levin**  
**Conducted by Lee Amazonas**  
**Accompanied by Miguel Pendás and Fred Levin**  
**August 20 and 21 and September 3, 2005**

## **AUGUST 20 INTERVIEW**

### *TAPE 1 BEGINS*

LEE AMAZONAS: This is Lee Amazonas. The date is August 20th, 2005. I am interviewing Irma Levin in her apartment in San Francisco for the San Francisco International Film Festival Oral History Project. First, I just want to ask you a few questions about yourself. What's your place and date of birth?

IRMA LEVIN: I was born in San Francisco, October 29th, 1916. My father was an art dealer. My mother was a housewife.

LEE AMAZONAS: What was it like growing up in San Francisco?

IRMA LEVIN: Everyone should be that lucky.

LEE AMAZONAS: Was film-going a significant part of the daily routine, either for you or for your family?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, I think everyone went to the movies.

LEE AMAZONAS: I understand that you were a hat designer in Hollywood for a while. How did you make your way to Hollywood?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I graduated from an art school and decided I wanted to go to Hollywood. I was interviewed, and I got the position. I worked at Paramount Studios. It was very exciting. I was out of designing school, and it was really most unusual to be able to go down there and get a job. I designed hats. And the reason I chose hats was because all the big dress designers were very important, but there was no one doing hats. They bought hats. So instead of taking pictures, I took hats to show what I could do and how I could do them, and I was accepted.

LEE AMAZONAS: How long did you do that?

IRMA LEVIN: I did it for over a year, because then I got married and came home.

LEE AMAZONAS: And how did you meet Bud?

IRMA LEVIN: We went to school together.

LEE AMAZONAS: High school sweethearts?

IRMA LEVIN: High school, yeah. We weren't sweethearts then, but we did go to school together. And then our paths crossed and we were married, I guess, not even a year later.

LEE AMAZONAS: I read that it was the day after his 21st birthday, which must have been very close to your 21st birthday.

IRMA LEVIN: We're only nine days apart. But I'm wasn't 21.

LEE AMAZONAS: What was he like as a young man?

IRMA LEVIN: He was the same fabulous man that he always was. He was very intense in what he did. He loved the movies. That was his whole life. He wasn't a sportsman. Everything was movies.

LEE AMAZONAS: How familiar were you with his family and their business interests with the theaters?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, my father and his father were distant cousins. And so we were knowledgeable about it, but not really—what do I say—involved. But we all knew that his father had built theaters. And as a young man, in school, he was an usher. So we were always interested in theaters.

LEE AMAZONAS: Was Bud accustomed to traveling around the world as part of his work as an exhibitor?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, he was. You know, a little bit here and a little bit there. He loved to travel. That was his whole life.

LEE AMAZONAS: Even before the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, way before the Festival. When we were first married, we traveled.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Where did you go?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, on our honeymoon, we went to Mexico. Two years later, we went to Alaska. And then we went to Hawaii and Fiji and Samoa, and through the Canal to New York. This was all early on. We always traveled. He loved the world.

LEE AMAZONAS: I did read about the trip to Africa, where he took the entire family.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, yes. That was before the Festival, too.

LEE AMAZONAS: I read that Bud first explored the possibility of a San Francisco Film Festival in the late 1940s.

FRED LEVIN: Where did you read that?

LEE AMAZONAS: I had read this in a number of newspaper sources, and it may be that they are repeating a mistake that somebody made.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, not to my knowledge, and I was aware of everything. Not then. It was too early.

FRED LEVIN: Yeah. There was no international film coming out at that time.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, there's a fellow named Frank Stauffacher, who was working with the San Francisco Museum of Art, who was talking this up with some groups of individuals in San Francisco, late '40s, very early '50s. And it seemed to be that Bud's name is mentioned occasionally, but also other exhibitors, other people related to other museums in San Francisco.

IRMA LEVIN: Not to my knowledge.

FRED LEVIN: At that time, he would have been the manager of a theater. He wouldn't have been in the position. Nor would he have had the scope. Miguel, when did foreign films start to come into the United States?

MIGUEL PENDAS: Well, this program that they had at the MOMA was in the '40s, I think. And this man, Frank Stauffacher, was involved in that. And what we read was that he was trying to get people together to talk about an international film festival here, and that he invited in all of the people that were involved in exhibition.

FRED LEVIN: It's very possible. I wouldn't question that at all.

IRMA LEVIN: The name is very familiar.

FRED LEVIN: But there's no way that that would have turned into anything.

LEE AMAZONAS: Right. He died in 1955, before the Festival started. Now, I read that Italian Week in San Francisco in 1956 was originally intended to highlight Italian fashion and art. Do you know whose idea it was to include film?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, yes. Pierluigi Alvera. He was the Consul General from Italy to San Francisco. Heretofore, Paris was the place. He decided that he was going to make Italy as important. And he started with Fashion Week. I think I. Magnin joined in, and he decided he wanted a film to be shown. But there wasn't anyone that would listen to him. Somebody recommended Irving Levin, and Irving Levin was really interested. They started with a film that was at the Alexandria, I think.

FRED LEVIN: A week of Italian films at the Alexandria.

IRMA LEVIN: In Italian.

FRED LEVIN: And my father, being passionate about film, and truly feeling it was an art form long before it became a vogue to consider film an art form, was very interested in that project.

IRMA LEVIN: And during that period, it came to his mind that he would like to be competitive with France and Germany and the rest; that he wanted to go international. And so, he talked to Pierluigi Alvera, because he needed someone to help. During that time, Mr. Amanati, who was the head of Italian Film, was in San Francisco. He came to our home and my husband talked with him. He always said he remembered the Festival as being “the festival with the mustache.” And he was very helpful. It started from there.

FRED LEVIN: And through the Italian Consulate came the French Consulate and the German Consulate. And they all got together and created what was the first San Francisco International Film Festival.

IRMA LEVIN: But it took a very long time to get it sanctioned. And it was Paris that was so difficult, because they didn't want a festival in the United States—because of Hollywood—but he worked on them and he worked on them, and he got it.

MIGUEL PENDAS: To go back to the Italian thing, there were several films that we knew the titles of one time. I think **La Strada** was one.

IRMA LEVIN: No, I don't think **La Strada** was there. Now, maybe it was, but I don't remember, because later on, Fellini and Giulietta were very close and they also helped. But I don't think **La Strada** was one of those. I'll tell you who would know, maybe: Tony Cortesa, who was the man who interpreted the Italian. They were in Italian.

MIGUEL PENDAS: He had no subtitles.

IRMA LEVIN: No subtitles. Tony got up on the stage and interpreted. And he's alive.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Oh, I've got to talk to him.

FRED LEVIN: Miguel, you might contact the Italian Consulate. It was 1956. And they may have a record of the films that were shown.

LEE AMAZONAS: The only film I've seen listed in newspapers, that comes up over and over again, is **La Strada**. And the mention is that it received a Golden Gate Award.

FRED LEVIN: That would have been the Film Festival, not Italian Week.

LEE AMAZONAS: No, for the Italian Week.

FRED LEVIN: But there could have been, in a subsequent Festival, a focus on Italian film. I wouldn't remember that. But the Golden Gate Award—you know, this is our memory—was created for the International Film Festival. I suppose there could very well have been a Golden Gate Award given at the Italian Film Festival in '56, very possible.

LEE AMAZONAS: OK, because that was going to be my very next question, because I found it very tantalizing that in one publication, it did refer to these Golden Gate Awards being given to films in Italian Week, and I hadn't noticed that anywhere else, so that was my next question.

FRED LEVIN: You know, if the article was written in the moment, most likely it's correct. If you go back to the press on the Italian Week, I'm sure that you'll find it someplace.

MIGUEL PENDAS: We have seen an item that showed some titles, and that **La Strada** won a Golden Gate Award. And this is a newspaper item from 1956.

FRED LEVIN: They could have said, we'll give an award to the best, and then they used that same name when they went international. It's possible.

MIGUEL PENDAS: I never saw anything whether any filmmakers came from Italy? Do you remember if any people came from Italy?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't know that. That would also be in the Italian Consulate. They would know. I don't know that they went that far. He was more interested in clothes than he was in the films. And there was food. He did everything that would be Italian. He did exactly what he wanted to do. Everything was very successful, Italian-wise.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Did you get to know Pierluigi at all?

IRMA LEVIN: Very, very well. I think he was handsome. He was suave. He was one of a kind. He was so perfect in everything he did. He ran the house at the Consulate. He was a marvelous man, very bright, very cunning. Knew exactly who to call. He knew who the right people were. And when it came for the list of people to call, he would give you the list of who he considered. He was very, very sharp.

MIGUEL PENDAS: They remember him at the Consulate, even people that never met him.

IRMA LEVIN: I will tell you, everybody would remember Pier, absolutely. To me, he was one of the brightest, most important people I remember. We were very good friends. In fact, his children were here. He was a wonderful man.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And this is when you were living on Lake Street?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. And it was when they first got the Consulate on Broadway. We were there often. He was very helpful.

LEE AMAZONAS: Do you recall Bud's role in the French film series that happened in early '57? There was a series of French films.



MIGUEL PENDAS: I don't know whose idea it was, or who started it; it was probably the French Consulate trying to do a similar thing. What we saw was, they showed a few films, and some filmmakers did come. I guess some people started calling it the French Film Festival, but I don't know that it was officially called that.

FRED LEVIN: Do you remember where they showed the films, what theater they were in?

MIGUEL PENDAS: I'm almost positive it was one of Bud's theaters.

FRED LEVIN: But you don't know which one.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Bud was involved. Was it the Alexandria?

FRED LEVIN: If it had been the Vogue, it would have made sense. Because the Vogue, at that time, showed art films. And they would have had all foreign films, so that would have made sense, if it was there.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, now we're actually going to go to 1957, the first Festival. Did you go on the trip to Europe with Bud, to talk to distributors, to get those very first films for 1957?

FRED LEVIN: I don't think he went that first year.

IRMA LEVIN: He didn't, no. I don't think we went until he got the sanction, because it really wasn't recognized. You can't call it the first festival in the United States if it doesn't have a sanction. But I can't tell you when he got the sanction.

FRED LEVIN: And sanction being from the International Federation of Film Producers Association?

MIGUEL PENDAS: Yeah.

LEE AMAZONAS: It was in 1958 when it became official.

IRMA LEVIN: That's the year.

LEE AMAZONAS: So how did he get those films in 1957?

IRMA LEVIN: He knew about the films because he read everything. I think he had to go through whoever distributed them. And I think that's how he would start to try to get them. I don't know who the distributor was, but I think it was him.

FRED LEVIN: Were there awards the first year, Miguel?

MIGUEL PENDAS: Yes. There were four awards: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Actress. Best Picture was **Pather Panchali**. Best Director was Satyajit Ray. Best Actor was the man from **The Captain from Köpenick**.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, it was Topol. Wasn't Topol that year?

MIGUEL PENDAS: No, no. It was German. Was it Heinz Ruhmann? And then Best Actress was Dolores Dorn-Heft, who was the wife of Franchot Tone.

FRED LEVIN: I remember that year.

MIGUEL PENDAS: That was it. That was the first time.

IRMA LEVIN: I still say that there was a distributor here who would have foreign films. We didn't call them art films; we called them foreign films in those days. And I think that's how he was able to decide where they were and what they were. And then he would have to go from there.

FRED LEVIN: I would say that we could try to piece it together and make some additions, but we really don't have concrete knowledge and I just don't see it happening that way. They had to be premiere

films, so they wouldn't be going through a distributor at that point. It would have been before that level, so it would have either had to come from consulates or writing to the different film organizations in each country and having them submit applications.

IRMA LEVIN: Maybe you're right.

FRED LEVIN: But I think that it's just guessing on our part, I really do.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Well, one of the reasons that you become curious about it is because the films that were shown in the first Festival, it's amazing, the quality. It's almost like you just went and picked 12 of the best films in the world.

IRMA LEVIN: You're right. And the Russian films, and all those films, had the same quality. No one heard of them, you're right.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Well, yes, even the first year, and first films, like the one by Andrzej Wajda; **Kanal** was his first film. Now he's gotten an Oscar for lifetime achievement, but back then, no one knew who he was. The Opening Night film was a German film, **The Captain from Köpenick**. I've never seen it. And of course, people had heard of Satyajit Ray, because he had already been at Cannes and so on. What about Franchot Tone? What was the connection there?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, it was not from the United States, he was not in that film. The first film in the United States was because of Jerry Wald, the producer, because nobody would give a film from Hollywood, they wouldn't. They boycotted it. He had no help from even the theater owners in San Francisco. But that is such an interesting question, how he got these original films. I don't know. I do know that the consulates were a tremendous help.

FRED LEVIN: Miguel brings up a good point, though, because they were landmark, monumental films, so somebody had to know.

IRMA LEVIN: Do you think they were films that were shown in their country? You know, he could have found out that way. Maybe the German one won an award in Germany.

FRED LEVIN: Very well could have been.

MIGUEL PENDAS: But in addition to how did he get films, one of the things we're curious about is how these people ended up showing up.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, I could tell you that. He had to get visas. He himself had to stand for everybody coming in, and then the films had to go through Customs, and the consulate had to be involved, because it wasn't easy to get a visa to come into the United States. I remember we had sleepless nights over the Russians and the Russian films. Mexico, the head guy, it was that great big guy, he worked on the bridge, and I think he killed somebody. Do you know who I mean?

MIGUEL PENDAS: Emilio Fernández?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. And they wouldn't let him in. But he stood for every one of those people to get a visa. And if he didn't know the people at Customs, they wouldn't have come in. They were not allowed in. And the consulates were wonderful.

LEE AMAZONAS: Do you think that occasionally the consuls allowed some of these films to come through by diplomatic passage?

IRMA LEVIN: No, I don't think so, but maybe you're right. But we didn't have a Russian Consulate, so it couldn't come in.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Franchot Tone was in a movie that was showing, **Uncle Vanya**. He co-directed it.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. That's how he came.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And he was also MC the Opening Night. Now, did you have some friendship with Franchot Tone or something?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, he came to the house. You remember?

FRED LEVIN: He was invited, and I guess he wanted to promote his film, and felt that the San Francisco Film Festival warranted that kind of attention, and he came. That was in '57. So I was 13 years old, and I can see sitting at lunch, right across from him. And didn't the girlfriend have red hair? Wasn't she a big, tall redhead?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. And he said, when they asked him if he wanted a drink, he said, "I don't drink," and then he went in the kitchen and he said to Dad, "Could I have a vodka?" (LAUGHS) I never forgot it! He was very nice.

FRED LEVIN: But he was, you know, just sitting at the dining room table, eating lunch. I mean, it wasn't like it was any big deal. It was just family.

LEE AMAZONAS: I guess the question, though, is partly, how did that first connection even happen? And what you mentioned is that he may have approached Bud, and said, "Hey, can I show this film? There's no other American films in this Festival."

IRMA LEVIN: But it wasn't an American film.

LEE AMAZONAS: It was an independent. It wasn't a studio film.

MIGUEL PENDAS: It wasn't Hollywood. But I'm pretty sure it was American.

LEE AMAZONAS: It was filmed back east, I think. New York.

FRED LEVIN: I can tell you that once my father had the idea, or once the idea was solid—whether it was brought to him as a concept, or whether he created it—once it was there, my father was not bashful,

and he was an incredible publicist in his own right. And the film world would have known what was going to happen in San Francisco in enough time for anybody to say, "I want to be a part of this," that wanted to.

IRMA LEVIN: They submitted their own films. That's it, Fred. People submitted their films.

FRED LEVIN: But we're still talking about year one, and that's kind of difficult; you know, there's a lot of work that goes into it. You can't just say, "Here I am." But after the first year, then I think it got into a pattern.

LEE AMAZONAS: Did you play any role in deciding which films would be shown his first year?

IRMA LEVIN: Only as a wife. He would turn around and say, "Did you like it, or didn't you like it?" But he would never say, "Would you play it?"

LEE AMAZONAS: And you'd say that would be good for the entire time?

IRMA LEVIN: We'd talk about it. I can't take any credit. This was a man that did the Festival himself.

LEE AMAZONAS: 1957 had a film from Nigeria, called **Freedom**, and one from the Philippines, **The Last Warrior**, two countries that really don't produce very many films, and certainly weren't, I think, even on the radar of many of the major festivals. Do you have any recollection on how those became part of the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: I still say some people heard about it and knew that it was a different kind of a festival. And I think they could have asked, "How do you do that? I want my film in a festival," and they presented, or whatever.

MIGUEL PENDAS: The Nigerians were here, too. Do you remember meeting them?

IRMA LEVIN: Sure, I remember them. I wouldn't know them if they stood in front of me, but people came from India; most of those people sent stars in the early days.

MIGUEL PENDAS: That was always the goal.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right. I don't know their names, and I wouldn't know them if they stood in front of me, but they were here. The out-of-the-way films, the different countries, sent people.

LEE AMAZONAS: Do you know who paid for them to come here? Was it their countries, or did the Festival help pay their way?

IRMA LEVIN: They got here on their own. I think. When they got here, they were taken care of, because some hotels helped, and people. They didn't have to pay for their room and board when they got here.

FRED LEVIN: And, depending on the countries, what used to be the Iron Curtain countries, they came with half a suitcase.

IRMA LEVIN: And interpreters.

FRED LEVIN: They had nothing when they got here, so everything was taken care of. But for the most part, they came with the films.

IRMA LEVIN: They carried it, literally. Literally. After they got their visas, which had to come from here.

FRED LEVIN: They came on their own. They were sent by the government.

LEE AMAZONAS: I read that tickets were sold each day to benefit a different charity.

FRED LEVIN: Where did you read that?

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, that is actually in the newspapers of the time for the first couple of years. It seems to be '57, '58 and '59. After that, it doesn't seem to happen.

IRMA LEVIN: Does it tell you the name of the charity?

LEE AMAZONAS: It actually does. For instance, Planned Parenthood was one of them, which I found very surprising.

IRMA LEVIN: Somebody, I think, dreamt that.

FRED LEVIN: Well, not if it was in the paper. Was it in the programs?

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, the first year, there is no program. I'm trying to think if it's in the second, I think they even are listed, at least by '59.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, if they're listed, then they did it. But I have no recollection.

FRED LEVIN: Absolutely no recollection whatsoever.

LEE AMAZONAS: But of course the programs don't go into detail. They may just be listed as a sponsor, as opposed to, for instance, I remember there was a beer bash at the Old Spaghetti Factory, sponsored by Planned Parenthood, for a particular film. And every night, there's a different event.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, they even closed off the street.

FRED LEVIN: There were events after every single performance.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, big events. They closed off the block where the Metro is.

FRED LEVIN: But it wasn't there in the beginning; it was at the Alexandria.



IRMA LEVIN: Oh, yes, but this was still part of the Festival.

MIGUEL PENDAS: The first Festival was at the Metro.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right, the Metro. The Alexandria had the Italian.

LEE AMAZONAS: It seems that blocks of tickets, at least from what I've read, were sold, I guess, from the Festival to these individual groups. It could be charity.

FRED LEVIN: OK, because this was such a kind of, by today's standards, zero-budget organization that the idea of whatever revenue was coming in, to be given to another charity, just doesn't ring as possible.

IRMA LEVIN: (LAUGHS) No, they needed it to eat!

FRED LEVIN: I mean, even though my father was running the theater as a business, there were partners, so somebody had to pay for something. So, you know, they could have even donated blocks of tickets, because in the first few years, it wasn't like they were sold every single night. So that's possible.

LEE AMAZONAS: I noticed that the members of that first jury were all the local entertainment writers for the local newspapers, including Paine Knickerbocker and Teresa Cone and a number of others; there were five of them. Now, all of them also wrote publicity material about the Festival for their papers, and reviews for the films that showed. Do you recall any criticism about that at the time?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't think so. Everybody was very kind, very excited. We were going to compete with Europe. I don't think anybody complained, I really don't.

FRED LEVIN: From doing your research, do you have the feeling that the first year was this huge event in either the city or the country or the world? Do you have a sense of it being important in any way?

LEE AMAZONAS: Certainly important in San Francisco, even though the city wasn't giving any money. We'll get into that a little later. There were articles in all the papers, and at that time, there were quite a few newspapers in the San Francisco area. And every single one of them had articles, and some of them earlier in the year, not just around the time of the Festival, so perhaps not as big as maybe the Giants coming but something that seemed important, at least on that level. I didn't see articles yet from the **New York Times**. **Variety**, there was one or two little mentions, not much.

FRED LEVIN: And I think that by the second year, they got international judges.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Well, the complaint would be that someone who is working for the Festival, promoting the Festival—

FRED LEVIN: Oh, I understand what the complaint would be; I don't understand who would be doing the complaining.

MIGUEL PENDAS: There was no press during that time.

FRED LEVIN: Yeah, nobody really cared.

LEE AMAZONAS: And also, I noticed it didn't stop these reviewers from saying if they didn't like a film. Now, a number of directors were sent by the Screen Director's Guild that year. But there seems to be some question as to who was actually there. Two who definitely did make it were Frank Borzage and George Waggner. Did you or Bud know either Borzage or Waggner?

IRMA LEVIN: I did.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Did Borzage have any San Francisco connection?

IRMA LEVIN: A lot of them came for curiosity, too. You know that.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, I know that the Screen Director's Guild actually sent a telegram congratulating the city of San Francisco on this Festival, and listed a number of directors to thank, who were going to be present. And of that list, those were the only two names of people I could say, "Yes, they were here, because they were quoted from the stage." And some others may have come. So at least to the Director's Guild, they saw this as a possibility, even in its first year. Now, Tay Garnett was also one of those directors, and he famously—famously meaning it was in all the newspapers—made three aborted attempts to get on a plane to get here from Los Angeles. Do you know if he ever made it?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't know.

LEE AMAZONAS: Now, other directors who were expected were George Stevens—

IRMA LEVIN: Well, George Stevens was very much against the Festival.

LEE AMAZONAS: I know he came later. I didn't know if he came the first year.

FRED LEVIN: He came later.

LEE AMAZONAS: And then King Vidor and H.C. Potter, those were directors who were listed in this telegram as going to be there.

IRMA LEVIN: I don't recall.

LEE AMAZONAS: Who came to the screenings at the Festival? What was the audience like?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, the first night was people who had given in-kind. And then there were a lot of people that Pierluigi Alvera said you should ask. And then there were some friends. And who else, Fred?

FRED LEVIN: You're talking about the first night?

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah. You couldn't buy tickets for the first night. It was all a thank-you for all the people who did anything for the Festival, and the consuls, and I guess the mayor came, and that's all. But it was all invitation.

LEE AMAZONAS: Then after that, what was the audience like? Was it more like the art cinema audiences, say, at the Vogue?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, it was. But remember, there weren't as many people interested in films as there are today.

FRED LEVIN: But those people who bought tickets and walked to the door were the people who were interested in foreign films.

LEE AMAZONAS: My next question you answered before we started the tape, so I'm going to ask you again. Did the staff from the theater business become the Festival staff?

IRMA LEVIN: His staff from his theaters did, yes.

LEE AMAZONAS: Did he have committees that helped him with different aspects of the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes.

LEE AMAZONAS: Who were on these committees?

IRMA LEVIN: The consuls. Each consulate was very involved. And I can't remember, honestly, who the committees were. They were volunteers. And it wasn't a permanent committee. There were people who drove, and they had housing, and they picked you up at the airport. But those were volunteers for every day. They weren't permanent.

FRED LEVIN: In the first couple of years, they would have volunteers who'd come in and stuff envelopes and make phone calls, and whatever it was, those types of jobs that needed to be done. My father had arranged to borrow cars. I think it was primarily Oldsmobiles.

IRMA LEVIN: Oldsmobiles, yeah.

FRED LEVIN: And then there would be people who would volunteer to drive, and they would drive the dignitaries around, or they would pick them up at the airport. Unfortunately, we didn't have stretch limos in those days, so it was just a car and somebody who was willing to drive them around, go to their hotel.

LEE AMAZONAS: Was there one person on whom Bud really relied, especially that first year, from his core staff, to help him get this going?

FRED LEVIN: Well, there were two; they really did it all. His secretary was Dolores Jovick, and he had a publicity man by the name of Norman Dorn. Norman K. Dorn, who went on to teach at San Francisco State, didn't he?

MIGUEL PENDAS: I'm not sure how the name is familiar to me now. What was Bud's office like?

FRED LEVIN: The offices were at 172 Golden Gate Avenue. There was a reception office, where the secretary was, and then he had a huge office, which was his. And then there was even a larger office that Norman had, with shelves and shelves of material. And that office, I think, was big enough for two or three people, but it was basically Norman in there. It was in the offices of United Artists, in the United Artists Theaters building. San Francisco Theaters had their suite of offices, and the Film Festival operated out of the San Francisco Theaters offices.

MIGUEL PENDAS: So it was those three people in the office?

IRMA LEVIN: That's it.

FRED LEVIN: And then the volunteers came in.

IRMA LEVIN: But they may come only one day for three hours, and that's it. There was no staff, no money.

MIGUEL PENDAS: One of the things that I'm trying to get at, that puzzles me, is why certain people would come, and often you would find there was some connection of some sort; they were a friend, or they knew somebody, or they were from San Francisco, or something.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I think a lot of the people that came to help would tell somebody else, and they were so excited; you know, films were exciting. And there were going to be movie stars. And also, they came and helped, and then they'd get invited.

FRED LEVIN: Basically, after the first year, then the traveling started. And it was all networking. San Francisco became an important venue, and people wanted to have their films here. And there was more to choose from. So at that point, everybody knew everybody. There were half a dozen major film festivals in the world, and everybody would come to everybody else's film festival. So, you know, it was very exciting. But they would see the same people hopping around the world at film festivals.

IRMA LEVIN: They still do.

LEE AMAZONAS: There's an organization, American Association for the United Nations, who sponsored—at least from what I've read—the Closing Night gala, and actually did that not just for the first Festival, but for the next couple of years. And I'm just wondering, how did they get involved, if you recall that?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't recall it. I wouldn't make a statement, because I don't know. But I usually know.

LEE AMAZONAS: There seemed to be a lot of support from local socialites, some of whom presumably belonged to the Chamber of Commerce, or had some political connections. I wonder why their influence didn't result in a little money coming from the City or the Chamber of Commerce.

IRMA LEVIN: The city gave \$10,000. And unfortunately, George Christopher died, but he lived in this building. And every time I would see him coming down, he said, “I remember when Irving came to the office and we gave him \$10,000?” That’s all the city gave. But we had so much help in-kind from friends of Bud and Harold Zellerbach. That’s how they got all the things done.

LEE AMAZONAS: Because I had read that that money from the city really didn’t come until four years later. It was that early?

IRMA LEVIN: Bud went to Harold Zellerbach. That’s where he went first. And he felt if he could get Harold Zellerbach’s help—And Bud could sell ice to Eskimos. He and Harold became very, very close. Together, they went to see the mayor. And they got \$10,000.

FRED LEVIN: But what year are you talking about?

IRMA LEVIN: The beginning. In the beginning, they got \$10,000. You don’t think so, Fred?

FRED LEVIN: It wasn’t year one.

IRMA LEVIN: It was year one. But I can’t check it out, because he’s gone. But I know that that’s where they got the money in the beginning. I think I’m sure.

FRED LEVIN: Well, City Hall will know exactly when they gave the money.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, you could find that out. And then it all came from in-kind. People gave things. The Zellerbachs gave paper, Schmidt Lithographic did the printing, Saul Bass did the posters. Everything was donated. People gave hotel rooms. The last night, you say, was done—

LEE AMAZONAS: By the American Association for the United Nations.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, all I know is that it was at the St. Francis Hotel, and the governor was there, and the mayor was there. But I don't know who paid for it. It wasn't for nothing.

LEE AMAZONAS: It seems like there was a party before the film, and it seemed to be at your house.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right.

LEE AMAZONAS: And then the gala after, where awards were given.

IRMA LEVIN: But I thought they gave the awards at the theater, but I could be wrong.

LEE AMAZONAS: You know, you're right about the first year giving the awards in the theater, because later on, they said that that was something that an approved festival didn't do. So the next year, they made sure they gave the awards at the gala.

MIGUEL PENDAS: OK, so they gave the awards at the theater, then they had the gala in the hotel, and then maybe there was still a party after that at your house.

IRMA LEVIN: There were lots of parties. People had invited somebody for cocktails, but not at my house. Now, we could have had a cocktail party before the awards.

LEE AMAZONAS: Although I haven't read anything in detail about this, it seems that at least some of the funds for the Festival came from Bud's pocket. Was this ever a hardship for the family; was the business ever threatened?

IRMA LEVIN: The business was not threatened.

FRED LEVIN: And it wasn't a hardship.

LEE AMAZONAS: Now, some problems from that first year included—at least from what I read—no local funding.



FRED LEVIN: \$10,000 is a lot of money.

IRMA LEVIN: Then, it was. Fred, I'm almost positive, but you can check that. I guess they must have records somewhere. George Christopher was mayor.

FRED LEVIN: I think it was a couple years before there was any money from the city. It was always a battle.

LEE AMAZONAS: And Bud is quoted several places, complaining about how the city likes us, but they aren't giving us money.

IRMA LEVIN: It must be right. As I say, I can't prove it. I just thought that's what they got, but Harold isn't here, and neither is George Christopher, and neither is Bud.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, in any event, it looks like there wasn't sufficient funding.

IRMA LEVIN: There was never sufficient funding. (LAUGHS)

LEE AMAZONAS: So that certainly would remain a problem for the first year.

FRED LEVIN: And 50 years later.

(LAUGHTER)

MIGUEL PENDAS: We're celebrating the anniversary of insufficient funding.

FRED LEVIN: There you go!

LEE AMAZONAS: And the nail biter was when the screening of **Il Grido** was threatened by the demand of Steve Cochran to view it first.

IRMA LEVIN: Right, right.

LEE AMAZONAS: It sounds like you remember that. Did it seem as if this would be the first and last year of the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't think so. I think every year was nail-biting to see if a film is going to even arrive, because it has to come through Customs. And if he didn't have a wonderful connection with Customs, he couldn't get it through. I mean, I think people lost sight that without a film, you don't have a festival.

FRED LEVIN: In your research, during the first year, are they talking about a second year?

LEE AMAZONAS: Only after the Festival is over, and that it is seen as a success.

FRED LEVIN: Because I would think that that's when the decision would have been made, and I think that it was probably referred to as the San Francisco International Film Festival in its first year, as opposed to the "first," because I don't think anybody would be that presumptuous.

LEE AMAZONAS: I also noticed that in 1957, the first year, Shirley Temple presented the best picture award to **Pather Panchali**. Do you remember how she got involved with the Festival, who asked her?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, I guess Bud must have asked her, because he asked everybody of any note.

FRED LEVIN: And she lived here.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Was she on the Chamber of Commerce in '57?

IRMA LEVIN: No, I think that was later, way later. And then she got involved with that picture that she said was pornographic. Do you remember that? Oh, I do.

MIGUEL PENDAS: I think that's the most news coverage that the Festival ever got in 50 years.

FRED LEVIN: What film?

MIGUEL PENDAS: It was called **Night Games**, directed by Mai Zetterling, a Swedish film.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, I remember. She sued, didn't she? Oh, it was a terrible thing, that whole thing.

LEE AMAZONAS: But this is before that. Now, my last question for 1957, actually, I think you mainly answered before, but maybe you've got something else to add to it; I saw that you had hosted receptions and dinner parties at your home. And one of the questions is, what was involved in preparing for such an event? I mean, it sounds like you did a lot of cooking, you and Bud together. And another is, if you had any anecdotes from those events, and any recollection of somebody behaving badly.

IRMA LEVIN: No. Everybody was very happy to be invited.

(LAUGHTER)

IRMA LEVIN: I think there was a worry. Naturally, you're concerned.

FRED LEVIN: In the beginning, when the parties were at home, you could kind of divide the attendees into groups; one would have been supportive friends, and the others would have been consul guests of the Festival, participants of the Festival. It wasn't like you were opening your home to strangers. So it worked surprisingly smoothly. And there were a lot of people involved. It was very, very nice. It worked well. My mother was extremely confident, and a very gracious host. Everything looked effortless to everybody outside of the household.

IRMA LEVIN: Thank you. It was lovely.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Before we leave the first Festival, you mention that Bud had just met Harold Zellerbach, and then they together went to go meet the mayor, but you got to know Zellerbach pretty well?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, we got to be like family. Very, very close. In fact, they traveled with us numerous times. We went to Moscow, to the festival; we were in Paris together. He was very, very helpful. You know, after all, he was the head of the Art Commission, and that's how, I think that was Bud's first idea of being able to even call the mayor. We always went to the ballgames. We were very close.

FRED LEVIN: Most of the key families in San Francisco were helpful. The Swigs were helpful; the Magnins were very involved.

IRMA LEVIN: What's his name at the Hilton? The Lewins were very helpful.

FRED LEVIN: The Lewins. There was a lot of help over the years. And people who were interested in promoting the city.

IRMA LEVIN: It's true. It was exciting to have San Francisco compared.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And Christopher, you got to know him, too?

IRMA LEVIN: Very close. As I say, they lived here in the building. They were at our house many times, a very wonderful man. And there isn't a time that he didn't have something to say. (LAUGHS) But he just passed away about two years ago. And the governor, at the last night, I think, was when we had that big party, was there with his wife. And he said he wooed his wife at the Metro Theater!

MIGUEL PENDAS: Pat Brown? So Jerry Brown owes his existence to—(LAUGHS)

IRMA LEVIN: I don't know. I guess. But everybody was really helpful. They did what they could.

FRED LEVIN: There was a lot of civic pride.

IRMA LEVIN: And it grew. Is it still growing?

MIGUEL PENDAS: Well, we're trying to get it back. We're trying to recapture that feeling. Now, there was also a telegram of congratulations read at the first Festival from Richard Nixon, the Vice President.

IRMA LEVIN: I don't even remember that. Do you, Fred?

MIGUEL PENDAS: It was reported.

LEE AMAZONAS: It was before the Russians showed up.

(LAUGHTER)

FRED LEVIN: Later, it all changed. It got on its feet, and they did have donors. And I'm sure the programs listed donors at some point. But at the beginning, it was very, very hands-on.

LEE AMAZONAS: It sounds like a lot of the donations were, as you say, in-kind.

IRMA LEVIN: In-kind, yes. Everything was. The hotel room, the automobiles.

FRED LEVIN: Everything dealing around civic pride.

LEE AMAZONAS: Yes. And that seems to have started happening a little more in '58.

FRED LEVIN: Sure, because then it was real. Nobody had to break ground.

IRMA LEVIN: And then they started charging to go to the big gala, where they gave the awards; they charged for the big dinners. And of course, the theaters. You know, it wasn't all free.

FRED LEVIN: And it grew. It got bigger and bigger and bigger.

IRMA LEVIN: Even the stores downtown had windows.

FRED LEVIN: That was kind of when we got too big.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Yeah, it's hard for those three people to grow infinitely.

FRED LEVIN: Well, I think that there were groups at that time that felt they had a better vision, and that it shouldn't be a society-type event; that it should be for people who just wanted to see art films. Nothing lasts forever.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, it seems as if the feeling of success for 1957 was so strong that there is an open letter to Orson Welles that I found in **Film Quarterly**, signed by the San Francisco International Film Festival, asking him to come in and be the Master of Ceremonies for the next year. Now, it doesn't look like he came. Do you know anything about it?

IRMA LEVIN: No, I don't.

LEE AMAZONAS: Did he answer? I mean, I think what's interesting about it isn't so much whether or not he came, but just what it showed about how they felt after that first year.

IRMA LEVIN: How it had grown and what they did. It's very interesting. You know, after all, in the beginning, I knew what happened every minute, but after that, the second or the third year— But I remember a lot. I remember a lot about the people who came. And I think there was something about a restriction on where they could travel. Now, I don't know where that comes in, but there was a restriction.

LEE AMAZONAS: It does come in a couple of years later. In 1962, that issue comes up for different reasons.

IRMA LEVIN: The Russians wanted to go to Disneyland.

LEE AMAZONAS: That actually was even mentioned in one of the articles.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, it is? And another thing is, the one person that I'm sure is written about is the wonderful parties that Louis Martini gave. Is that mentioned?

MIGUEL PENDAS: Yes. They would drive up to his place in buses.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, my God! They were simply—And who was the person that cooked? What was his name, from a restaurant? I don't remember. An Italian restaurant. Oh, Orsi. But Louis did the chickens. I'll never forget it. You know, that was a tremendous gift for the Festival. Everybody wanted to be invited there. The stars went up there, too. So you see, there was a lot of help.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And there was a lot going on.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah. But he was a personal friend of mine. When we lived in Marin, we used to go on Sundays up there, to his place.

LEE AMAZONAS: 1958, this is the year that the Festival gained official recognition. And it seemed like a very big deal.

IRMA LEVIN: It was a big deal, it was.

LEE AMAZONAS: Now, the Festival poster was designed that year by Saul Bass. And he was at the height of his career. How did he get involved?

IRMA LEVIN: My husband called him, just picked up the phone and called him. And there were lots of wonderful shorts that were done by important people, but I can't remember their names.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Well, he was one of them, Saul Bass.

IRMA LEVIN: I know, but there was a couple, a husband and wife, who did it.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Was it Charles and Ray Eames?

IRMA LEVIN: And my husband picked up the phone and called them.

LEE AMAZONAS: Hubley.

IRMA LEVIN: Hubley; yeah, the Hubleys.

MIGUEL PENDAS: **Mr. Magoo.**

IRMA LEVIN: They were a wonderful couple. And all he did was pick up the phone.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Now, you know that the Festival gave an award to Faith Hubley a few years ago, and she has died since. Their daughter is in one of the biggest rock bands in the United States. And they played music for a silent film that we showed a few years ago.

IRMA LEVIN: How interesting. Does it mention in there about the award they gave, the music award, to Darius Milhaud? My husband picked up the phone for that, too. He was teaching at Mills. He came with his wife, they were wonderful. He was in a wheelchair. And I remember we went to their home; a wonderful couple. I think they gave an award in his name.

LEE AMAZONAS: Eventually they did call it that. So then, it was Bud's idea to give an award for film music?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, this next question, you've already answered. How influential or helpful were the national consuls in acquiring films?

IRMA LEVIN: They were everything. They were wonderful.



LEE AMAZONAS: A film director, Edward Dmytryk, was reported to be—that year, anyway—a friendly advisor to Bud. How did he meet Dmytryk?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, they were very close friends of ours. In fact, two weeks ago, she called me. We met one summer, when we were with our children and we were away. You know, if you're in a resort, and you meet somebody, that's how we met. We were friends, well, until he died. And even when he went through his—He was one of the “Unholy Ten,” you know.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Right. He went to jail.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, he went to jail because he wouldn't tell. Alvah Bessie was involved with that.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And he also went to jail.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah. They were all in jail at the same time.

MIGUEL PENDAS: But Dmytryk then changed his mind, and he sent a few other people to jail.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, he did. He was a very brilliant man.

MIGUEL PENDAS: I'm trying to think. He did make some films here. Was Dmytryk from here?

IRMA LEVIN: No, but he's made a lot of films. He made **Raintree County**.

LEE AMAZONAS: What was his role as advisor in that year?

IRMA LEVIN: Just films.

LEE AMAZONAS: That year, Bud went to Cannes and Venice to observe the festivals.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right. It was very exciting. You got to see how they put on their festival. And Bud wanted to do it a little better. Their parties were very snobbish. And everybody would go around, "Well, did you get an invitation?" And that was in both. In Venice, Amanti was a much friendlier man, a darling man. They were wonderful festivals. They were lots of fun, and the films were good and not good, to our thinking. It was a working festival, to see what was there and what you could have, and you got to meet directors, and you got to be friendly with them, and then some of them would want to send their film to you. That's how you found out. I mean, today, they go to a festival to find out about the films. It's the same thing.

LEE AMAZONAS: Did Bud get any ideas on how the festivals themselves were run, that he brought back to San Francisco?

IRMA LEVIN: No, Bud was a very inventive person. He didn't need any of that. When you see a movie today, or any performance, and you see, from the back, marching bands coming down, now, that has to be in one of the articles.

LEE AMAZONAS: Oh, the marching bands? That comes up in a couple of years.

IRMA LEVIN: That was one of the very first that he did. He was wonderful when it came to that. So he didn't need that. I don't think there was anything you could take away that he couldn't have done better. And I'm not saying that because he was my husband. That's the kind of a person he was. He was a good publicity man, right?

LEE AMAZONAS: Now, in October of '58, **Variety** reported a blackout of mention of the Festival in San Francisco newspapers. It doesn't look like it lasted for very long.

IRMA LEVIN: I don't know that. Do you? A blackout of mention of the Festival?

LEE AMAZONAS: The San Francisco papers stopped talking about the Festival. And it does seem as if there's a little bit of time, about a month, where I find very few mentions of the Festival. But they seem to have recovered, and in fact, after that, had supportive editorials, so it didn't last very long. And in

1958, there was a very interesting tie-in with the Festival, a UC Extension course called “Film Appreciation in the Film Festival,” which included four free tickets with tuition. Did Bud come up with this idea? Do you remember the course at all? Did you drop in on it?

FRED LEVIN: No.

LEE AMAZONAS: Now, this, you had actually referred to earlier. I read that some San Francisco film exhibitors were working quietly to keep Hollywood films from appearing at the Festival. And it wasn't just the Hollywood studios themselves that were doing this. Is there a way you can expand on that? What would they do?

IRMA LEVIN: They really wanted no part of it. These were people that he did business with. They were all colleagues, all in the theater business. I don't know. I can't tell you why they did it. But it was hurtful, very. They didn't help in any way. Later on, it changed. And they were friends. They were very good friends.

LEE AMAZONAS: So it wasn't just that they were competitors; they were colleagues.

IRMA LEVIN: They just didn't want any part of it. And maybe it was because they were competitors. I don't know. Maybe they felt they were taking away people that would go to the movies. It was a bad time, is all I can say.

LEE AMAZONAS: There was an interesting mix of alumni groups—Mills, for instance—and nonprofit organizations we talked about, consuls, and the social set, that were all involved in helping put on a show here. How did these groups get along with each other?

IRMA LEVIN: We never knew that. I never knew it, or if my husband knew it, he didn't come home and tell me, because I don't remember it. The consuls all worked together.

LEE AMAZONAS: I had read that the Tourist Bureau asked Bud for money after he had asked them.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right. (LAUGHS)

LEE AMAZONAS: So you do remember this.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, I do. They helped a little by giving us free tickets for something. But it never went any further than asking.

LEE AMAZONAS: Another promotional activity for 1958's Festival was India Week, on the USF campus. And it was occasioned by **Aparajito**, and it was everything from an Indian art exhibit to some of the students dressed in saris and turbans and an elephant walking around campus. Do you remember this or similar promotional events at all?

IRMA LEVIN: I do remember them coming with their saris, but I don't remember the elephant story. But if it was written, it had to be.

LEE AMAZONAS: Right. I just wanted to see if you had any memory of it. And I also found one mention of the raffling of prizes at this particular Festival, 1958. Now, I found it nowhere else, so I'm just asking if you recall this.

IRMA LEVIN: No, I don't. I'm sorry.

LEE AMAZONAS: Many of those associated with the Festival—the volunteers, various event organizers—are quoted in papers as attributing to the Festival the chance to improve international understanding. Do you remember this attitude?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I think that was part of it; that film as art was the same all over the world. Isn't that an answer to that?

LEE AMAZONAS: The motion picture exhibitor said that the 1958 Festival was not a financial success, but that the cultural, civic and charitable groups "cleaned up."

IRMA LEVIN: (LAUGHS) I'm glad!

LEE AMAZONAS: I guess this setup was intentional, possibly to keep the groups with the Festival?

FRED LEVIN: I think that's civic pride, and how each organization determined whether it was worth their getting involved. There was never any financial gain anywhere. First of all, it wasn't big enough. The money involved wasn't flowing enough that an organization could come out financially ahead. They could have raised their profile and helped cultivate their own organization. But I would have to guess that that article wasn't referring to dollars and cents. But who knows?

LEE AMAZONAS: Or perhaps in comparison to the Festival itself.

FRED LEVIN: Could have been.

IRMA LEVIN: What year did Thailand come, and the girls' danced? Did they do that? And what year Soren Manchour came from Hong Kong? Did they tell you that?

LEE AMAZONAS: Actually, Thailand came a couple of times. I didn't see anything about the Thai dancers, though. So tell me.

IRMA LEVIN: They were there. They were in the house. You don't remember?

FRED LEVIN: Being in the house is not the same as being in the Festival, I don't think.

IRMA LEVIN: They danced, honey.

LEE AMAZONAS: Do you remember either what year it was or what film it was?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, it was a sad happening. When we were in Thailand, we were invited by the prince to go and see an unusual performance. He took us to a little country town, and it wasn't a theater; it was a little office kind of a thing, and behind a seat sat people. The film would be projected, and these people

would speak for the film. Then he took us to another little town, and the same people would speak in another language for the film. It's the same film. So we thought that was so different, and Irving said, "Would you come to San Francisco with this group to do it? Wouldn't that be exciting?" He thought that would be very interesting, to have these people come. They set it up in the theater—I don't know which theater of ours—and these people spoke, and I don't know who the reporter was, but he said it was a hoax. And these people; I thought it was so sad. First of all, the prince was a personal friend of ours. The government paid for these people to come.

MIGUEL PENDAS: How did you know the prince?

FRED LEVIN: This is what's-his-name's father.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, you know whose father it is. What's-his-name.

MIGUEL PENDAS: The one who just came here four years ago and made a film, went to UCLA with—

MIGUEL PENDAS: Francis Coppola.

FRED LEVIN: That was a personal friend of my parents. They met early on at one of the film festivals.

IRMA LEVIN: And we've been friends all these years. I remember when this kid was born. He came up here to see me.

MIGUEL PENDAS: But where did you meet the prince?

IRMA LEVIN: In Germany, at a film festival. Anyway, because of our friendship, he knew about the Festival, and he agreed that their country would pay for these people to come. I don't know who the reporter was, but there was a whole thing in the paper that it was a hoax, and it couldn't have been real. We felt terrible. And the daughters were dancers. The prince, this kid's sisters, gorgeous.

LEE AMAZONAS: I know I read about that film showing. It comes a couple years later. But I didn't see anything in the clippings I found about the hoax. I know that there were a few people who wrote about it.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, it was all in the paper. I don't know who the writer was. But you know something? He was also a friend. And when Bud said to him, "It's not a hoax," he didn't believe him. It was the worst review I think the Festival ever had. So that was the Thai film. And Soren Manchour had films from Hong Kong.

LEE AMAZONAS: Yeah, that comes up in a few years.

*TAPE 1 ENDS*

*TAPE 2 BEGINS*

IRMA LEVIN: Is that worth telling?

MIGUEL PENDAS: Absolutely. This Thai film has been in the back of my mind for years. Where did this come from? How did it happen? You know, this is a big tradition in Japan as well. They call them *Benshis*.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, well, it was interesting to see.

MIGUEL PENDAS: There are still some people who do that. For the silent films, they would speak the parts, they would sing, they would reinterpret the whole thing. I had no idea that it was still going on.

IRMA LEVIN: It was so small, it was as big as our entrance hall. We were at the Berlin Film Festival.

IRMA LEVIN: And Bower said to my husband, "Please do me a favor. There's a prince and princess here from Thailand, and they are leaving because no one has given them the courtesy they feel they should have." Well, you only had to tell it to my husband, and we went over, and my husband talked to

them. Well, his name was Anyusen, Anyusen Hga. And when he was in college in London, they couldn't pronounce his name, so he said, "Call me Jack." So he said, "My name is Jack." He spoke a little English; she didn't speak at all. She was a producer, so they said, a beautiful woman, gorgeous. I'll show you a picture in a minute. And so we became very good friends, and we invited them to go with us to the gala that night, because they weren't going to go; they didn't know anybody. They had the most gorgeous daughters. They were elegant. Just like the pictures of the Thai princesses, with the long nails. They were a lovely family. And he said, "If you ever come to Thailand, be sure and call us." And one year, we did go. And my husband always would send a letter, and said, "I'll be at this hotel at that time; if you can call us, call us. We'll have a drink." So we got off the airplane. And as we were getting off the airplane, you know how people talk? They say, "Somebody's got to be very important on this plane; they got a red carpet out." When we got off the plane, there were two big cars; one for us, and one for our luggage. (LAUGHS) They thought we traveled the way they did. That was our first meeting. And we saw each other almost every year; they stayed with us at home, in San Francisco. And they were wonderful, wonderful friends. He just passed away. And what's his name? I can't think of the kid's name.

MIGUEL PENDAS: It's a very long and complicated name.

IRMA LEVIN: Chadry. But that's not what she used to call him. Chadry's not a long name.

MIGUEL PENDAS: It's the last name.

FRED LEVIN: No. That's what you called him. That's not his official name.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh. I didn't call him that. Huey is what his mother called him. Anyway, so that's how we got to know the prince. And that's how they got to bring the film here, OK?

MIGUEL PENDAS: And that is a great story.



IRMA LEVIN: It's a true story. And the next year, when we went to Berlin, we wanted to see if they were there. They weren't, but their brother was there. He was the nephew of that current king. And he would go every day to be with the king. It was a wonderful family. The mother is still alive.

MIGUEL PENDAS: At first I had thought that this had been an old film that was silent, but apparently, they were still making silent films.

IRMA LEVIN: They were still doing that, yes. It was fantastic to watch it.

MIGUEL PENDAS: We tried looking this film up, and it's hard to find anything about it, right?

LEE AMAZONAS: There's not much so far. I still have to go to the Pacific Film Archive to see what they've got. But it was a new film, it was narrated, it was silent. And from what I read, the reception was at least respectful.

IRMA LEVIN: The reception was, but that review was a disaster. We were very embarrassed, as you can imagine.

MIGUEL PENDAS: But talk about bringing things from all over the world.

IRMA LEVIN: He did. He did. And you see, it was because we had gone to that festival that we met him. I'm trying to think how we met Run Run Shaw. Do you know that, Fred? God, we've known him forever. I don't know if he's still alive.

LEE AMAZONAS: From the clippings I've seen, it seemed that in 1959, there was a very wide range of news coverage: the **L.A. Times**, **Christian Science Monitor**, a number of the trade papers, and at this point, several articles in **Variety**. Did Bud employ someone in charge of press relations? Was it Norman Dorn who was still working on that?

IRMA LEVIN: I think it was, yes.

LEE AMAZONAS: Now, while social events were important from the beginning, they seemed a lot more elaborate in 1959. And my particular favorite scheme is the 13 bachelors, San Francisco professional bachelors, who were recruited to be escorts for all of the visiting foreign film stars. Now, were you involved in the planning of any of the events, any of the social events, that happened?

IRMA LEVIN: No.

LEE AMAZONAS: Before the Festival began, I read of some complaints regarding the Festival's low glamour and glitz quotient, but this was the year of the first film from Hollywood, **Beloved Infidel**.

IRMA LEVIN: That was Jerry Wald's film.

LEE AMAZONAS: Right. And there was plenty of glamour and glitz to go around. You started talking about that. Do you have any recollection of Gregory Peck, Sandra Dee, Simone Signoret?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I think Gregory Peck's daughter lived in San Francisco.

FRED LEVIN: Hollywood set them up; the studio set them up. They weren't coming to visit family.

IRMA LEVIN: I know it was very exciting when he got word that Jerry Wald was coming up with the film. And it was—who owned the studio at that time?—who called Bud and said, "We have a film for the Festival, and he just couldn't believe it, that they were going to send up a film.

MIGUEL PENDAS: I wonder if Jerry Wald had something to do with that. Wasn't he a San Franciscan? He produced some films here. **Dark Passage**.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, but he was not a San Franciscan. But I can't remember which studio it came from.

LEE AMAZONAS: Do you have any recollections of any of these folks who were here; David Niven or Simone Signoret?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't, but there were lots of stars.

FRED LEVIN: Gregory Peck and Sandra Dee, I remember were here.

IRMA LEVIN: Gregory Peck I remember very well.

LEE AMAZONAS: Now, it was also the year that Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg were here as well, for **Pull My Daisy**.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, but I don't remember them personally. I know they were here.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Sandra Dee had a big thing going on in Berkeley, right?

LEE AMAZONAS: She did. They brought her over to one of the frat houses.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And it caused a riot!

FRED LEVIN: It was a publicity stunt. It certainly wasn't educational, being Sandra Dee. (LAUGHS)

MIGUEL PENDAS: And she was involved in a film. She did voice-over for the Russian animation, **The Snow Queen**, the English version.

MIGUEL PENDAS: So I take it Jerry Wald was here, right? Did you get to know him?

FRED LEVIN: Gregory Peck, I got to know.

IRMA LEVIN: Not only was Jerry Wald here, but his brother, who was a writer, Melvin; he was a friend of Walter's. So that's how I knew they were coming.

LEE AMAZONAS: 1959 was the first year—and it might have been the only year—for a three-day seminar for theater operators, going on at the same time as the Festival, run by Bud. Did this win more support for him from his fellow exhibitors?

FRED LEVIN: I think each year, as often as possible, they tried to have what we would call an educational consultant, but it wasn't something that we would have had knowledge of, because it would have been on the technical side or on the educational side. I don't think anybody in the family would have been involved.

LEE AMAZONAS: Now this year also, the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce announced their full cooperation with the Festival. What did that mean?

IRMA LEVIN: Nothing. Somebody in there took over the Festival. Who was that?

MIGUEL PENDAS: Yeah, they took it over in '65.

LEE AMAZONAS: I think it was Melvin Swig.

IRMA LEVIN: I don't know. Maybe.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Are you thinking of Stanley Mosk?

IRMA LEVIN: No, no. It was somebody who was very active with the Chamber of Commerce, and felt they could do a much better job. But I don't think it was Mel Swig. Maybe you're right. I don't know.

LEE AMAZONAS: But in this year, when they said cooperation, it was just words.

FRED LEVIN: I'm sure they did something. I'm sure they helped promote it; they must have done something.

MIGUEL PENDAS: We should try to find out who was in charge of the Chamber of Commerce, because maybe you knew him.

LEE AMAZONAS: That's easy enough. I was looking into 1965 because I wanted to take a look at what happened right after the transition. And I mean, Melvin Swig's name is sticking in my brain. But I may be completely wrong.

FRED LEVIN: I don't know who it was, but it would have been the board that would have made that decision anyway. It would be interesting to see who was on the board at that time, and if any of those names that show up there after are in Film Festival material.

LEE AMAZONAS: This was a year where there were some last-minute no-shows, a film or two, as well as Rossellini and De Sica. Do you recall anything?

IRMA LEVIN: The disappointment, yes, because it didn't happen until the last minute. There was some excuse why they couldn't come. And the publicity already went out.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Did Bud know De Sica and Rossellini?

IRMA LEVIN: No, not to my knowledge. He could have, but I don't know that.

FRED LEVIN: He could have met them someplace. There was no previous friendship or anything.

LEE AMAZONAS: The critical reaction to **Beloved Infidel** was not positive. And in fact, I read that of three judges—at least, according to Herb Caen—one walked out after five minutes; another slept through the film. Was there any reaction? I mean, did this cause embarrassment?

IRMA LEVIN: Disappointment, yeah, because there was so much hoopla that we were going to have a film from Hollywood, and then to have it fall flat.

LEE AMAZONAS: Was there a feeling that the Festival had been set up with an inferior film?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't think so. Do you think that?

FRED LEVIN: Was there anything in the press that indicated that?

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, there was one mention that that was possible. One of the local reviewers—it might have been Paine Knickerbocker; I'm not sure—suggested that that was a possibility. There's also a mention that possibly it was a warped print.

IRMA LEVIN: Also it was a possibility that they couldn't get it played anywhere, and so they gave it to the Festival. That was an undercurrent.

FRED LEVIN: Paine was a wonderful supporter. And he could have tried to use that to benefit the Film Festival, as opposed to just saying, "It was a lousy film."

IRMA LEVIN: It was a very bad film.

LEE AMAZONAS: You remember it?

IRMA LEVIN: No, but I remember what everybody said. And when you say somebody fell asleep and somebody walked out, I believe it!

LEE AMAZONAS: And those were the judges!

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah!

LEE AMAZONAS: Now, after four years of pleading—wow, we've just headed into 1960—the Festival was finally given \$5,000 by the city, from what I've read. And I guess my question here is, what finally broke through, although your recollection is that the city gave the money—

IRMA LEVIN: I disagree with Fred, I'm sorry. But I don't know that. And if you've got that, use that.

FRED LEVIN: Well, don't forget, this is your interpretation. No one's asking you to correct history.

LEE AMAZONAS: Absolutely. And as I said, sometimes with the written record, one person makes a mistake and 40 people then repeat it.

FRED LEVIN: Who was mayor in 1960?

LEE AMAZONAS: There was a new mayor, and they even mention there's a new mayor in some of the articles. They don't actually mention who that mayor is, and that was something I wanted to look up, but so far, haven't located. Now, there was a promise reported in the **Chronicle** that there'd be money coming from the state department for the 1961 Festival. They were promising that in 1960. Does that ring a bell?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't know that.

LEE AMAZONAS: This was the year that Mary Pickford was the official hostess.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes.

LEE AMAZONAS: How did that happen?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't know who contacted her. But I can remember what happened. Everybody was waiting at the Metro. They were waiting and waiting for her to come down. And finally, somebody came up to my husband and said, "Miss Pickford is waiting for you to come and escort her."

FRED LEVIN: She had been announced from the stage, and they were waiting for her to come up to the stage.

IRMA LEVIN: And she was in her hotel room, waiting for him to come and escort her. That's all I remember. Everybody was very disappointed. She came. I don't think it was any big deal.

MIGUEL PENDAS: You know, I didn't think we were going to get this far on the first day, but I have something that I want to show you, because I have the correspondence between Bud and Mary Pickford that set up the event. He wrote to her. And then, at the end of the Festival, they had to leave early, because Buddy's mother had just died. And then she wrote a thank-you letter afterwards, from her home.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, that's nice.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And she said very nice things about the family. And she said, "Would you help me get my earrings back? I left them in the hotel room."

IRMA LEVIN: (LAUGHS) I don't remember anything about it, except the audience and everything, but Bud was so harassed that he just felt terrible. You know, you can't keep the audience waiting, and he didn't know that she was waiting.

LEE AMAZONAS: At one social event, her husband, Buddy Rogers, was reportedly the center of an admiring group. And there was a photo that looked like he certainly was, and he was still very handsome.

IRMA LEVIN: I'm sure he was.

LEE AMAZONAS: A **Chronicle** article writes about Bud.

IRMA LEVIN: That's Paine Knickerbocker, huh?

LEE AMAZONAS: I'm not sure if he wrote this, because usually when he wrote it, I wrote it down. "In the past six months, he's screened a staggering total of 250 films from 60 nations, pruned the number of entrants down to 20 shortly before the 1960 Festival began." Who, if anyone, helped him watch 250 films?



IRMA LEVIN: The critics helped. I think that's a bit of an exaggeration, but the critics did. From morning until night.

LEE AMAZONAS: So local film critics? And did they help him choose the films?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't know that.

LEE AMAZONAS: Did you watch any of these films with him?

IRMA LEVIN: No. I watched them in Europe; I didn't want to watch them here.

LEE AMAZONAS: In 1960, for the first time, the Festival had a prize specifically for the best musical score in film, and you did mention he had gotten on the phone and called Darius Milhaud. What was the general reception to this idea?

IRMA LEVIN: Good, it was good.

LEE AMAZONAS: Now I read that the very large Soviet delegation, who was here for **Ballad of a Soldier**, was ordered by the U.S. government to stay within San Francisco county limits during the Festival.

IRMA LEVIN: I remember them very well. It was a wonderful delegation. I even remember the two. Mark Donsky and Karaganov were the two men who were the directors. And they had interpreters. And the stars were adorable.

LEE AMAZONAS: There're pictures of them in cowgirl and cowboy outfits.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, yes. They were wonderful.

LEE AMAZONAS: So it sounds like their movements were really not restricted.

IRMA LEVIN: Well they couldn't go to Disneyland.

LEE AMAZONAS: But they could go to Martini's.

FRED LEVIN: That could be controlled.

LEE AMAZONAS: I see. As long as you were in a group.

IRMA LEVIN: They couldn't go alone, right.

FRED LEVIN: Was that the year the house was being watched?

IRMA LEVIN: Our house? Yes. Where the policemen were out in front.

FRED LEVIN: Well, we don't know who they were, police or FBI. They were in plain cars.

MIGUEL PENDAS: What happened?

FRED LEVIN: They were being watched.

IRMA LEVIN: They were at our house for dinner.

FRED LEVIN: For years, anybody who came from the Soviet bloc, they would watch them. The house would be under surveillance, so to speak.

MIGUEL PENDAS: So they came to your house out on Lake Street?

FRED LEVIN: They'd just sit there all night. And my father would have never said anything—

IRMA LEVIN: He wouldn't tell us.

FRED LEVIN: You know, we just used to laugh. And I don't think we had a consulate or anything in those years, did we?

IRMA LEVIN: No, no.

FRED LEVIN: The Russian community gave a reception after the movie, because in those years, the consuls always gave them. So there was going to be a vodka and caviar party after the Russian film. And it was held in a Russian Society rental hall on Clement Street, upstairs, above some of the shops. It was wild! Everybody was dressed in black-tie, because all of the events were always very formal; if they weren't black-tie, they were certainly suits and fancy dresses. They had vodka and caviar that they had brought with them; I mean, huge containers of caviar. And the community had supplied the Seven-Up and potato piroshki. You could have any combination of those four items that you wanted.

IRMA LEVIN: And Fred did.

FRED LEVIN: And I did. It was long tables with oilcloths. It was really very, very funny. People had a good time.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, they all had a good time. And it was so exciting to see who would be invited.

FRED LEVIN: And it was real caviar and Stoli, you know?

IRMA LEVIN: And real vodka.

FRED LEVIN: I mean, it was very, very generous.

IRMA LEVIN: They were very good parties, different parties.

FRED LEVIN: Usually very elegant.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, very. I remember— Who did we have to dinner in the house? There were two men and you and your brother. And your brother turns around and looks at this fellow, and he says, “Are you a Communist?” (LAUGHS) And the man said, “Yes.” And so Larry says, “Tell me about it.” And he did. But who were those men?

MIGUEL PENDAS: Was it Chukhrai?

IRMA LEVIN: No, no. Maybe it was Chukhrai. I don’t know. But it was so funny. We had lots of dinner parties, lots of fun. One time, I ended up in the hospital, but I don’t know what year that was. It doesn’t matter. Everything was fun.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Just to finish on this Russian thing, was there any kind of opposition in the Russian community, because some people are very anti-Communist.

FRED LEVIN: There was. There was.

IRMA LEVIN: There were some? I only know the ones that cooperated.

FRED LEVIN: It was low-key. But I remember because they were White Russians and really Russians. There was a little bit.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Did anyone ever protest that a film was being shown from the Soviet Union?

FRED LEVIN: No, no. I remember more at the reception afterwards, that there was a commotion in front.

IRMA LEVIN: Before we went in.

FRED LEVIN: Yeah, like picketers and that kind of thing.

IRMA LEVIN: You know, it's years and years ago. For me, a lot of it I remember, but a lot I don't. And some of the things I wasn't privy to. After all, he's not going to come home talking about it all the time. In the beginning, he did, because it was exciting, and every little thing was important. And every time there was a disappointment—"So-and-so's not coming, the film didn't show up"—but the people who were at Customs were wonderful, that's all I can tell you. They were wonderful. They gave such great parties.

LEE AMAZONAS: Also in the room for this previous interview was Miguel Pendás, the director of the Oral History Project. He was asking questions. And also answering questions was Fred Levin, son of Irma Levin.

## **AUGUST 21 INTERVIEW**

LEE AMAZONAS: It's Sunday, August 21st. I'm interviewing Irma Levin in her apartment in San Francisco. Also present, Miguel Pendás, the director of the Oral History Project for the San Francisco International Film Festival Oral History Project, and Fred Levin, Irma's son. Well, yesterday, we ended with the Russians. In 1960, there was a film panel that year, hosted by the World Affairs Council, "The Role of Film in International Relations." And the panel included film directors Jean Renoir, Edward Dmytryk and Grigori Chukhrai. Did you attend this event? Do you remember it? It sounded like Jean Renoir was particularly forthcoming and charming and funny.

IRMA LEVIN: Right. He told stories about his childhood with his father, very interesting. He said his father got up in the morning and went to his office, which he hated. He came home, he had lunch, and he went back. That was his office work. That was his memory of it. And then his wife was a sculptor, very interesting couple. They were both there at the Festival.

LEE AMAZONAS: Now I read that he was supposed to be on the jury, and in fact, was identified as one of the jurors, but another article said he had to leave early.

FRED LEVIN: That was covered in **Life Magazine**. It wasn't on the front page, but it was **Life**, wasn't it?

LEE AMAZONAS: His visit to the Festival?

FRED LEVIN: No, that panel.

LEE AMAZONAS: The panel? Really? We'll have to hunt that down.

FRED LEVIN: If not, I have it someplace.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Outside of the official activities, did you spend any time with the Renoirs?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, yes, we went to their home. And he wrote a book. He autographed it, I think. Is it here? Somebody's got it.

FRED LEVIN: You went to his home where?

IRMA LEVIN: Los Angeles. He lived there. And I think, did his father do a painting of a little boy? I can't remember that. Was it "Blue Boy?" They were very gracious.

MIGUEL PENDAS: When they were up here, did you spend some time with them?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, no. That was just part of the Festival. I mean, no one-to-one.

LEE AMAZONAS: **Variety** in this year, 1960, was very optimistic about the Festival's future. They reported, just as the Festival was getting underway, that the advance sales had increased at least 50 percent over 1959. And the San Francisco dailies were writing more and more about the Festival than they had in the past. Do you recall the sense of optimism in Bud and others who were deeply involved in the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, I think they were always hopeful that it would grow, and that more people would participate. And I guess, just as today, you don't know the financial until it's over.

LEE AMAZONAS: These were reports that were happening before the Festival began, because of the advance ticket sales.

FRED LEVIN: We really wouldn't have known about the ticket sales.

LEE AMAZONAS: But just in general, just sort of doing well.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I know that he would come home and he would be happier.

FRED LEVIN: You also have to keep it in the context of a specific year. Unless you have records, there wouldn't be a memory of any one year jumping out.

LEE AMAZONAS: There was one film, **Flight**, which was based on a John Steinbeck short story, and Steinbeck arrived at the Festival, although too late to watch the film. Do you remember Steinbeck's visit?

IRMA LEVIN: No recollection.

LEE AMAZONAS: This was also the year John Cassavetes came with  **Shadows**, which was as un-Hollywood an American film. Do you remember the audience response to the film? Do you remember John Cassavetes?

IRMA LEVIN: No, you see, it was a long time ago. And he wasn't special in those days, and to me, it was very nice that a director or producer, writer, somebody, would accompany a film. But I wasn't involved.

MIGUEL PENDAS: It was his first film.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right. So he was not much, you know.

MIGUEL PENDAS: I think he had a TV show. So he was known as an actor on a talk show and TV show.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right. And as I say, it was just another person, happy that he was there.

LEE AMAZONAS: Shirley Temple shows up again, attending the Festival. Was she involved in any way?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't recall. Her name came up, but I can't recall any particular involvement. Was she on the jury?

LEE AMAZONAS: She wasn't on the jury.

FRED LEVIN: I think he always tried to have as many names as they could at every event.

IRMA LEVIN: So they'd get the publicity on it.

LEE AMAZONAS: Right. And just the fact that they'd say, "Well, Shirley Temple showed up at a Russian film on Saturday."

IRMA LEVIN: That's right.

LEE AMAZONAS: Evelyn Munchausen was at a reception. She was a direct descendant of Baron von Munchausen. And there was an article written for **Film Culture** by Herman Weinberg, who was one of the jurors that year. And he came up with quite a number of the things that I'm in the middle of asking you about right now, because he came up with a lot of detail I didn't necessarily see elsewhere. And he seems to have gone to all the parties. Do you remember Herman Weinberg?

IRMA LEVIN: No, I don't. Maybe if I saw him, I'd remember.



LEE AMAZONAS: There were some reports in **Film Quarterly** about the need of better press and public relations, as well as what they viewed as an emphasis on high society. What do you recall of Bud's reaction to that?

IRMA LEVIN: You know, there was always controversy. Why weren't more people involved? Well, that was their choice. If they didn't attend, that was it. But of course, the high society would bring out the publicity, and people would go that wanted to see so-and-so.

LEE AMAZONAS: And the money.

IRMA LEVIN: And the money. Do you recall any big donors? They were still using in-kind, free.

LEE AMAZONAS: That was still going on?

IRMA LEVIN: And more and more.

FRED LEVIN: And there had to be some money coming in from someplace. At some point—and again, I don't know whether the programs indicate this—but at some point, I seem to remember there were industry donations. Maybe not necessarily from Hollywood, but suppliers, I believe, started to give a little bit, but I'm not sure. But somehow that sticks in my head, because I know there had to be some money coming in. Do the programs ever begin to list donors?

LEE AMAZONAS: In '65, they have different names, where you can tell that they are donors. And in fact, your name, in 1965, is listed in one of those donors lists. But before that, you see committees. And it may be that some of these folks on some of these committees really did give, or if you were chair of a committee, and we haven't been able to parse out yet. Bud received Italy's Star of Solidarity.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, he did. I could show it to you, if you wanted.

LEE AMAZONAS: Oh, I'd love to see it. We can take a picture.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Yeah, we'll take a picture. There was more than one?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, one is written, you know, when you get an invitation and it says, "Ribbons will be worn." That was one that you could wear. This is a little button, you know; the French have one. And he was given that; quite an honor.

LEE AMAZONAS: Do you remember the ceremony?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh yes, I do. It was at one of the last evenings. The then Consul General—Alex Sauvignon was his name—presented it at that time. It was quite festive. It had started to be worked on by Pierluigi Alvera. But I guess it took a lot of time, so that Pierluigi had left, and the next one was Alex Sauvignon, and he presented it to him. It was quite a thing.

LEE AMAZONAS: So they didn't tell him ahead of time, "We're going to be giving you something?"

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I think they said something about because he had done so much for the arts, that there would be some kind of recognition.

LEE AMAZONAS: And this was a big deal.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes it was. I don't know how big it is now, but it was then.

LEE AMAZONAS: They still give them out.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And where did this take place?

IRMA LEVIN: One of the hotels.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Was it during the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: It was the last gala.

LEE AMAZONAS: There seemed to be quite a few parties in 1960, and one of them was a party for the foreign film theater owners at the Fox Theater. Do you remember this? Was this something you might have attended?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, I'm sure I attended it. I remember a party, but I don't remember it at the Fox Theater.

LEE AMAZONAS: This is, again, from Herman Weinberg. He wrote about the Star of Solidarity and a number of these other details, which you don't find in the local newspapers.

IRMA LEVIN: I'm surprised.

LEE AMAZONAS: I was quite surprised as well.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Is that the Fox Theater on Market Street?

LEE AMAZONAS: Just a few years before it was demolished. One thing that Weinberg said about Bud was, he was Ben-Hur, but he was controlling both chariots at the same time.

IRMA LEVIN: I think he was controlling more than that. (LAUGHS)

LEE AMAZONAS: And Bud told Weinberg that this was the biggest investment, from a financial standpoint, and Weinberg, after that, declared it as one of the world's major festivals. He said that there was no question about it, but that there needed to be more publicity, saying that there wasn't enough of it, that there would have been more people coming if there had been more publicity. It seemed like there was a lot of publicity.

IRMA LEVIN: It seemed like that to me. The critics were very good. The society editors were wonderful. I don't know how much more they could do. They had, as I say, they had windows in the stores downtown. They had as much, I guess, that was possible at that time.

LEE AMAZONAS: One thing I also noticed was that the fashion editors started having Festival-related layouts in the newspapers.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right. And the society editors talked about what people wore and what they did.

LEE AMAZONAS: A couple of them mentioned what you wore, and just absolutely everybody who came.

IRMA LEVIN: Right. They were very, very cooperative.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Do you remember any of them? Did you know any of them?

IRMA LEVIN: I knew them all. One is still alive. I can't think of her name, though. But Blanche Barnett was from the **News**. Then there was another one, and her husband was a photographer. She was terrific. She used to go to Paris, but I can't remember her name, and he was a photographer. Their names were in the paper for everything.

LEE AMAZONAS: Are you talking about guests from society, or is this the society editors themselves?

IRMA LEVIN: The editors.

LEE AMAZONAS: You had mentioned something yesterday. I think the quote was that you were frightened, that they sometimes frightened you, the society editors.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I was very frightened, only once, and that was the first night, when we had the group before the first showing. It was Blanche Barnett; we were very close friends after that. She phoned up, and she asked, "Who is the designer that will design your gown?" And I didn't answer her.

And she said, "Well, I want to know where you bought the dress, and who designed it." Then she tried to explain again what she meant by a designer. And finally, I just started to laugh. I said, "I don't have a designer. I make my own clothes." (LAUGHS) That's what frightened me. But it was OK after that. I'm trying to think of the society editor that's still alive. The society editors were wonderful, because there were a lot of quotes about people who came and what they wore. And I guess people were interested, as they are for the opera.

FRED LEVIN: You have to remember, at the time, there was the opera and the symphony, and there really wasn't much else, so this was something they could all write about. And the coverage was really incredible for what was going on in the city. If you go back through, you know, it's just volumes of stuff. I think it filled a need for them, too, you know, gave them something to write about.

IRMA LEVIN: I think Grace [Preen] was one too, and she's still around. But that's not the one I'm thinking about. But if you go back under society pages, there's a lot. Sometimes there were two or three in one night.

LEE AMAZONAS: I did notice that. In fact, when we get to 1961, I have a number of questions related to that, because that year, there were many parties.

IRMA LEVIN: And the mayor would come. In fact, one night, we saw the mayor three times, and he said to Bud, "I know what I'm running for; what are you running for?" (LAUGHS)

MIGUEL PENDAS: Well, he was running for United States Senator, right?

IRMA LEVIN: No, he was running to be reelected as mayor.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Oh. Because he did run for Senator.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, we're now at 1961. I've got a page from the "Inquiring Photographer," and the question was, "Why do you work with the Film Festival?" And I've got eight folks here who were volunteers.

IRMA LEVIN: How nice!

LEE AMAZONAS: And so I just want to show it to you and see if you remember any of these folks?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't know one of them.

MIGUEL PENDAS: They all look about college age.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah. Maybe Fred will. I didn't. Not one name comes to mind. I didn't read the whole thing. Does it say how long they've worked there? See, as Fred said, they could be folding envelopes—

LEE AMAZONAS: For one afternoon.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah. But probably they would hope that a movie star would come in. That was the ultimate.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, what I noticed was, all of them had jobs, though.

FRED LEVIN: They could have been drivers, they could have been anything.

LEE AMAZONAS: OK. Just thought I'd ask.

IRMA LEVIN: Don't ask, don't know.

LEE AMAZONAS: In '61, there was a two-month tour of Europe and Asia during the summer of '61. And I think you mentioned that you went on this trip. This was the same year as the Moscow Film Festival. Do you remember where you went on this trip?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I guess when we were in Moscow, we had tour guides. And they would take us around. But I can't really tell you.

LEE AMAZONAS: Was this the year that you first went to Hong Kong?

IRMA LEVIN: When did I go to Hong Kong? Well, it had to be before they came with the picture, because we would have had to have made arrangements and met them at that time. I can't really tell you.

FRED LEVIN: Whatever the trips are that are mentioned, my mother was there. My father never went alone. They were always there. But I do not ever remember a two-month trip.

IRMA LEVIN: No, no. We couldn't have been away that long, because I also had children that I had to worry about!

MIGUEL PENDAS: When you went to Moscow, was that like an official invitation to attend the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, absolutely, yes. The Zellerbachs were with us. And we had a guy. And it was about film, you know, because he was President of the Art Foundation. You couldn't go if you didn't have an invitation.

FRED LEVIN: Miguel, they were always by invitation. All the festivals, you didn't just go to Cannes and hope to buy a ticket to a movie. I mean, it was really an official trip. He went representing the San Francisco Film Festival, and was involved in everything that was going on in the individual festival that they were visiting. It was all set up in advance, what they were going to see, what parties they were going to. Everything was all programmed.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Now, would you go to see a film?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, sure. You went to all the films.

MIGUEL PENDAS: But did they have interpreters with headphones, or subtitles?

IRMA LEVIN: Both. Because they were set up hoping that the film buyers would come and buy the film. And that was the purpose for us to go, too, to meet the producers and the directors, and see if they had a special film, because in those days, the films could not be shown if they'd been shown inside the United States. Today, they show you a film that has played.

MIGUEL PENDAS: When the Festival got its A rating, what year was that?

LEE AMAZONAS: That was '64.

IRMA LEVIN: It took a while.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Yeah, because it was one thing to be recognized; it was another thing to get the A rating.

IRMA LEVIN: If you weren't recognized and get an A rating— I don't know which came first.

FRED LEVIN: Oh, sure, because you were going long before that. Even before there was an A rating, you were going to all the film festivals.

LEE AMAZONAS: Recognition happened in '58.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh well, there.

LEE AMAZONAS: There was no mention of a prize for best musical score for '61, as there had been in '60. It did pick up again in '62. Did you know Milhaud?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. We did know him before. As I said, Bud picked up the phone and had a meeting, and explained what we were doing, and we'd like to have something in his honor. That was it.



LEE AMAZONAS: This particular year, '61, there was a panel of five judges on the jury for the first time, and they were very international. And every year, it seems like there's a very fascinating mix of folks. Did Bud just pick up the phone to line these folks up? Did he have an advisory group?

FRED LEVIN: He had met most of them at other film festivals. He knew who they were, and they knew who he was. So it was a timing thing, whether they could do it or not.

LEE AMAZONAS: It might be a Soviet film reviewer, or it might be Josef von Sternberg. It was a wide, wide variety of folks.

IRMA LEVIN: But he's right; he met them, and they knew him, and he knew them. And then he would, I guess, send a letter or however. But it was always his choice.

LEE AMAZONAS: The Russian delegation, once again, was large and very well interviewed. And this year, much was made in print of the very chic looks of the Russian women. They seemed like the centerpiece of the Festival.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh they were, absolutely, because they were very charming, very. We had to do something with them.

IRMA LEVIN: By that time, it had filtered through how wonderful it was to come to San Francisco. And it wasn't as difficult. And they didn't have that many interpreters. Now the first group, with Karaganov, they abandoned their interpreter. They said, "We will get along fine." And then, when we went to Russia, we saw them. They entertained us. They were wonderful.

LEE AMAZONAS: That might have been this trip in '61, when you went to the Moscow Film Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, probably. They were wonderful. And the director—I can't remember his name—or the head of the film festival, or maybe the motion picture industry, invited us for lunch and said he could only give us an hour. Four hours later, and vodka all over, they were wonderful. And then it

wasn't difficult to get their films. After we were in their country, and Bud spoke to the people who were heads of the motion picture industry, there was no problem at all.

LEE AMAZONAS: It seemed like there was no problem getting the local papers to review them either.

IRMA LEVIN: Well it was pretty exciting to have those films here.

LEE AMAZONAS: And the individuals.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right. And they were very nice. And it was a one-to-one. In other words, it was after he spoke to the heads of the motion picture industry, in Budapest. Frank, where did the little puppet come from? Was it Budapest? When did we have the film that was not Coca Cola, but the reverse of that?

LEE AMAZONAS: **Lemonade Joe?**

IRMA LEVIN: Maybe that was it. Where did it come from?

LEE AMAZONAS: Czechoslovakia.

IRMA LEVIN: Czech, yeah. When we went there, they were very, very wonderful. We went there several times to meet with them. But that helped, one-to-one—not through letters, not through telephones—one-to-one.

LEE AMAZONAS: Or for organizations.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right. Always the heads of the motion picture industry for those countries. And they were all subsidized, you see. The government paid for everything. They paid for their trips here; they paid for everything. Very unlike here, for the arts.

LEE AMAZONAS: I read a number of articles that implied that Jack Warner was particularly against the San Francisco International Film Festival because he considered it too “red.”

IRMA LEVIN: And competitive.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, and competitive, but it seemed, in fact, in ‘61, there was a lot in the papers about Bud keeping open a slot for **The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone**, until the very last minute. And seeing that he had some idea that he might get the film, but I guess my question on this is, do you think that part of Hollywood’s non-participation in the Festival was this idea that perhaps this would be a hotbed of “reds?”

IRMA LEVIN: I don’t remember any of that.

FRED LEVIN: I will tell you that in my memory, every year, it was something new. Every year, there was another reason. Hollywood wanted nothing to do with it. Even when they finally got involved, sending pictures or sending stars, it was, I think, under great duress from the film community, whether it was international or national. They never wanted anything to do with it. It was something that should have been in Hollywood all along. San Francisco had no right to it. And they were never, ever supportive in the years that my father was the director.

LEE AMAZONAS: That seemed to be the case, and not only not supportive; it seemed as if they did some things to try to undermine it.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, yes.

FRED LEVIN: So even if they sent a group, they would then get negative stories planted in the trades. The trades were never supportive. There was no support whatsoever.

LEE AMAZONAS: I was surprised, even starting around this time, though, **Variety** does write, why is Hollywood ignoring this festival? It’s there. It’s a real thing. Wise up.

IRMA LEVIN: I wish I could remember the reporter from the **Hollywood Reporter**, whose son I think is now doing it, was very kind, and a very nice friend. But I can't remember his name for the life of me.

LEE AMAZONAS: 1961 had two films that were lost in transit: one from India, **Devi**, and an Israeli film as well. And then there was one withdrawn at the last minute, **A Taste of Honey**.

MIGUEL PENDAS: It was withdrawn? Not shown?

LEE AMAZONAS: At the very last minute; it was replaced with another British film, and one of far less quality. And I think there was another film that year that was completed in the lab just hours before it was scheduled to go on, so there was kind of a rush to the theater. Did Bud always have a Plan B for these near disasters?

IRMA LEVIN: I'm not sure. I know he had a lot of worries, and I don't think he had a Plan B. But you see, to go back, Hollywood thought that it would be competition for the Academy. That was their main problem. And the lady who named the Oscar, Margaret Herrick—they named the new library for her—looked at the statue; she told us the story, so I know it's true. She looked at the statue and said, "Oh, it looks just like my Uncle Oscar." And she was helpful, too.

LEE AMAZONAS: She was helpful to the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes.

LEE AMAZONAS: In what way?

IRMA LEVIN: If he found a film, they would know about it. And she was very nice. She would give him information about a film.

MIGUEL PENDAS: She attended the Festival. I don't remember what year.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, yes. She attended the Festival. And when we went to Los Angeles, she and a lot of these people turned out to be very good friends. In fact, she was such a good friend that—this has nothing to do with the Festival—she would call him early the morning that they had decided who was nominated for the Academy, so that he could put it in his own theaters. Is that good? That's what a good friend she was. She was a charming woman, Margaret Herrick. We made a lot of friends.

LEE AMAZONAS: I was just wondering about Plan B because it did seem as if, in spite of these films being withdrawn he always had a backup.

IRMA LEVIN: He must have had it; we just didn't know about it. Don't you think so, Fred?

FRED LEVIN: I think he'd shift things around, or he was able to redo the program. I don't know.

IRMA LEVIN: Maybe there was a film that he wasn't sure about, but he had it. I couldn't tell you that.

LEE AMAZONAS: And that was from early on, from the first year?

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, but as he said, it was too much trouble to take those films back, so they just left them, because it was easier that they could take them. A lot of them brought the film with them.

LEE AMAZONAS: That still happens sometimes.

MIGUEL PENDAS: You're talking about films that were withdrawn, and we're in 1961, but we didn't talk about the biggest withdrawal of all, which was in 1960, **La Dolce Vita**. It was front-page news. About two days before opening night, Bud found out that he wasn't going to get **La Dolce Vita**. Do you remember that? In fact, Fellini tried to intervene, but he no longer had any rights to the film.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, the reason I hesitate is because they talked a lot. You know, they were friends, Fellini and Giulietta. Maybe that's where the friendship started, that they couldn't get the film. I don't recall that at all. But I could see where you'd be upset not getting it.

LEE AMAZONAS: Yes, especially since it was so highly promoted.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And they gave him such phony excuses.

FRED LEVIN: Does the press say what it was replaced with?

LEE AMAZONAS: It was **Night over Rome**; another Italian film.

FRED LEVIN: So they could have said, “You can’t have this, but we’ll give you this.”

LEE AMAZONAS: There was some talk in the press that it was up against **Ballad of a Soldier**, and it was either in Venice or at Cannes, it nearly lost to **Ballad of a Soldier** for the number-one spot. And there was some idea that they didn’t want to lose in the competition to that film. And at yet another festival, **Ballad of a Soldier** didn’t even play, and they won there. So I think they were a little nervous. That was the theory at the time. After years of critics who thought the Festival needed more glitz, like Cannes and Venice, in ’61, there was a starlet named Jeri Elam, who was the daughter of a character actor, Jack Elam, who took a dip in the mirror pool at the Legion of Honor. There were pictures in the paper. Do you remember any of this?

IRMA LEVIN: I don’t remember that at all.

LEE AMAZONAS: To me, it looked like someone saying, “OK, you want Venice? You want Cannes? Here we go.”

MIGUEL PENDAS: She must have seen **La Dolce Vita**.

LEE AMAZONAS: Yes. And in the paper, they made sure to let you know she was very careful to not get her dress wet.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh. (LAUGHS)

LEE AMAZONAS: Now, you mentioned Mervin LeRoy earlier. Now, I didn't find any evidence that he was at the Festival in '61, but he was quoted in the **Examiner** as saying he saw no value in film Festivals whatsoever. Do you remember him being at the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. Now, who was the man we talked about that I said was honored? He was an actor. He was in all the horror movies. Vincent Price. Vincent Price was a guest. I think Albert Johnson had something to do with his being here. And for some reason or other, Mervin LeRoy was at one of the parties with his wife. Somehow, I got seated with them. He was a little bit older and forgetting a lot. But I knew his whole family. And because maybe I talk too much, I mentioned him. He was from San Francisco. I think he was—I can't say not all there, but maybe losing some of it. And somebody may have interviewed him at that party. That's when he was there. I think he knew Vincent Price. I don't think he had an invitation. But I do remember having dinner with him the year when Vincent Price was here.

LEE AMAZONAS: The Film as Communication Competition began the year before, but it seemed like it was all over the papers in '61.

IRMA LEVIN: He's the first person I ever heard say film was a form of art, and through film, you could communicate all over. Was there an award for that?

LEE AMAZONAS: There were awards for this.

IRMA LEVIN: That's what I remember, that he was so positive that if this got out, that this is something that would encompass everybody. He always said it was a form of art.

LEE AMAZONAS: He had a wide variety of films.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, I remember that. But I can't give you particulars.

LEE AMAZONAS: Again, the juries were very prominent filmmakers. Again, I guess he used his Rolodex. Stanley Eichelbaum, in the **Examiner**—

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, he was great. Stanley was a wonderful man, and very honest. He didn't miss a thing. And he's only gone, what, about two years?

LEE AMAZONAS: He later became a chef.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, great chef. He came to everything. We used to see him all the time.

LEE AMAZONAS: I could tell he was certainly at the Festival, and he was very witty about it. He reported in '61 that an independent L.A. producer threatened to walk out with his film, because he needed more seats for his "outsized delegation." I'm assuming this is John Hoyt, who made **The Glass Cage**, which was an independent American film that was being shown that year. Do you recall any of this at all?

IRMA LEVIN: I remember there was something about somebody that didn't have enough seats, but I couldn't tell you who or when; there were lots of things like that. At the big affairs, everybody wanted a table up front, and there were always people calling, "I'm a friend of so-and-so's; I want a good table." They gave the awards, usually the last night, at a large hotel, and there were people coming out of the woodwork. They wanted to be sure they'd have a table in front.

LEE AMAZONAS: So how did those kinds of disputes get resolved? Who usually resolved them?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, the answer was, "I'm not in charge of setting the table."

LEE AMAZONAS: Or any of these kinds of disputes. Would Bud do one-on-one?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, if he could, or he'd pass it on if he could. It all depends, you know. It always worked out.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Were these galas organized by the Festival?



IRMA LEVIN: Yes. They sold tickets. Am I right?

FRED LEVIN: I don't know who organized them.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, the Festival. I don't know how much the dinners were. I think the last night got to be a hundred-and-some dollars to go, which was a lot of money then. And it was always full.

LEE AMAZONAS: Speaking of parties, I noticed that the Consulate of the United Arab Republic put on one of the cocktail parties.

IRMA LEVIN: Everybody. It's unbelievable how cooperative they were.

LEE AMAZONAS: And the fact that they were serving alcohol wasn't an issue?

IRMA LEVIN: No, it was not an issue.

LEE AMAZONAS: There were many socialites listed, as we talked about before, in a variety of hosting roles for the Festival. And also, they were the folks who really arranged those galas at the end. Are there any particular that struck you as key in these events? I certainly have lists and lists of names, and I have a few here whose names came up a lot. Marian Davies Lewis?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. She gave parties. She arranged things. She was wonderful.

LEE AMAZONAS: I was thinking that we might want to talk to her. She's still very busy, very active.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, sure, yes.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Do you remember how she became involved?

IRMA LEVIN: A volunteer. Her son was very interested in wanting to be an actor. He was a young boy at that time. She was wonderful. Who else?

LEE AMAZONAS: Isabelle Flood Obrush?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, Isabelle Flood also. If you want to say society, they were. I think she passed away recently; I'm not sure. Who else?

LEE AMAZONAS: Phyllis Frazier.

IRMA LEVIN: You know the stories of Phyllis Frazier. She was the gal about town.

LEE AMAZONAS: She did seem to be.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, boy! Gorgeous! I heard even Herb Caen, everybody took her out. It would cost maybe a \$1,000 gown to do this. She killed herself. And we went to the funeral at Grace Cathedral. Oh, the gossip about her! She was gorgeous!

LEE AMAZONAS: Dibble, there were several Dibles. There was Oliver Dibble, there was David Dibble, there was Mrs. David Dibble.

IRMA LEVIN: Oliver Dibble; that name is familiar, but I don't know who they were. George Hale and his wife, they're both gone, but they were very much involved. Oh, I'd love to see the list.

LEE AMAZONAS: I've got lists. There was one night where a major party was being held for the Festival, and it was the same night that Ingrid Bergman's daughter was holding a party for her right here in town.

IRMA LEVIN: Pia?

LEE AMAZONAS: Yes, although they called her Jenny in the articles. And I didn't realize, but she was married to a local Carley.

IRMA LEVIN: I don't know, but she was engaged briefly to the guy who was on public television for years? Who's the one that was every morning? Oh, maybe it wasn't public, everybody listened to him every morning.

FRED LEVIN: Are you talking about Don Sherwood?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. She was engaged to Don Sherwood.

LEE AMAZONAS: OK. And she was holding a party for her mother the same night as a major party here, and many of the names that usually show up at the Festival were there. Do you remember this?

IRMA LEVIN: No. She's very active, I think, on television in New York.

LEE AMAZONAS: She was. In fact, I thought at this time I used to see her on TV in New York. In '61, your name is starting to show up a lot more in the Festival reports. Is this because your role expanded, or you were just getting credit for what you'd been doing all along?

IRMA LEVIN: Maybe they didn't have anybody else to write about. I didn't do any more than I always did.

FRED LEVIN: I think it was just more press. In what context?

LEE AMAZONAS: In the context of, you were there, this is what you were wearing, the ever-gracious hostess—I would see those phrases.

FRED LEVIN: That's just more coverage, because it was probably when the parties got bigger and more people were attending, or the city was giving the Festival more PR. It had grown. That would have been, what, four years in. But her role was pretty constant throughout the whole experience.

LEE AMAZONAS: Now we're at 1962, and the very first question I have here, you answered way beyond our wildest dreams yesterday, but this is about that silent Thai film.

IRMA LEVIN: (LAUGHS)

LEE AMAZONAS: You did tell me that there were some problems with one of the critics, but did the audience seem to enjoy the film?

IRMA LEVIN: You know, I don't remember.

LEE AMAZONAS: Did you enjoy it?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I had seen it in-person before. I think maybe there wasn't enough good publicity before it was shown, and maybe the audience was small. It was a disaster.

LEE AMAZONAS: This was the year, in '62, that the Board of Supervisors actually authorized \$20,000 for the Festival. What made the difference that year?

IRMA LEVIN: Maybe they paid bills; I don't know. Or maybe they were able to pay for things that they didn't before.

LEE AMAZONAS: And this, again, is a year where Darius Milhaud was back, judging film scores. Do you remember? And I think this was a time where they started naming the award after him.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, I do remember. I remember him being there, because he was in a wheelchair, and it was a little confusing to get him up on the stage. That, I remember.

LEE AMAZONAS: Again, this is a year where there's more Hollywood undermining the Festival. They announced a planned international film festival for Hollywood the following year. You remember this?

IRMA LEVIN: The planning, the publicity was a disaster, I think.

*TAPE 2 ENDS*

*TAPE 3 BEGINS*

IRMA LEVIN: I don't think there's any other international festivals in this country, are there? There are a lot of festivals, but are there any more international ones?

FRED LEVIN: Oh, sure. Sure, they all are.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Yeah, dozens.

LEE AMAZONAS: This is a year where Blake Edwards actually sounded like he wanted **Days of Wine and Roses** to show, but Jack Warner stopped it. Do you remember anything?

IRMA LEVIN: I remember the disappointment.

LEE AMAZONAS: I've got a whole list here. I don't need to go into all of them. A rough cut of **Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?** was previewed at the St. Francis just before the Festival was to begin. There was another film they showed as a world premiere. I mean, it seemed like one little attack after another.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right. It did happen. But I can't tell you why.

LEE AMAZONAS: Was Bud still continuing to attempt to get Hollywood cooperation with the same vigor?

IRMA LEVIN: I think so. He always wanted it. He never gave up.

LEE AMAZONAS: This year, '62, is the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis, which happened just before the Festival began. And according to the **Examiner** on October 30th, the Soviet delegation couldn't come, although the films were on the way. But the Russians did come a few days later, just missing one of the films. Now, do you know if their movements were restricted at that time?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't know if that was the time of Disneyland.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Well, '62 was the year that Tarkovsky came. And completely unknown at the time, of course. It was his first film. And now, Tarkovsky is very well known.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, sure. But I don't think it was restricted. I don't think so.

FRED LEVIN: There was so much going on in a two-week period that we wouldn't have known all those kinds of things. Unless it was in the paper, and we were reading it the same as everybody else, it wouldn't be like, oh my god, the Russians are coming, and they can't go here, and they can't go there. There was too much stuff going on.

IRMA LEVIN: Anyway, it was not the first time.

LEE AMAZONAS: No, it was the third year in a row.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right. So the first time, I don't think they brought as many interpreters.

LEE AMAZONAS: You referred to this earlier; this was the first year the Sixth Army Band made their appearance.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh boy, that was something. That was such a production.

LEE AMAZONAS: How did that come about?

IRMA LEVIN: He just got that idea.

LEE AMAZONAS: He just said, "Oh, let's get the band."

IRMA LEVIN: He just got that idea. And he was so excited about it. It was really—I can't even explain it to you.

LEE AMAZONAS: And the Army was happy to cooperate?

IRMA LEVIN: Well they must have concurred. It was phenomenal. So now, when they make a big deal about it, even in theaters, when they do it, I'm not impressed. (LAUGHS)

LEE AMAZONAS: So did they march down the street?

IRMA LEVIN: They marched down the center of the theater.

FRED LEVIN: First of all, everybody was seated. And where the band was prior, I have no idea. The Metro is very small. There was no green room to put them in. The entire theater was packed. And then, you started to hear them. And they come marching down. Once they got down, I don't even know how they turned around and got out, or what they did. I mean, the logistics; it was one of the best-kept secrets for an event that I can ever remember. I did not know this was going to happen, and I sort of knew what was going on. It was an amazing experience. And the scope of the sound a marching band would have in a little venue, it was—

IRMA LEVIN: People were just— It was unbelievable. Phenomenal. It really was. I think it's the one thing that will stand out forever with the Festival.

FRED LEVIN: And they didn't come marching down the street. It wasn't a big deal. All of a sudden, they were coming down the aisle.

LEE AMAZONAS: Which is much more dramatic than coming down the street.

FRED LEVIN: Absolutely, absolutely.

IRMA LEVIN: I think people were so stunned, no one could talk. I don't know what happened to the film. (LAUGHS) I don't know whether it had anything to do with the film.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, one person in the paper mentioned that the opening film was a Bulgarian film, and that the band did not play the Bulgarian National Anthem.

IRMA LEVIN: No, I guess not! That would have been terrible!

MIGUEL PENDAS: If it was the Sixth Army Band, then they must have come from the Presidio.

IRMA LEVIN: They must have had cars.

FRED LEVIN: The Presidio was not that far away.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Yeah, they could have walked over.

FRED LEVIN: Right. I'm sure they were in a bus or something. I don't know where they were, though, because they really were invisible until all of a sudden, they were there. They always had, I guess, as close to a red carpet kind of thing going on in the theater that they could, so the lobby and the sidewalk would be mobbed. And there were curious neighbors lined up to see who was going to come.

LEE AMAZONAS: That actually reminds me of something I did want to ask about. What was it like—especially on opening night—outside the theater? Were there folks gathered around?

FRED LEVIN: Oh, yeah. I mean, there weren't thousands of people, but there were hundreds.

IRMA LEVIN: And people hanging out the windows from the apartments across the street.

FRED LEVIN: And if I remember correctly, they did do a red carpet on the sidewalk kind of thing.

IRMA LEVIN: And they did take pictures.



FRED LEVIN: There were lots of cameras going off with flashbulbs. The TV stations were frequently there, interviewing and that kind of thing, but low-key compared to what you see now on TV. There were two hours worth of red carpet, not quite Cannes —

LEE AMAZONAS: But high key for the times.

FRED LEVIN: Very high key for the times, very, and they just came for the film. As I remember, there wasn't a whole lot of other stuff going on. There was the ballet. But there weren't a zillion events, like charity balls. It was pretty big stuff.

LEE AMAZONAS: This was also a year where there was a special award presented by **Show Magazine** at the Festival, intended for a film artist in any capacity who showed great promise, and they gave it to the Bulgarian filmmakers. How did this come about? Do you recall this?

IRMA LEVIN: No. I don't. Some of the things, I really wasn't aware of. Maybe I just forgot.

LEE AMAZONAS: Maximilian Schell was a guest.

IRMA LEVIN: And not only that, I remember at one of Martini's parties, at the winery, oh, everybody was so excited to be there. They heard that Maximilian Schell was going to be there, and, oh, the women — Well, he was fabulous, really great.

LEE AMAZONAS: He seemed to be interviewed quite a bit.

IRMA LEVIN: He was, very gracious, very gracious.

LEE AMAZONAS: Do you remember any stories about him?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, I do. Do you want to know how he got there? Is that a story?

LEE AMAZONAS: Oh, sure. It definitely is a story.

IRMA LEVIN: Eddie Dmytryk made a film with Max in it. I can't remember the name of the film.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Is it the **The Young Lions**?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. And we had met him at the Dmytryks' house. So he was invited to come to the Festival. And because we knew him—he didn't speak English at that time, very little—he was the most gracious, the most sought after. And that's what I can tell you about him. He was just terrific. Yeah. He was just a friend, and very happy to be there, so low-key.

LEE AMAZONAS: Really? Low-key? There was a coverage of him that was very high-key.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, he was very special, but in the house, he was just a guest.

FRED LEVIN: He wasn't demanding, I think.

IRMA LEVIN: No. See, a lot of this was all personal. You can gather that.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Yeah, but part of what we're trying to get at is what goes on at a film festival, besides the official events.

IRMA LEVIN: He was so gracious at the party, at the winery, that he couldn't do enough. People came up; could they have their pictures taken with him?

FRED LEVIN: He was very engaging and very willing to be a part of the festivities.

MIGUEL PENDAS: So '62, then, was one of the years that you went up to the Martini Winery?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't know when it started. He did it two or three years in a row, or more.

LEE AMAZONAS: Oh, at least, at least. Martini went on, it looked like, for at least four or five years.

FRED LEVIN: Do you have any references to Bette Davis being here?

LEE AMAZONAS: Yes, but it's later, about '69, when Albert Johnson brought her.

FRED LEVIN: She was there before then.

IRMA LEVIN: She was at our house.

LEE AMAZONAS: Was she really?

FRED LEVIN: She was there with her daughter, and she was pushing her daughter onto who?

IRMA LEVIN: I can't remember, Fred. I remember her walking in the house with the daughter.

FRED LEVIN: I don't remember her at the house; I remember her at the Film Festival.

IRMA LEVIN: No, she was at the house.

FRED LEVIN: She was here with her daughter. She was trying to get her daughter hooked up with a movie star. I don't want to be held liable. George Hamilton?

LEE AMAZONAS: George Hamilton was there in '63. Bette Davis's name does not come up during that year, but that doesn't mean she wasn't there.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, I remember her, walking in the door with her daughter.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Why was it so memorable? Didn't you know she was coming?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I never know who's coming. I don't know.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Oh, was this for the big event?

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah. One day I opened the door, and there were people there, and somebody said, “You didn’t expect us?” I said, “No, I didn’t.” And he had invited people for cocktails. I really didn’t know. Oh, for a big party, I knew. I didn’t expect her, no. She came in and she mingled. By that time, I was jaded, jaded and tired. (LAUGHS) It was fun. But you see, she wasn’t any more special than any of the others who came for the Festival.

MIGUEL PENDAS: One of the things that distinguishes this Festival is the interaction between the filmmakers, the audience, et cetera. And I can see that the roots are right back at the beginning. So we want to hear these stories.

IRMA LEVIN: There were very few that didn’t meld. I don’t remember anybody coming that wasn’t nice. There could have been some. But Fred, don’t you think everybody was very nice? They were very appreciative to be invited to our home, especially the foreign delegations, the Russians, the Mexicans.

FRED LEVIN: You have to keep it all in context of what was going on in the film-society world at that time. There were, what, six international film festivals in those years?

LEE AMAZONAS: And a sprinkling of other minor festivals, yeah.

FRED LEVIN: So a lot of these people knew each other or had friends in common. It wasn’t as competitive as things are today. It was a slower pace. It was kind of an industry of its own. And everybody was very pleased to be part of it, or they wouldn’t have come. And although everything was judged, and there were awards, and people used to say “Winner of the San Francisco Film International Film Festival,” there was a camaraderie, particularly outside of the country, the international community. So those who were really divas would have jumped out, because they were so unusual. You have to keep that in mind when you think about what was going on at the time. And for San Francisco, in the early years, it really was a very personal experience, and it was like a family. There were so few people involved. It was my father and my mother, and their home, and that was the focus of it, certainly

throughout my father's tenure, because I remember, even in '64, huge parties at the house. Everybody was very gracious.

LEE AMAZONAS: It was probably unusual to have that kind of personal touch at Cannes or Venice.

IRMA LEVIN: I have letters. Peter Fonda wrote the most beautiful letter. I don't like saying this—at the other festivals, as Fred said, it wasn't personal. You weren't invited to anybody's home; the man in charge of the festival didn't invite you to his house. They didn't have time for that. Our house was always open, and we did invite them. And as Fred said, they came, they had dinner with us, and they were so nice, because they had never done that before.

FRED LEVIN: But even at the time, Cannes and Venice weren't the size they are today. It was a fledgling industry.

IRMA LEVIN: So that's why I keep saying the things I remember happened in our home.

LEE AMAZONAS: Which helps you remember them.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right, absolutely. And it was wonderful. Bette Davis was here. And as Fred said, when the prince and princess brought all their family and slept all over the house, (LAUGHS) you know, I must say that it was different from what I ever expected of my life.

LEE AMAZONAS: One of the jurors that year was Jiri Weiss, the Czech director. And in an interview, he expressed surprise about the Northern/Southern California split. And he had suggested that in future festivals, there actually be a two-day trip to Hollywood. Do you remember this suggestion?

IRMA LEVIN: No, I don't, but it sounds like somebody would have come up with that. I don't think Hollywood would have enjoyed that.

LEE AMAZONAS: So foreign filmmakers could meet the producers and performers and see how they did things in Hollywood.

IRMA LEVIN: If they were invited.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, yeah. I think he didn't really understand that part of it. It occurred to me that—maybe you'll disagree—but maybe it wasn't so bad that big Hollywood films didn't make it here, because, well, for one thing, you had all these fabulous international films, but also American independents, whether they be shorts or features. And in '62, **David and Lisa** found its footing through its showing here at the Festival. Was this a consolation to Bud?

IRMA LEVIN: I've been trying to think of the man who was the artist in **David and Lisa**.

LEE AMAZONAS: Keir Dullea.

IRMA LEVIN: He died recently, I think. He wrote the most beautiful note. I'm glad you remember his name. They were wonderful guests.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And Janet Margolin was the actress. I think the director came, too, Frank Perry. Very underappreciated director.

IRMA LEVIN: Frank Perry came. He was also very nice. Yes, he did wonderful things.

FRED LEVIN: Lee, to address your question, I don't think that my father ever got over the lack of support from established Hollywood. I think that that was always a goal, was to get them to acknowledge the importance of San Francisco and participate in it, along with the world film community. So I don't think it was ever a consolation at any time.

MIGUEL PENDAS: But you bring up an interesting point. What was the San Francisco film community at that time?

IRMA LEVIN: The exhibitor people were not cooperative. They didn't cooperate at all. I think they thought if they ignored it, maybe it would go away.

FRED LEVIN: The other chains did not participate? They didn't come to anything? They weren't involved?

IRMA LEVIN: No. They were nasty. They were nasty.

FRED LEVIN: The Syufy's, the Mann's— None of them came?

IRMA LEVIN: No. Excuse me; not the Naify's.

FRED LEVIN: Well, I didn't say that.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, that's something else. Go ahead.

MIGUEL PENDAS: But today, everybody knows that there's a Lucas, a Coppola, a Robin Williams, et cetera. Was it anything like that, like people who maybe grew up here and kept coming back, or anything like that? Because Mervin LeRoy grew up here.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, but he came back because of Vincent Price, not because of the Film Festival.

FRED LEVIN: There was no film industry in San Francisco.

MIGUEL PENDAS: No, but some people have roots here and, well, for example, Alfred Hitchcock loved to come to San Francisco. He just liked it here.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, he never came to the Festival. Maybe no one invited him; I don't know.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Delmer Daves was another San Francisco—

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, Delmer Daves did come, I think, but as a friend, because we met him when we went to the festival in South America, Fred. Do you remember what festival it was?

FRED LEVIN: I think it was in Brazil.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Rio?

FRED LEVIN: No, I think it was São Paulo. Is there a film festival in São Paulo?

IRMA LEVIN: No. But we met Delmer Daves and his wife, and they came to the Festival as guests. What in the world was the name of the festival? Sorry. You can always find out, but I don't know.

MIGUEL PENDAS: I don't remember coming across his name.

LEE AMAZONAS: And this was a year when ten foreign delegations came, more than any other year. Then, in '63, **The Victors** came, which you probably remember very well.

IRMA LEVIN: Very well.

LEE AMAZONAS: Do you recall Carl Foreman and that relationship? Could you talk about him a little bit?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I don't think my Carl Foreman relationship has anything to do with the Festival; do you, Fred? I only know him through Walter.

FRED LEVIN: That was a big delegation.

LEE AMAZONAS: Yes, it was.

FRED LEVIN: All the stars were here. It was the Opening Night film. I think it was out of competition.

LEE AMAZONAS: It seemed that Carl Foreman had been, even before '63, a supporter of the Festival, and quoted in the papers, "I don't know what Hollywood's trouble is," and previously had tried to get an



American film here. And finally, it was only at his insistence, actually, that this film even came. So I was just wondering if you recall him at all.

FRED LEVIN: Do you know when you met him, what year you would have met him? He was a friend of my uncle's, a friend of my mother's brother.

IRMA LEVIN: I really can't tell you.

LEE AMAZONAS: OK. The New York Film Festival began the year before, in '62. And so I just want to see if that brought up concerns, any nervousness, or was there an idea that, well, we've been doing it longer.

IRMA LEVIN: I can't say. We had such a head start. I don't think so, but I'm not aware of it, really. It wasn't the same kind of a festival.

LEE AMAZONAS: They were showing the best of previous festivals.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right. And I don't think there were awards.

LEE AMAZONAS: Funding from the city seems to have been cut in half from the year before, so now it was down to \$10,000. Do you know why the city's support goes up, goes down? Bud is quoted as saying that it now cost \$100,000 to put on the Festival, and the financial losses are "borne by me personally." Do you have any comments on that?

IRMA LEVIN: No, I don't know.

LEE AMAZONAS: Were there more patrons or anonymous donors this time? Because one thing that he did mention was that there were—and it's a quote—anonymous donors.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, I'm sure there were, but I don't know who they were.

LEE AMAZONAS: In the same interview, Bud was asked about the rewards to him in staging the Festival. And he answered, “It encourages creative filmmaking, and leads to the discovery of worthwhile productions, and it also improves the film exhibition business.” I found that very refreshing and frank: Yes, I’m doing it for art, but I also see a business angle. Did he find that these kinds of statements then got used against him? That he might be using the Festival for business?

IRMA LEVIN: I don’t think so. There were lots of things used against him, but that wasn’t one of them.

LEE AMAZONAS: In interviews throughout his tenure, Bud said that the Festival needed more public support. Do you know exactly what he meant by that? Was it more people buying tickets? In my estimation, that’s what he wanted, was people to come up; it’s all so changed now. You see the people going to film school. It wasn’t that way.

FRED LEVIN: I think that public support has a broader context. I think that he meant not only people buying tickets, but people supporting the event in the city. Throughout his tenure, it was still him picking up the phone and saying, “I need this; will you help me? I need this; will you help me?” And when you consider the size of San Francisco, his contacts were a very small group of his personal friends whom he was going to. I mean, there was no real huge citywide support, which I think is where the convention group came in.

IRMA LEVIN: The Chamber of Commerce.

LEE AMAZONAS: I read that invitations for opening night in 1963 stated “Black-tie or national dress.” Do you recall there being much in the way of national dress?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh yes. The Japanese people came, the Indian people, ethnic groups came in national dress.

LEE AMAZONAS: It seems that one of the biggest headaches connected to administering the Festival happened in 1963. Bud was depending on the Mark Hopkins as the official headquarters, and to put up

the guests, but then the place got sold, and suddenly, the agreement on a handshake— What can you tell me about it? Are there any recollections you have about this?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, it was running around to different hotels. And I remember it; it was called the Jack Tarr then; they came. People even offered their homes.

LEE AMAZONAS: Did they?

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, some did.

LEE AMAZONAS: I read that lodging was found at the Continental Lodge and the Plantation Inn. And Festival guests, how did they react to the change?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't think anybody complained. If they did, I wouldn't be aware of it.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well if they did, you probably would have heard.

IRMA LEVIN: No, but I didn't, so I don't know. I mean, the hospitality was wonderful.

LEE AMAZONAS: And I see that the Hollywood contingent did get rooms at the Fairmont.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah. That was Dick Swig. He was wonderful. And also, the Lewins of the Hilton, too; everybody was very nice.

LEE AMAZONAS: What kinds of things did those individuals do?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, they gave rooms. I think the Hilton gave a party; I'm not sure. But they were so helpful, all of them.

LEE AMAZONAS: Speaking of Hollywood guests, I read that Columbia Pictures gave \$10,000 to the Festival, partly to help bring film critics in.

IRMA LEVIN: I have no idea. I couldn't tell you.

LEE AMAZONAS: Now, at 1963's Festival, there was no set jury when the Festival was about to begin. And then, when they finally got the Festival together, one member from Mexico, I think he checked in and then went off to sightsee and never returned.

IRMA LEVIN: Do you think that was what's-his-name?

MIGUEL PENDAS: Emilio?

IRMA LEVIN: Emilio! I think that's who that was. I'm not sure.

LEE AMAZONAS: Now, Columbia had required that nobody be permitted into the theater to see **The Victors** after 8:00 p.m. Do you remember this causing difficulty?

IRMA LEVIN: Sure. Well, there are a lot of people who have parties Opening Night, and then straggle in late, and that's what he didn't want.

LEE AMAZONAS: Arthur Freed visited the Festival. He said in the future, Hollywood would cooperate with the Festival.

IRMA LEVIN: Promises, promises.

LEE AMAZONAS: And at the time, was Bud enthusiastic about it?

IRMA LEVIN: He never lost his enthusiasm about everything.

LEE AMAZONAS: With all the emphasis on Hollywood glitz this particular year, and stars visiting the Festival—and they got quite a bit of coverage, and all of them are photographed with the local

socialites—did the international delegations feel slighted at all? I noticed that the press paid a little less attention to the Russians.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I guess they were getting to be old hat.

LEE AMAZONAS: One writer in the **Chronicle**—I think this actually might have been Stanley—was very, very impressed with the Opening Night Party; the amount and quality of the food, the champagne. George Hamilton and George Peppard were there. I think this is where Columbia Pictures' money came in, actually.

FRED LEVIN: Did it say where it was?

LEE AMAZONAS: It might have been at the Fairmont. I can double-check that. Do you recall this Opening Night being more opulent than the others?

IRMA LEVIN: They were all pretty nice, they really were. The older the Festival got, the fancier the parties.

FRED LEVIN: It was amazing what kinds of things we were doing at these parties; the ice carvings and the amount of food. I mean, they don't do it like that anymore.

LEE AMAZONAS: I only have one more question from '63. The Festival tried to give a special award to Carl Foreman, who refused it. So it was given to one of the international filmmakers. Do you remember this?

IRMA LEVIN: No.

LEE AMAZONAS: For '64, there were a couple of cover stories in Sunday supplements, interviewing Bud in great, great detail, and asking him about the entire history of the Festival. I'd just like to ask you about a couple of things. These articles were, in general, very positive. In one, from the **Examiner**, there's much made of Bud's ulcers in this article. How much of a physical toll did this take on him?

FRED LEVIN: I don't think it took that much of a toll. He was so passionate about it. But that year, at the end of the Film Festival that year, my mother and father both ended up in the hospital with bleeding ulcers at the same time, together.

IRMA LEVIN: (LAUGHS)

LEE AMAZONAS: And this was before it began. This interview happened even before the Festival had begun.

FRED LEVIN: Then it could have been the year before that they ended up in the hospital, and they could be referring to it this year. I don't remember. You wouldn't remember what year that was, would you? It was probably '63, come to think of it. It would have been '63. '64 would have been too late.

LEE AMAZONAS: And as we mentioned before, Bud's birthday, your birthday, your anniversary are all in late October, and by this time, the Festival is around that time. These personal events, were they overtaken by the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: The Festival took precedent over everything. The Leonis's had the most fabulous party.

FRED LEVIN: They owned a restaurant called the Greek Taverna.

IRMA LEVIN: They're both gone now. And they entertained for our 40th birthdays.

FRED LEVIN: Which would have been in what year?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I'm going to be 89. Go ahead; figure it out.

FRED LEVIN: What year were you born?

IRMA LEVIN: '16. Figure it out.

FRED LEVIN: So it wasn't your 40th; it would have been your 45th.

IRMA LEVIN: Our 45th, then. And they had a fabulous party for guests of the Festival, in our honor. It was lovely. But other than that, it was just another day.

LEE AMAZONAS: Bud, in this interview, mentions a trip that you were both on in Asia, flying from Taiwan to Hong Kong. You had planned to take a sightseeing tour, but it fell through. You left a day early, and the plane you should have been on crashed.

IRMA LEVIN: We were invited to the Taiwan Film Festival, invited by a fabulous couple. You know, the museum was not built, and in the mountains, they had all the treasures hidden in Taiwan. And we were invited to take a plane as part of the guests, to go there. The night before, we were invited to a dinner, and William Holden was there. We were the only Caucasians. We'd decided we're not going to the party. There was also a party then. We're going to the mountain to see the museum. And William Holden said, "Chiang Kai-shek's son took me there. There's nothing. Don't go there. Go on to Hong Kong." So we took him at his word, and we left the next morning to go to Hong Kong. The next day, in Hong Kong I was getting dressed, and the newspaper came. I shoved it at Bud, and he said, "Oh my gosh!" The plane that everybody was on—not William Holden—crashed. This man's whole company was killed. We were supposed to be on that plane. And Fred called. My other son was in Europe and didn't know it. My brother sent a cable, saying, "Are you alive?" My brother in London saw the list, and it said that there were two Americans on that plane. I can't think of the man's name—this man was the next mogul. He had just married the most beautiful gal, and William Holden was their best man. So he saved our lives. That's a true story. Very frightening.

MIGUEL PENDAS: You remember that phone call.

FRED LEVIN: Oh, sure, because I opened up the paper, and it was headlines in the San Francisco paper, something like, "Attendees at the Taiwan Film Festival Crash." And I knew that my father would have been on that plane. He wouldn't have missed an opportunity to do something that was off the beaten track. And so I just picked up the phone and called.

IRMA LEVIN: My brother had called the airlines, and they said that on their manifest, there were two Americans.

FRED LEVIN: Those were the good days, when you used to be able to find out who was on an airplane. You could call United Airlines and say, "Flight so-and-so, I'm looking for so-and-so."

IRMA LEVIN: But I will tell you, on that trip, Bud had an interview with Chiang Kai-shek. I have a picture of that, very exciting.

MIGUEL PENDAS: He must have been aware he saved your life.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, he must have been. But you see, it was not that he saved our life, but he lost his friend and the friend's whole film company.

MIGUEL PENDAS: That's right, he had just been their best man.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, the most gorgeous woman you ever met, with jewels. She was elegant. We were very flattered to be invited to their reception. It would have been after we came back from the mountain.

LEE AMAZONAS: Let's go away from this for a sec. I did mean to ask you about Run Run Shaw, and how you met him.

IRMA LEVIN: You know, I can't remember. Run Run Shaw has been a friend of ours for so many, many years. Do you have any idea, Fred?

FRED LEVIN: It had to have been through a film festival. I mean, there's no other way he would have met him.



LEE AMAZONAS: In this article, you are referred to—and I’m quoting here—as “the other half of the Levin team, who some say has as much to do with the selection of pictures in the Festival as he did.” Now, you’ve already assured me that that was not the case.

IRMA LEVIN: What a compliment! No, it’s just as Fred said; we went everywhere and did everything together. He could have turned to me and said, “Do you like it?” which would be normal in any film. I’d like to say I did, but I didn’t.

LEE AMAZONAS: It’s possible you had influence without knowing it.

IRMA LEVIN: I don’t know. But I’ll tell you a funny part. A lot of these films didn’t have interpreters. And they were—I remember this in India—they weren’t subtitled. And we would sit there and look at those pictures. And I wrote this story; I knew exactly what it was. I didn’t need an interpreter. And when I saw the film with subtitles, it had nothing to do with my story. (LAUGHS) Or maybe the interpreter was sitting next to Bud, and I was sitting on the other side. Those Indian films go on and on and on and on! I remember Satyajit Ray was supposed to be there. Fortunately, he didn’t come, and we got up and left, which you would never do; that’s an insult.

LEE AMAZONAS: And his films did win the first couple of awards. Now, ’64 was the year that the Festival gained the A rating. Do you have any idea what finally turned the tide?

IRMA LEVIN: Maybe persistence. Maybe success. I couldn’t tell you.

LEE AMAZONAS: It must have been a very thrilling moment.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, it was. Believe me, it was, very. It took a long time to get it.

LEE AMAZONAS: And this was also the year that the Festival moved to the Coronet. It was larger, but it did seem like a decision that Bud regretted very quickly.

IRMA LEVIN: I don’t know that.

MIGUEL PENDAS: But now, did the Festival move to the Coronet, or added the Coronet?

FRED LEVIN: No, moved. There were no more at the Metro that year. There was always only one venue.

LEE AMAZONAS: Did anyone else ever offer or suggest another theater?

IRMA LEVIN: No, they didn't, because you would have to pay for it. You see, these theaters were in the family company, and they didn't have to pay for it.

FRED LEVIN: And I think that's probably what the quote referred to when he said he bore the expense, was the fact that it was through his company that this whole thing was happening.

MIGUEL PENDAS: I don't know why I had the impression that there were still shows at the Metro, and they added the Coronet, and that people didn't like the Coronet because it was too far.

LEE AMAZONAS: There were no restaurants, was one thing.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Yeah, no nightlife around there at all. It was even more of a neighborhood theater than the Metro.

LEE AMAZONAS: But it was larger, and the Festival was getting more successful. Stanley Eichelbaum, who appears to be a friend of the Festival, states that, "This year, never has Levin been hit more severely than in recent months, especially by the press," for a number of things. Do you recall either which newspapers or trades or individuals had been most critical, or whether they were being unfair?

IRMA LEVIN: There were always things that they could pick on, but I can't tell you what they were. I know some of the things that they complained about, that it was getting to be too social. That was one thing.

LEE AMAZONAS: And Paine Knickerbocker, another Festival supporter, also seemed displeased in a way I had never seen him before in print, particularly for the reel mix-up in **Lemonade Joe**, that first reel. Do you remember that?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, I do. It was a sad time, just sad. It was a mix-up in previewing the film. And I can't tell you anyway. I've never seen, in all the years I was married, never knew my husband to be so upset and so hurt. And he didn't preview all the films. You know, that was not his job. So it was really very hurtful. I've seen things on television that, today, get mixed up. It was a bad time. And they were reporting it as they saw it. It all happened. And I remember we went on to a lovely, big party at the hotel, and Bud got his composure back. And then some of their society editors were very kind. They said the party went on, and everybody had a good time, because that's all they were interested in.

LEE AMAZONAS: And this was a year of more photos of revealing necklines—and this may have also been a part of the time, because we are in 1964 now—and more discussions in the papers regarding the bustlines of visiting actresses.

IRMA LEVIN: They oughta see them today.

LEE AMAZONAS: And particularly the Eastern Europeans, which I found interesting. And also, a North Beach exotic dancer came to Opening Night, I think, on the arm of her dress designer, which is how, I guess, she got an invitation. Do you remember any of this?

IRMA LEVIN: No I don't. (LAUGHS) Do you?

FRED LEVIN: No.

LEE AMAZONAS: It seems like it was part of his push for more glitz and glamour. Again, your name is mentioned in the clippings this year, even more than ever. Regarding opening night, and I'm quoting, "The gracious atmosphere was created in no small measure by Mrs. Irving Levin, who made a point of visiting each table." And then another is, "Welcoming guests was Mrs. Irving Levin, the unfailingly

gracious wife of the beleaguered Festival director.” And also, “Don’t count out Irma Levin as a full time partner.”

IRMA LEVIN: That’s very nice.

LEE AMAZONAS: And from what you told me before, it sounds as if you were doing this all along.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, ask my son. He’ll tell you.

LEE AMAZONAS: It wasn’t that your role was changing. And I think, too, it may be that, given when they mentioned that Bud was beleaguered— In retrospect, did this seem like the end of the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I think so. I don’t think it was a good way to end it. He worked very hard. I remember he made a speech on radio, and I think he said it was time to “put my baby to sleep.” It was hurtful, very hurtful. But I think it was all right. Everything has to grow. And he worked very hard, and how long can he do it?

LEE AMAZONAS: Bleeding ulcers and all.

IRMA LEVIN: But I think they were very unkind, I really do. He had done all this work, and had laid the groundwork for it. And whoever took over then, the Chamber of Commerce, they were so foolish; they didn’t ask him any questions. He would have been glad to give them help. It was a bad time, and I don’t think they were nice. I think it came almost to Peter Scarlet to talk to him. I don’t know how many years that was.

LEE AMAZONAS: That was ’83–’84 when Peter Scarlet came.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah. Claude Jarman was always very nice. Of course, he knew them, but they were not theater people. Maybe because I was prejudiced, but it was a hurtful time.

LEE AMAZONAS: So Claude Jarman was very friendly, but never asked for advice.

IRMA LEVIN: Nobody did. No one asked for any information. Peter was the first one to want to even talk to us. Teresa Cone used to say—and I have an article that Stanley wrote—you know, that they were very foolish.

LEE AMAZONAS: In 1965, I saw an article where—or it might even be in the program—where Bud's listed as a special advisor to the Festival.

IRMA LEVIN: Well I don't know when that was. Maybe it was. Who was the head then?

LEE AMAZONAS: It was Mel Swig.

IRMA LEVIN: Maybe. Maybe they called to ask him a question. I can't tell you.

MIGUEL PENDAS: It seems I recall there was some sort of a tribute to Bud, either in '65 or '66, or some recognition, something that they did.

FRED LEVIN: You were still going to the Film Festival in those years. I wasn't, but you were still going. It was moved to Masonic.

IRMA LEVIN: We went that one night, I think, and they had people up and down, protesting. And we were waiting, and it was raining. I have a picture. We walked up the stairs, and there wasn't anyone around. And they took our picture; it was on the front page. I never forgot it. And what they said was how lucky we were that he wasn't running it, because they had all this picketing. But I don't remember going a lot to the Film Festival.

LEE AMAZONAS: And this is in '65, the first year after Bud left the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, he said it was the year that it was at the Masonic. It was a party.

MIGUEL PENDAS: It had something to do with furs?

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, because they were protesting that you shouldn't wear furs.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Really? Way back then?

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah. It was terrible. They were throwing red paint. This is the end, right? What year was Topol here and won the award?

LEE AMAZONAS: It might have been this year. It's either '63 or '64. It was for the Israeli film.

IRMA LEVIN: Because there was a lot written in the paper about him. A lot. He was singing in a nightclub.

FRED LEVIN: We went one night to a restaurant. He got up and started singing.

IRMA LEVIN: But he was in a picture here. That's why he stayed.

FRED LEVIN: He wasn't here as a nightclub entertainer. But he went out one night and he got up and entertained.

IRMA LEVIN: But he always said that he was only recognized after the San Francisco Film Festival. And then he went on to make movies and do the rest. It was quite a thing in the paper about that.

MIGUEL PENDAS: We haven't asked you about Walter.

FRED LEVIN: Yeah, I was going to bring that up. That was 1960.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Now, was 1960 the year that he saw the film? Did he come every year?

FRED LEVIN: He did not come every year, but in 1960 **The Mouse That Roared** was in the Festival. It was out of competition. I think it was Opening Night, but I'm not sure. But I know it was out of competition.

LEE AMAZONAS: It was closing night.

IRMA LEVIN: And didn't we also have a film with what's-his-name, the actor that has, every year, a telethon.

FRED LEVIN: Oh, Jerry Lewis?

IRMA LEVIN: Jerry Lewis was here.

FRED LEVIN: I don't think he was in a movie. I think that was another event. I doubt it was the Film Festival.

IRMA LEVIN: Maybe you're right. And who was the one with the tooth? Did he come for a Film Festival?

LEE AMAZONAS: Terry-Thomas? He was in **The Mouse That Roared**.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, that's it. He was here.

LEE AMAZONAS: In fact, that seemed to be the beginning of the mention of Carl Foreman. That question must have fallen through the cracks.

IRMA LEVIN: But that's how it all evolved, because Carl Foreman did a lot in Europe for the people who were in the Unholy Ten.

FRED LEVIN: The blacklisted.

IRMA LEVIN: The blacklisted. He produced the film in his name. Dalton Trumbo was one. And it came out as Carl Foreman, because he had the clout that he could do it. That's what I remember. But Walter came.

LEE AMAZONAS: In fact, his name is mentioned in several articles that year, but they don't mention the family relationship.

IRMA LEVIN: It was pretty close.

FRED LEVIN: It was not mentioned on purpose. It was not an omission.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Do you recall his ever talking about seeing a film by Richard Lester?

IRMA LEVIN: He was the director of— Was it the Beatles?

MIGUEL PENDAS: Yeah, **A Hard Day's Night**. But it was years before, when Richard Lester was not known, and had just made a short film.

IRMA LEVIN: But that's how he chose it. And when he made **The Mouse That Roared**, Peter Sellers wasn't known either. He was on a little television show in London. None of them were known.

*TAPE 3 ENDS*

### **SEPTEMBER 3 INTERVIEW**

*TAPE 4 BEGINS*

LEE AMAZONAS: It's Saturday, September 3rd, 2005. This is Lee Amazonas interviewing Irma Levin in her home in San Francisco for the San Francisco International Film Festival Oral History Project. Also present are Fred Levin, Irma's son, and Miguel Pendás, Director of the Oral History Project. I just have a few follow up questions. They're mainly about people. Then I have some questions about Bud.



And then I've got lists of entertainment writers, society writers, descriptions of clothes you wore, and then many socialites. You spoke a little about Albert Johnson. And after he was a juror in 1958, was he a big supporter of the Festival during Bud's tenure?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't remember, but I don't think so. When did he teach at Cal?

LEE AMAZONAS: He was teaching in the '60s. I don't know when he started, but he was certainly there in the mid- to late-'60s. He may have started earlier than that. He was writing for **Film Quarterly** before that.

IRMA LEVIN: We remained friends, and we were in contact, but I don't really remember if he was a great supporter.

LEE AMAZONAS: Also, you mentioned the Naify family. You mentioned them in passing, and then I noticed that Mike Naify had appealed to Hollywood during the time of **Beloved Infidel** to bring more stars to the Festival. So I was just wondering if the family was supportive of Bud and the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: Marshall. The name is Marshall.

LEE AMAZONAS: Oh, they called him Mike in the paper.

IRMA LEVIN: That was his father. His father and my father-in-law were partners.

FRED LEVIN: The Naify were partners in San Francisco Theaters. So they were extremely supportive in that it was taking place in their theaters. I think they were as helpful as they could be.

MIGUEL PENDAS: What about the Nassers?

IRMA LEVIN: No. None of them had anything to do with the Festival.

LEE AMAZONAS: The next person I was going to ask about is Alvah Bessie.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, I just remember the name, and I remember he was very nice, and I think he was very helpful, but I can't tell you any more than that. And I don't know how long he was there.

FRED LEVIN: I think it was two Festivals. And I don't remember if he was full-time or only during the Festival, or, you know, for a period of months prior to the Festival. But I can see him sitting there, working late, so he was there for a while.

LEE AMAZONAS: And then Barnaby Conrad. He first started as a juror, but then his name shows up, he and his wife. Do you have any memories of either of them?

IRMA LEVIN: Well, they were supporters. Barney's name was very important. I remember them at the house, at parties.

LEE AMAZONAS: And then, in 1963, Tennessee Ernie Ford was the MC for the Festival.

IRMA LEVIN: That's the one I tried to remember. His voice is on the tape of the Festival. He was from the Golden Gate Bridge. That was what I was trying to remember. Don't you have a tape?

MIGUEL PENDAS: We do, we do.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, that's his voice. When you run it, you'll hear it.

LEE AMAZONAS: What was his connection with the Festival? It seems unusual.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, what was the name of the man who took the pictures? I think he got him. What was his name?

MIGUEL PENDAS: Oh, Morton Beebe.

IRMA LEVIN: Morton Beebe, and Bruce Campbell. Somehow, I think they were the ones that helped get Ernie Ford. I'm not sure.

FRED LEVIN: He was popular at the time and he had a voice that was very recognizable. I don't think he was really part of the Film Festival. He was part of the movie project.

IRMA LEVIN: That's right. And I think it was good publicity for him as well as the Festival. It's a wonderful tape. You should listen to it.

LEE AMAZONAS: And I guess they just brought him in while he was around to MC the awards—

FRED LEVIN: Because they were taping it.

LEE AMAZONAS: For 1958, '59 and 1960, in the little blurb that Bud wrote at the beginning of each program for those years, he thanked individuals who worked with him. After that, it seems that the amount of space that's given over to both him and Harold Zellerbach to write got cut in half, and then he just thanks the staff in general. But if you wouldn't mind, I wanted to show you this list.

IRMA LEVIN: I'd love to see it. Meryl Rabinovich, Dolores Jovick, Grover Sales, John Field, Norman Dorn. I don't recognize Joseph Durra. I don't recognize that name.

FRED LEVIN: That's a pretty short list.

LEE AMAZONAS: That was just from '58.

FRED LEVIN: Right. Dolores and Norman were regular San Francisco Theater employees.

LEE AMAZONAS: Then this is for 1959. This would be the advisory committee. Do you remember any of those folks?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, Abe Blumenfeld. That's interesting that he would be on here, because he was a theater man. George Christopher, of course. Well, these names are familiar, but I didn't know them. It says Planned Parenthood was a sponsor. This is very interesting.

LEE AMAZONAS: That's the list of sponsors of nonprofit groups that we talked about.

FRED LEVIN: Why don't you take a look at the next year, in that area that they've got highlighted, and let me take a look at the old one.

IRMA LEVIN: Those are all names that I remember, except Patricia Lindsey; I don't know her. See, it says Marion Conrad. They were very good. Almaden, Saul Bass. They were all in-kind. See, all of this would have been at Louie Martini's.

FRED LEVIN: Yeah, and various other events.

IRMA LEVIN: Now, I must tell you, the Park Commission was fabulous. The stage was decorated with beautiful trees, and it was all from the Park, beautiful. I think that should be noted. The staff that you have here, do you know the name Robert Greensfelder? Well, Dolores Jovick was his secretary. Marion Conrad and Dorothy Friend; Steven Moore was the manager of one of the theaters, so he also worked.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Was it the Metro?

IRMA LEVIN: No, the Vogue. John Field became a very successful architect.

FRED LEVIN: He did a huge project on Lombard, at the Embarcadero, one of the huge condo projects. Nice guy.

IRMA LEVIN: Williamson Mayo did posters. And he also was well known. His things were at the museum.

LEE AMAZONAS: So he designed the Festival poster?

IRMA LEVIN: He did some that Saul Bass didn't. Didn't he, Fred?

FRED LEVIN: I don't know if he did Festival posters or other things for the Festival, maybe dealing with specific movies, or other things.

IRMA LEVIN: In other words, when there was a Japanese movie, you remember the big Japanese stars he did? Huge. He did things like that. Nate Grossman managed the Metro. I'm very impressed with some of these.

FRED LEVIN: The advisory committee is sort of self-explanatory. As I have gotten more involved, I understand these things a little bit better. (LAUGHS)

LEE AMAZONAS: I didn't think they were advising on films.

MIGUEL PENDAS: The two people that were in the office, Norman Dorn and Dolores Jovick, seemed like they would have played a pretty big role day-to-day. Can you tell us anything about them?

IRMA LEVIN: She was the secretary.

FRED LEVIN: Today, we would call it the executive assistant, who truly fit that title.

IRMA LEVIN: She was fabulous. She worked for him for years.

FRED LEVIN: She did everything; you know, whatever needed to be done. And in the early years, she acted as what we would call the volunteer coordinator, because it was all her responsibility to stuff the envelopes, so if she could get somebody to help her

IRMA LEVIN: Gosh, you have wonderful titles!

FRED LEVIN: And Norman did all the publicity. The other people on the list obviously made considerable contributions, or they wouldn't have been listed. To the best of my knowledge, they would have been volunteers, particularly in these years.

IRMA LEVIN: I think Alvah Bessie would be somebody who got paid. Nobody else got paid. There wasn't any money.

LEE AMAZONAS: I think Alvah Bessie was working a little later with him, in '63 or so.

FRED LEVIN: Yeah. And it's interesting; even in '60, most of these contributors also look like they were still in-kind. Just by the company names, I can see what they were giving.

LEE AMAZONAS: In 1961, even though we don't have any employees listed here, I did make a copy of the advisory committee and the contributors, and it looks to be the same.

FRED LEVIN: Yeah, interesting. I actually probably have these programs.

LEE AMAZONAS: We were missing a couple of years. And even again, in 1963, more in-kind.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, I'll say. See, I worried about Louis Martini, but I see he had credit; he should have. And Oldsmobile gave us cars. It's all in-kind. And when it says Retail Merchants Association, you know what they did? They showed their windows.

LEE AMAZONAS: That's the windows you were talking about.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, beautifully done, with film and stuff.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Do you remember any particular store, any particular window?

FRED LEVIN: It would have been the Union Square shops at the time, the Magnins and City of Paris. I can't even remember what was around the square at that time.

IRMA LEVIN: See, that's the staff of the Festival and the Metro Theatre.

IRMA LEVIN: You see, the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau later gave tickets for things; you know, a boat ride or something. And the Park Commission, as I say, was just unbelievable.

FRED LEVIN: But in this one, they have uniform companies, Cadillac Motor Car, Coca Cola, Amstel Beer, Almaden.

IRMA LEVIN: Coca Cola was wonderful.

FRED LEVIN: Carbons Incorporated. Do you know what that was?

MIGUEL PENDAS: Carbon paper?

FRED LEVIN: No. That was for the arc lights; they were donated, so they didn't have to pay for the carbon. That was no small donation.

IRMA LEVIN: And the United States Customs Service, I said how wonderful they were, to be able to get all the films.

FRED LEVIN: In helping expedite the film and the visas.

IRMA LEVIN: And the Consular Core. I'm so glad, because the Consular Core was outstanding. Without their help, I don't know.

IRMA LEVIN: They got Coca Cola because the theaters had served for Coca Cola all these years, and they were friends of Bud's. And that would have been contributed income, in addition to in-kind.

LEE AMAZONAS: And is it Coca Cola, as the international cinema, that will create world peace?

IRMA LEVIN: That's right. Well, you sure have done your research. This brings back a lot. I wonder what the San Francisco Municipal Railway would do today, when they've raised the price of the cable cars to \$5.00. (LAUGHS)

LEE AMAZONAS: You told me a little bit about one of the entertainment writers, who you knew well, Stanley Eichelbaum. And I have a few more listed here. I've got Paine Knickerbocker.

IRMA LEVIN: Paine and Nancy Knickerbocker were very, very good friends. He was on the **Chronicle**.

FRED LEVIN: And they were very supportive in giving coverage to the Festival during the year, and during the two weeks of the Festival pre-publicity; anything they could do.

MIGUEL PENDAS: I get the impression from Paine's articles that he must have talked to Bud quite a bit.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, he did. They were friends, beside the Festival, you know, because Bud used him for advertising the theaters, so he knew these people. And they were very supportive, all of them.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And you were friends to the extent of having dinner together?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, yes, having dinner together, always.

FRED LEVIN: Parties even, you know, beyond the Festival.

LEE AMAZONAS: Teresa Cone.

IRMA LEVIN: Very good friend. She was with the **News**, or the **Call Bulletin**.

LEE AMAZONAS: And then the **News Call Bulletin**, right?



IRMA LEVIN: She was publicity. She came to the films, she came to the parties and wrote about them. And when we went to Budapest, we saw her family, so we were good friends. She had a wonderful husband who made violins.

LEE AMAZONAS: Emilia Hodel? I think she was at the **News**.

FRED LEVIN: I think so. I remember the name.

IRMA LEVIN: No, I don't remember her.

LEE AMAZONAS: And Hortense Morton. I thought it was either the **Chronicle** or the **Examiner** in the very early years, I think before Stanley Eichelbaum.

FRED LEVIN: I think you're right.

IRMA LEVIN: I think so, yeah. But even if she stood in front of me, I wouldn't know her.

LEE AMAZONAS: Then I've got the list of society writers. Ursula Cole Castle.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, yes. She was a society gal herself and very, very nice. The society ladies were wonderful. I'm waiting to see which one is still alive.

LEE AMAZONAS: Blanche Burnett?

IRMA LEVIN: She was the **News**, and she was a wonderful woman. We were very good friends. She's the lady that had asked me who designed my dress. (LAUGHS)

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, she's very important, then. And then Merla Zellerbach.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, Merla Zellerbach is still a society writer.

LEE AMAZONAS: I thought I saw her name on the Web.

FRED LEVIN: She's with the **Nob Hill Gazette**.

IRMA LEVIN: But I have known Merla for many, many, many years.

FRED LEVIN: And you met her when Harold was involved.

IRMA LEVIN: Honey, I've known Merla for many years.

MIGUEL PENDAS: What is her relationship to Harold?

IRMA LEVIN: She was a former daughter-in-law. She was married to his youngest son, Steven. And she worked with the Festival. She was very dear. She still is. She's wonderful, and she writes beautifully.

LEE AMAZONAS: Those are the only society writer names I came up with.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, no, there's another one, and I can't remember; and she's still alive.

LEE AMAZONAS: There were many society columns that weren't signed.

IRMA LEVIN: No, she had a byline. Someday I'll remember it. She's still alive and she's still writing once in a while.

LEE AMAZONAS: She's still writing in one of the San Francisco papers?

IRMA LEVIN: No, no. Occasionally, you'll see something written by her, but I can't remember it.

LEE AMAZONAS: We can do more looking, but what I did was I went through everything we had, and those were the names we came up with. Then, there were two times I found your clothing described.

Once was in 1961; a brown sheath and coat, and the coat was embroidered, and apparently it came from Japan.

IRMA LEVIN: The material came from Japan. I still have a piece that big of the material.

LEE AMAZONAS: Do you really? Can we see that later, when we look at the dress you have?

IRMA LEVIN: Sure you can.

MIGUEL PENDAS: But now, when you say the material came from Japan—

IRMA LEVIN: I made the dress.

MIGUEL PENDAS: OK, that's what I figured.

LEE AMAZONAS: Right, because that's what you told Blanche Burnett when she asked you. There's an article that I made a copy of, that describes your dress, off-white, heavy silk dress with matching wrap, and there's a photograph. Now, it's extremely muddy—

IRMA LEVIN: It sure is.

LEE AMAZONAS: But there you are, between the two Zellerbachs. We're going to try to get an original, so that we can make a real photograph.

IRMA LEVIN: I don't remember that dress. I'm pretty good with this, because I have some pictures from the Festival with the dresses that I wore, but I don't remember that one.

LEE AMAZONAS: Now we're going on to the socialites. I went through the many, many names, and tried to tease out the ones that seemed to show up the most. And some of these folks were volunteers, but many of them are people who had come to the parties, and certainly, some did both. I divided a list

into couples, and then a lot of the women, who did a lot of the work, and then there's a list of men who seem to be escorts. So I've got Mr. and Mrs. Hunt Conrad.

IRMA LEVIN: That's Marian Conrad's husband. He was Barney's brother.

LEE AMAZONAS: Oh, OK. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Untermeyer. Did you know them?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. She was a Benioff girl. They did a lot.

FRED LEVIN: They were part of the Benioff family? And that was the furs?

IRMA LEVIN: That was the furriers. He was a nephew.

LEE AMAZONAS: Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur Magnin?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. That would be the Magnin family; not the I. Magnin family.

FRED LEVIN: Grover was what relation to Cyril?

IRMA LEVIN: Cousin, I think. Well, Cyril wasn't I. Magnin. It was related to the Magnin family.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Was Cyril involved with any of the department stores?

FRED LEVIN: Yes, he was the head of Joseph Magnin's.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And did he have some kind of role in the city as a goodwill ambassador or something?

IRMA LEVIN: A big role, huge. There's a street named for him.

FRED LEVIN: Was he head of protocol or something for the city?

IRMA LEVIN: I think so. We were friends. The whole family was supportive.

FRED LEVIN: The Cyril Magnin family in total was supportive.

IRMA LEVIN: Which would be Ellen and Walter Newman, and Donald and Elaine Magnin.

LEE AMAZONAS: The Richard Swigs.

IRMA LEVIN: That's the Fairmont Hotel. They were all supportive.

FRED LEVIN: That's Cissy Swig.

LEE AMAZONAS: There's a number of Swigs that come through the narrative.

FRED LEVIN: Right. But this is Cissy Swig.

LEE AMAZONAS: The Walter Haas's.

IRMA LEVIN: That's Levi-Strauss, big supporters.

LEE AMAZONAS: The John Uptons?

IRMA LEVIN: They were supporters. She was top, top society, Mrs. John Upton. You find her name everywhere. They were supportive.

LEE AMAZONAS: And when these folks were very, very supportive, they gave their time, they gave money, they gave parties?

IRMA LEVIN: Parties, yeah.

LEE AMAZONAS: Peter and Elise Salz?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. I think they're both gone. But they were very supportive. Maybe they were hostesses. I can't identify.

LEE AMAZONAS: The William Solares?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. They're part of the Zellerbach family. William's mother was a Zellerbach. She would have been Harold Zellerbach's sister. So the Solares are part of the Zellerbach family.

LEE AMAZONAS: Harold and Annette Dobbs?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. Harold Dobbs ran for mayor. He was a supervisor, but very supportive in the beginning. The early years.

LEE AMAZONAS: Dodie and John Rosencrantz?

IRMA LEVIN: They're part of the Naify family.

FRED LEVIN: She is, and he is a Spreckel.

IRMA LEVIN: His grandmother did the museum, the Legion of Honor.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Alma?

FRED LEVIN: Yeah, which was his grandmother. And she's part of the Naifys. He was society. Most of these people were society, and they would appear in the society column and the press around all of that.

IRMA LEVIN: Dodie Rosencrantz still is. She has a place in Venice and France, and a place here. She's still from society, Dodie Rosencrantz.

LEE AMAZONAS: The Leonard Ericksons?

FRED LEVIN: Now, they were friends.

IRMA LEVIN: Honey, she was the one who was Eddie's secretary. You remember? Yes, they were friends. And they were very supportive. She still supports the opera.

LEE AMAZONAS: Nancy and Reuben Hills III.

IRMA LEVIN: They are the original Hills.

FRED LEVIN: Were they your contemporaries?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, they were my contemporaries, yes. So would they be the original Hills? Yes. No, the next generation.

FRED LEVIN: Or the next one. Who knows?

FRED LEVIN: But they were Hills Brothers Coffee. And if you go through current society things, it would be Reuben, but a different wife. But he was Hills Brothers Coffee.

LEE AMAZONAS: Then I've got a list of the women whose names pop up. And probably their husbands went to a few parties as well. Mrs. Lester Goodman. She seemed like she had a number of positions, at least in the volunteer core.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. She and her husband were very supportive, very. She was everywhere. They lived at the Mark Hopkins.

LEE AMAZONAS: Mrs. Leon Tucker?

IRMA LEVIN: Those people were top society in San Francisco. I don't know whether they are now, but I know as I came into this, they were the top society. They were on the list that Pierluigi Alvera gave us.

FRED LEVIN: So they would have been, as you said, hostesses at parties, or that kind of thing.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, they would be invited to the big parties, when the Consul Generals had their parties.

FRED LEVIN: They weren't stuffing envelopes, though. They were not volunteering.

IRMA LEVIN: No, they weren't hosting. They were guests. You'd find their names everywhere.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And do you think that most of these people became involved because of someone like Pierluigi? Or were some of these people that you knew before the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: I didn't know any of them.

FRED LEVIN: It was one of the those things that became—which we talk about frequently—it became the place to be at this particular time in San Francisco; you know, the two weeks of the Festival, that was your social life for this group at that time. This was still being done in October, and I don't know what the Symphony season was, or what the opera season was, but they all turned out for this.

IRMA LEVIN: Now, we first met them when Pierluigi would have a big cocktail party. They would all be there. And they met the director of the Festival. So from then on, if an invitation came from somebody for the Festival—say, from another Consul General—they would all come.

FRED LEVIN: You had to be careful how you used this society. They didn't want to be the ones left out of the list. And that was their value, was increasing the profile of the festival through the parties. They were not talking about the quality of the films.

IRMA LEVIN: Or if they went.



FRED LEVIN: And that's how the Festival grew in notoriety, but was also one of the downsides, because it became so exclusive that a lot of people felt that it excluded the common man, and film was for the common man. So there was a huge change in the mid-'60s.

LEE AMAZONAS: Mrs. William Coblentz?

IRMA LEVIN: Bill Coblentz's wife, yes, absolutely. He was a very important attorney, and he's, I think, a regent at Cal.

LEE AMAZONAS: Whenever I later on could find a first name, I put it in, but these are also in order of years, and in those early years, it was hard finding a first name. Mrs. Joseph Martin and Mrs. Robert Cahill.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. The Cahill builders in San Francisco, absolutely.

LEE AMAZONAS: Then this individual seemed to be all over the place as a volunteer, Mrs. Gardner Mein?

IRMA LEVIN: Gardner Mein, yes, absolutely.

FRED LEVIN: He started the **Nob Hill Gazette**.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, it looked like she was doing more than showing up at the parties for the Festival.

FRED LEVIN: Could have been a volunteer.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, she could have been. She was very pretty.

LEE AMAZONAS: She's photographed a lot.

LEE AMAZONAS: Ann Coleman Woolworth. Related to the five-and-dime?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't know. Let's hope so.

LEE AMAZONAS: Then Rosemarie Polk.

IRMA LEVIN: She's one of the Russo twins. Yes. Is she the one that was married?.

FRED LEVIN: I think she was actually a volunteer.

LEE AMAZONAS: She shows up a lot because she was paired with George Hamilton the year he was here, so she's in the paper a lot.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, that's who it is. She was recently divorced. I don't want to put that in.

LEE AMAZONAS: Oh, it was in the paper that she had been. I mean, they mention that. Grace Cushing Warnicke?

IRMA LEVIN: Grace Warnicke, yes. Her father, I think, is a very important man in Washington. She used to live here. She doesn't anymore. She was a volunteer.

LEE AMAZONAS: Mrs. James French Jr.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, yes. That was Jimmy French. That was the automobile people. Which automobile did they have?

FRED LEVIN: I have no idea.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. Very, very, very active.

LEE AMAZONAS: Mrs. Frank Atlas? Joan Hitchcock?

IRMA LEVIN: Isn't she the one that was married to Melvin Belli? But the name is very familiar, and it must have come around a lot.

LEE AMAZONAS: Madeline Haas Russell?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. She was the head of protocol during the Film Festival. Levi-Strauss. She was the sister of Walter Haas.

MIGUEL PENDAS: She was the head of protocol for the city at the time? Does that entail doing anything for the Film Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: It was a very short time. I don't know. But I know that she was very helpful.

FRED LEVIN: She was a major player.

LEE AMAZONAS: Mrs. Harold Brown.

IRMA LEVIN: Well, Mrs. Harold Brown and Ida Brown are the same.

LEE AMAZONAS: Oh, are the same person. And Mrs. Reed—

IRMA LEVIN: Reed Funston. She was a redhead. She was a guest, a society gal.

LEE AMAZONAS: And I guess Funston Street is related?

IRMA LEVIN: No, I don't think so.

LEE AMAZONAS: Then, finally, there's the shorter list of misters. James Beaver, Roy Thompson Jr. Warren Clark, Fred Braun, Gordon Knowles.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, but none of these people did anything.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, with the list of men, it seems that these are names I got mainly from parties, or they were escorting women, but some of these names did pop up quite a bit. **Clay Calloway**.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. They were all escorts. That's the best way I could say it.

LEE AMAZONAS: And then, **David Appelbaum**, who had the Shalom Restaurant. Apparently one of the parties was there, at 436 Geary. The restaurant had just opened.

FRED LEVIN: I think that's when Topol sang.

IRMA LEVIN: You're right.

FRED LEVIN: I remember being at the party. Topol was part of the party and he got up and sang.

LEE AMAZONAS: **Bill Abille**?

IRMA LEVIN: Yes. He was very well known, and a very good escort. **Bill Abille** gave the first party, and the gal that did the party with the balloons, I think, was Pat Montandon.

LEE AMAZONAS: Oh, yeah. That's a name I came across.

IRMA LEVIN: Sure you did! It's her son that just wrote the book. Sean Wilsey.

LEE AMAZONAS: Don Sherwood.

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, absolutely, one of the closest friends and the best publicity man on television. You know who he was.

LEE AMAZONAS: Well, you'd mentioned last time. Did he talk up the Festival?

IRMA LEVIN: Always, always. He was a radio personality.

LEE AMAZONAS: OK. The final thing I wanted to do is ask you some questions about Bud, because we did a little of this at the beginning. You mentioned you both went to high school, but I didn't ask you what high school you went to.

IRMA LEVIN: Lowell.

LEE AMAZONAS: And he mentioned he'd gone to college for a year in one of his interviews.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, he did. Menlo Park College.

LEE AMAZONAS: And were you together at that time, or this is while you were in Hollywood?

IRMA LEVIN: No, he was already working.

FRED LEVIN: He would have been 19.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, because he was working when we got married. That's probably before we even went out.

LEE AMAZONAS: Before two months ago, I'd certainly heard of Bud. I knew he founded the Festival. I did a little research when we did the 40th anniversary a few years ago. But in the past two months, reading everything I have, I mean, he just comes across very much as a force of nature, and somebody who's full of humor and very outspoken and very delightful. Of course, I've never met him, though I feel I know him, but only from these articles. So I guess I want to get another sense of what he was like.

IRMA LEVIN: You know, I think his son could probably tell you better, because I was married a very long time to a man that I loved, and I don't think I'm qualified. He was very interesting. But Fred will tell you more.

FRED LEVIN: He was very interested in several different areas. One, he really loved film. He was really passionate about it. And he did think of it as an art form, before it really put mainstream into the art category. Through film—and this is just my supposition—I think if he had been able to, he would have traveled all his life. Going to exotic places was a real passion of his. You were married in—

IRMA LEVIN: '37.

FRED LEVIN: And they traveled to Mexico, Hawaii, the South Pacific and Alaska in the first four years they were married. At that time, those were all exotic destinations. They didn't go to Europe until '52, and he took the entire family. We were gone seven months, through Africa and Europe. That was really very, very important to him. The idea of giving back to the community was always very important. During the war years, he headed bond drives—

IRMA LEVIN: I'm going to interrupt. He was one of the Honored Hundred, to have sold more bonds. And he was invited to Washington.

FRED LEVIN: He was involved in charities sponsored by the film industry. He was involved in the Guardsmen organization in San Francisco. But I think that the Film Festival kind of brought it all together for him. He was able to really see film as an art form. He was able to travel. He was able to give something back to the community. He really left quite a legacy when you consider that the year after next, we're going to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the San Francisco International Film Festival. There aren't too many people who can say that they started something through its infancy, and after 50 years, it still exists. That's a pretty good accomplishment. Those passions continued with him throughout his life. And his passion for what he did was infectious to other people who were willing to see his vision and get involved. I think that after his '52 European trip, he just felt there was so much to be learned that, through one of the theater charities, he put a tour together to take a group of, I guess it was friends, really, on a tour of Europe with a donation to the charity. I think they had the whole plane,

didn't they? It was a 707 that they filled for this tour. And he got to show them Europe, because most of these people, it was their first trip. So he was a very interesting man.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Who were those people?

FRED LEVIN: Friends and family, and anybody who joined. It was for the Blind Babies Foundation, and anybody who joined was eligible to go and make a donation. He was president of the Blind Babies Foundation board for a number of years.

IRMA LEVIN: He was also president of the theater owners, too.

LEE AMAZONAS: He continued doing these things after the Festival?

FRED LEVIN: Particularly traveling.

MIGUEL PENDAS: On that trip in 1952, did you ever go to the movies?

FRED LEVIN: Of course we went to the movies. First of all, he took a 16mm camera, and all the equipment to go with it, and photographed the entire trip. A little bit of it still exists, but not much. The filming was mostly African. I think he thought that maybe he could do a little documentary or something at the end, but I think that he didn't put the time into it, so nothing was ever edited. There were hours and hours and hours of film. It's been since put on a video, but it's all very, very dark now. It wasn't well cared for. It wasn't professional. We went to movies all over. In some instances, they would put my brother and me in a matinee, and then they would go off and just leave us.

IRMA LEVIN: (LAUGHS) Can you believe that? Can you believe anybody doing that today?

LEE AMAZONAS: Did he have favorite films and directors?

FRED LEVIN: He had a favorite film—I can't think of the name of it—**Gunga Din**.

IRMA LEVIN: He could see it over and. You bought him a tape. I remember the highlight of his life was when—what was the water boy’s name in the movie?—came to the Festival.

FRED LEVIN: He was a doctor on TV. With the curly hair, little guy.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Sam Jaffe?

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah. When he came to the house for a Festival dinner, you know, movie actors didn’t impress him, but **Gunga Din** did.

FRED LEVIN: He just loved that movie. But outside of that, I really could not tell you. I think that there was always a new movie; there was always a great movie. All movies were great. But this one, he really went nuts over.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Was he ever in the military?

IRMA LEVIN: Couldn’t go. He couldn’t go because he was an usher, and he stood up, and he had terrible varicose veins, because he was always standing.

FRED LEVIN: And that was when he got involved in the bond drives.

IRMA LEVIN: Yeah, because he couldn’t go, and he got involved in selling bonds.

FRED LEVIN: He used to sell bonds in the theaters. He had a pretty big audience. He had seven theaters, and they were selling bonds in every theater.

IRMA LEVIN: A hundred in the United States were invited, and he was one of the honored hundred.

MIGUEL PENDAS: So you said because he was an usher—

IRMA LEVIN: He didn’t qualify; they said it was because he was standing on his feet too long.



FRED LEVIN: Of course, the fact that he was married and had two kids may have had something to do with it, too.

MIGUEL PENDAS: But the other thing I'm trying to get at here, this was the family business, the movie theaters, so Bud worked as an usher in the theaters when he was young?

IRMA LEVIN: Oh, sure. Everybody did. Fred did. Walter did, too. Everybody did.

LEE AMAZONAS: At what point did he take over the business?

IRMA LEVIN: When he was an usher. (LAUGHS) When did he take over, darling?

FRED LEVIN: I don't know. Was he a manager when I was born? So I would guess probably '47, '48, some place in there, because he was not a manager in Marin. And that was '48, so in '47, '48, he took over as the general manager.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Who started the business?

FRED LEVIN: My grandfather started it, but I believe there were partners along the way. He would get it started, and then somebody would come in and join him in a particular theater. That theater would have been sold off, or they would have bought him out, or he would have bought them out. It ended up as San Francisco Theaters, and he was a partner with Mike Naify.

MIGUEL PENDAS: You're talking about Samuel?

FRED LEVIN: Yeah. Samuel Levin and Mike Naify were partners in San Francisco Theaters, and then that arrangement changed as the years went on. The family still retains a small interest in what's left of San Francisco Theaters.

MIGUEL PENDAS: And was there also a real estate company? Another family business? Was there something called Golden State something?

FRED LEVIN: That could have been before I was born.

IRMA LEVIN: Golden State was a partner with McNeil.

FRED LEVIN: Was Grandfather part of Golden State?

IRMA LEVIN: No.

FRED LEVIN: OK, so it wasn't our family. There is another Levin family in the theater business in San Francisco, which is a very distant cousin of my grandfather's. And I don't think they're still in business. I think one of the last ones they had was maybe the Parkside, I'm not sure.

MIGUEL PENDAS: Because I think I remember that Bud's office address was the same as something called Golden State something.

FRED LEVIN: Did Golden State then become United Artists? United Artists Theaters was the Naifys. And San Francisco Theaters was much smaller. And since they owned a percentage of it, the offices were all in the same building, but they had a separate suite. And a lot of the back office stuff was handled by United Artists at that point.

LEE AMAZONAS: Were there any questions that you wished I had asked, that I hadn't asked, things you'd like to say?

IRMA LEVIN: I don't think so. I think you're very good. I think it's a wonderful, wonderful history. I'm very impressed. It brought back a lot of memories; a lot of good ones and a lot of sad ones, a lot of disappointments. Some day, I'd like to remember the name of the society reporter. Otherwise, I've done pretty good.

LEE AMAZONAS: That's my next job: to research, to see who the heck else was writing about society during that period of time.

IRMA LEVIN: And she's still alive.

LEE AMAZONAS: Actually, still alive means she's Googleable. Is there anybody you think we should talk to? You've mentioned some as we've gone along.

IRMA LEVIN: You know whose name is not mentioned, honey? I asked you this before. Zelinsky.

FRED LEVIN: Well, he passed away.

IRMA LEVIN: But there are a lot of people who passed away who worked for the Festival. Did you mention the name Zelinsky at all?

MIGUEL PENDAS: His name never came up in print in those years.

IRMA LEVIN: I don't understand that.

LEE AMAZONAS: But it may have and I just don't recall.

FRED LEVIN: It doesn't matter. He's recently passed away, and he's not going to be able to answer any questions.

IRMA LEVIN: Yes, you're right. I can't think of anybody. If you get a hold of that society gal and she's still got her brains, maybe she can help you. (LAUGHS) But I don't know anybody else.

*TAPE 4 ENDS*