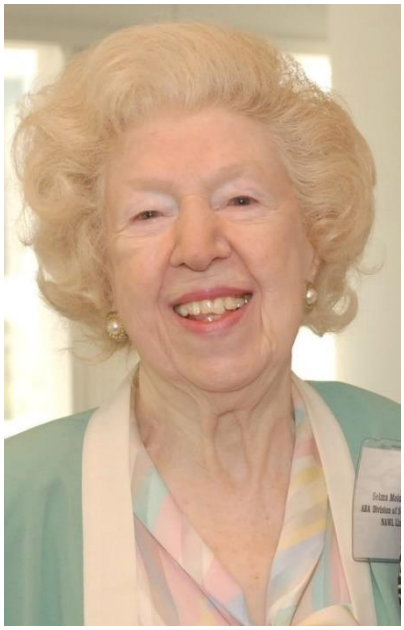

Selma Moidel Smith

Oral History, Session I — June 19, 2013

Interview by Kathryn Werdegar,
Associate Justice of the California Supreme Court

Women Trailblazers in the Law Oral History Project of the American Bar Association

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Werdegar: Good afternoon. This is Kathryn Werdegar, Associate Justice of the California Supreme Court. With me in chambers is Attorney Selma Moidel Smith. Today is June 19th, 2013, and we have just come from a meeting of the Board of Directors of the California Supreme Court Historical Society, on which we both serve.[1]

[1] *See* Hon. Kathryn Mickle Werdegar, "A Tribute to Selma," *California Supreme Court Historical Society Newsletter* (Spring–Summer 2012), pp. 2–5. Available at http://www.cschs.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/CSCHS-SelmaMoidelSmith-Competition.pdf, http://wlh-static.law.stanford.edu/articles/CSCHSNewsSS12-Selma.pdf, and http://www.americanbarfoundation.org/uploads/cms/documents/cschsnewsss12-selma.pdf.

We will be holding a conversation that will serve as the introduction to Selma's oral history — which she has been invited to record by the Women Trailblazers in the Law Oral History Project of the American Bar Association. The theme of this conversation will be the role that early influences — together with her own personal characteristics — have played in shaping the Selma that we know today.

To begin, I want to read a short item from Selma's childhood. When she was ten years old, she was in the sixth grade and graduated from Grant Elementary School in Hollywood, California. Her family had moved to California from Ohio at the start of the school year [arriving August 25, 1929], so she had been at the school for only one year. Nevertheless, she received the single Honor Certificate given by the school at graduation.

It is dated June 27, 1930, and it gives the reasons Selma was recommended for the award. They are as follows:

> Because she made a splendid chairman of her History group.
> Because she has served so well on the Typing Committee, taking home many of the pupils' compositions to get ready for our book.
> Because she has made an excellent chairman of the "Clipping Bureau" for current events.
> Because she has splendid executive ability and uses it.
> Because of her excellent scholarship.
> Because we believe that she is an outstanding member of the class and will make an excellent record in higher schools.

I know these characteristics, manifested at such a young age by Selma, have continued throughout her life because of my long association with her and my very pleasant opportunity to observe these talents in action. Selma, I'm going to ask you if you could explain some of these to me and elaborate on what the award mentioned. Will you tell me about your "History Group" and your chairmanship?

Smith: Yes, I'd be glad to. Takes me back a long way, but they were happy days, too. The History Group, actually, was formed by me from my class in the sixth grade. I had felt that history was so important and really wasn't enough covered, and so I had spoken to the teacher and suggested that I might want to have a separate group that I thought might be the more capable ones, and that we would be able to meet for a little while — after — and discuss in depth more of what we were covering with the class. And so she gave her full permission to do this. I selected my students, and they named me chair — chairman, as they said at that time — and we continued to have our meetings, to discuss, as I say, more in depth and we, as a result, I think had quite an additional history upbringing, shall we say. Everyone enjoyed that very much.

Werdegar: Well, to my mind that's rather extraordinary for a ten-year-old, and no wonder your school was impressed. But not only were you chair of your History Group, you served on the Typing Committee and, I note, you took home "many of the pupils' compositions to get ready for our book." Would you tell us about that, and the book that they're speaking of?

Smith: Oh, yes. Well, our teacher felt that the epitome — the mark that she was working toward — was the book at the end that we had all contributed to, and that we had had an opportunity to write a composition for, and that it would become *our* book. I'm smiling to myself because it says "Typing Committee." It was a committee of one [laughing]! I was the only one who was typing, and my own took so little time that I was able to volunteer to make all of them look their very best, if they were going into this book, and so I did, and that was how the book was compiled.

Werdegar: Now, what was the "Clipping Bureau" of which you were also chairman?

Smith: Oh, yes. That was related in a way. I suggested to the teacher that we really ought to have something — part of a bulletin board perhaps — where we could put up clippings that we had selected from newspapers having to do perhaps with a particular area that we were covering in our History class at that time. I brought in the first clippings that had to do with a certain country that we were discussing, and it encouraged others. They were put up on the bulletin board, and each child who had one — after all, this was a new experience for them — I was accustomed to reading the newspapers — they were not — and so the teacher was quite pleased to see that they now, instead of just looking at the comic section, were looking at the rest of the newspaper, too. And it did become, as she put it, the "Clipping Bureau." That was my contribution to the group.

Werdegar: Well, continuing, the Honor Certificate cites, "Because," you, Selma, "she has splendid executive ability and uses it." I think we've already had an inkling as to what that was about, but would you care to expand?

Smith: Well, this was something they chose to identify in that way. I was simply doing what came naturally, and fortunately I was able to enlist the cooperation of the teacher, because it was her class [laughing]. She was happy to have these ideas presented, and when the award was given and I brought it home, and so on, I read that line and I said, "Well, I guess *that's* what they call it, then." I actually looked at that almost as something that was new to *me* — but there it was.

Werdegar: You didn't realize that your talents came under the rubric of "executive ability"?

Smith: No.

Werdegar: And they say, because of your "excellent scholarship."

Smith: Yes, that was always true. It never took me very long to dispose of whatever was being presented for our class work. As a result, and this went on — I'm picturing even into high school, and on — where they limited you to just two outside activities. In my case, they said, "Take that away." They knew that it wouldn't matter how many I would engage in, the scholarship would never be less, and that I could be in a number of other activities at the same time that I was doing my school work.

Werdegar: And the scholarship never *was* less, I presume.

Smith: No.

Werdegar: And in conclusion, the certificate cites, "Because we believe she is an outstanding member of the class, and will make an excellent record" in higher schools.

Smith: Yes, well, fortunately, again, it also had preceded in Ohio [city of Warren, where I was born in 1919] — in schools — before we came to Hollywood. It continued, both before and after. I don't believe there was any year in which I was not in the highest scholarship.

Werdegar: Well, if I might interject a personal comment, Selma. I'm gratified to see that your talents were so early recognized because I have known you, as we mentioned, on the Board of the California Supreme Court Historical Society, and every one of these attributes cited in your Honor Certificate have manifested in your service on the

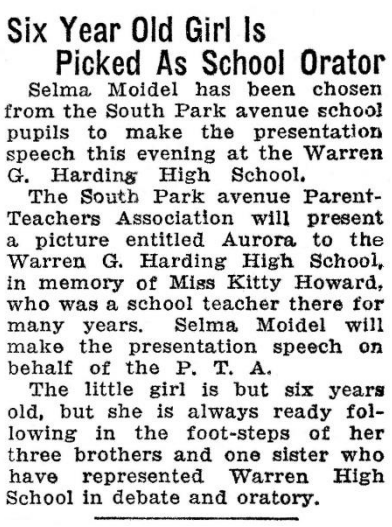
Board — a deep interest in history, of course, editing and compiling and writing articles for the journal [*California Legal History*], which you edit, and the newsletter of the Society — and manifesting "splendid executive ability" and using it. You've transformed the historical society. So the consistency there is impressive — and gratifying. Selma, in the beginning, where did this all come from? How did you get so interested in writing and editing and history?

Smith: The answer to that is simple and yet quite complex. Actually, the simple part of it is — it's a reflection of the family into which I was born. My three older brothers, my older sister, all of them were in writing, also in speaking — also I might say, debate. If I were to take an example, one of my brothers was the youngest president of the National Amateur Press Association in the country. I can remember also that when my oldest brother became a lawyer, I was then six years old, and he, being fifteen years older, was twenty-one. But I must tell you one little story that connects to that, but tells you something of my family. When he went to take the bar exam — it was at that time in Columbus, Ohio — when he took the bar, it was the type that was writing, answering questions — all written — and the proctor in the room was sitting there. Then my brother got up and started to walk out, and the proctor said to him, "Son, don't give up so soon. Just try again. Don't just walk out." And so, my brother said to him, "I did finish, and I passed." At any rate, came time for our newspaper in our city, when they published the names of people who passed, his name was not on it. He had already been a frequent visitor to the newspaper, and those were his friends. They told him, "You're not on [the list]. You didn't pass," and he said, "Yes I did." And so they started an investigation. They got back to

Columbus. They had to go over it again, and lo and behold, he had indeed! But there was one hindrance — they couldn't swear him in yet because he wasn't yet twenty-one. So, they had to wait until his birthday, and so then he was sworn in and was indeed a lawyer.

Werdegar: Now, was this your oldest brother?

Smith: Yes. At that time, you know, I was already familiar with a typewriter in the house, and everyone was either typing or handwriting. Libraries were a living thing in our household — and studies, and speeches they were practicing, and debates they were trying out. All of it headed in a certain direction, of course — law. My sister was engaged in all the same things — the speech, the debates, the writing. All of them. So that when I was doing these things as a ten-year-old, I had already been speaking — as a six-year-old, in a public speech — and by eight I had written my first article, typed it, for the newspaper, and it was printed. And I remember, even after my speech, when I was six — I was selected by the school to speak, to dedicate a picture of a teacher who had passed away, a young woman. The name of the picture was "Aurora." It was done in her name, in her memory, and I was the one to speak at the dedication and tell a bit about her, and so this is what I did do, when I was six.[2] The newspaper editor, the next day, came down to meet me at my home because he had published this, and I think he was trying to check up on it himself. So he said to me,



Six Year Old Girl Is Picked As School Orator

Selma Moidel has been chosen from the South Park avenue school pupils to make the presentation speech this evening at the Warren G. Harding High School.

The South Park avenue Parent-Teachers Association will present a picture entitled Aurora to the Warren G. Harding High School, in memory of Miss Kitty Howard, who was a school teacher there for many years. Selma Moidel will make the presentation speech on behalf of the P. T. A.

The little girl is but six years old, but she is always ready following in the foot-steps of her three brothers and one sister who have represented Warren High School in debate and oratory.

[2] "Six Year Old Girl Is Picked As School Orator," *Warren Tribune-Chronicle* (Feb. 1926).

"Well, Selma, that's really nothing." He said, "Anybody can get up and make a speech," and I said, "No, first, you have to have something to say."

Werdegar: That's true!

Smith: And so he backed off, and he said, "Yes, I guess so." That was a sample of what happened when I was six. At eight, they published an article that I had written which referred to "The New-Fashioned Years."

My brother, the youngest of the brothers, had always put me up on a counter or something, and because I hadn't learned to read at the time he started with me, he would read me lines of poetry — Alfred Lord Tennyson — and I memorized them all. So I was able to give a reading, just from memory. On one occasion, in preparation for one of my class requirements, he absolutely insisted that I had to use hand gestures, which was something he did in his oratory. I said, "but Mitch," and he said, "Well, just hear me out," you know. "I want you to put your hand in that direction," and so on. I said, "But Mitch," and he said, "Don't interrupt, just do like I'm saying," you know. And so he said, "All right, finally, what was it you're trying to tell me?" And I said, "I'm going to be speaking when something is being shown on the screen, and the room is dark!" [both laughing] So that was the end of my instruction in gestures, which I have never used.

My brother, who was the one who became president of the National Amateur Press, and remained always the youngest one — they never had a younger one before or after — would hand me things that he had written and ask me to "look it over," to edit, as it were, and to make corrections.

Werdegar: Now, he was younger, or you were the absolute youngest?

Smith: Yes, I should say that my oldest brother was fifteen years older, the next one — the writer with the National Amateur Press — was close to thirteen years older, Mitch was the one who would be about eleven years older, and my sister was nine years older.

Selma Moidel, 1937

Werdegar: And then you?

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: Ah, so you had lots of siblings to tell you what to do —

Smith: And they did [laughing].

Werdegar: And watch you blossom. Sounds like you were born into a family of extraordinary intellect — and achievement. So that was a blessing.

Smith: Yes, I used good judgment in deciding where to be born [both laughing]. That would account for the typing, the writing, and in a small way — no, it doesn't, it's really unrelated — my oldest brother learned to play the violin. I well remember, I was then probably five or six years old, when he would bring home some sheet music, and put it up on his stand and play for us after dinner. There were seven of us around the table, with my two parents. I well remember that he did a pivotal thing — he put

the sheet music down on a chair, and at my height, it was just right [laughing]. I looked at the music, and I started to hum the music — which I had never heard — from looking at the notes on the paper.

Werdegar: And, of course, you hadn't been trained in reading music, either.

Smith: No, and we had no radio.

Werdegar: And the fact that you could translate these marks on paper, that you were not trained in, into the sound in your mind is rather astonishing.

Smith: And when he heard me humming the tune, he stopped cold. He was putting up his stand, and realized that somehow I knew — he had already heard it played when he bought the sheet music — he realized that, obviously — well, let me say it resulted in a job that I had: I got to be page turner. That was my introduction, in a way — but obviously, it was there, and he saw that. So, that reaches out into the music in an indirect way.

Werdegar: Selma, as you reference your childhood and your older siblings and this — to my mind — amazing family that you joined and became part of, I notice that you were able to read music, read marks on a paper at age six, marks that you'd never been trained to understand what they were, and you weren't yet playing an instrument, I believe. This reminds me of a conversation we've had in the past about your composing, and I once asked you and I'll ask you now. Well, how does it happen? How do you compose all of this music, some of which has been orchestrated? And

we know you've done nearly a hundred piano pieces. How does that work for you? Would you tell us a little bit about that?

Smith: Oh, yes. Actually it's something I don't know anything about, but I'll tell you how it manifests itself. I can be doing anything, engaged in whatever. I begin to hear the beginning and a complete melody, and I hear it playing [from first note to last]. I know that it comes from some place that nothing else comes from. I know that once I've heard it, it's there, it's out.

Werdegar: And since I'm able to speak to you and not to Mozart, you know, I now understand that that is a phenomenon. Those of us — most of us — who've never experienced it, don't get that, but you've explained it to me. It *comes*.

Smith: And I can come back to it anytime.

Werdegar: So you don't lose it if you don't immediately set it down?

Smith: No. In fact, one example of that — I was in Europe, with the International Federation of Women Lawyers, and I was washing my face at night before going to bed. I was standing over the sink, and I began to hear a tango, a particular tango. I heard it all the way through, and it was weeks before I had the opportunity to even approach a piano to — with my right hand — strike the notes of the melody.

Werdegar: You weren't afraid you would lose that melody?

Smith: No, once it's out, it's out.

Werdegar: And you just accessed it later when it was convenient?

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: You mentioned it was a tango.

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: As I recall, there's some Spanish flavor in your life, your music, your creativity. Do you want to speak about that? You played the Spanish guitar, as I recall?

Smith: Well, yes, that came later. The first thing was, again, around that age of five or six or seven, something like that, when I was in the kitchen. I had wrapped myself in a Spanish shawl that my older sister had received as a gift. I wrapped myself in it, and I borrowed, without her knowing it, her high-heeled shoes, put my shoes inside, stood inside her shoes, and wrapped the shawl around me. My father, without my knowing it, that anyone was looking or knew that I was doing this, had summoned my mother to come and look because I was doing steps — with the shawl and with my heels.

Werdegar: Would you say this came to you the way the music came to you?

Smith: I guess it did, because I do remember it, and they of course couldn't imagine where this came from. It had simply been there, I guess. I can't account for it. So it, I think, was the harbinger of more to come. Later, in the seventh grade, they first started to teach Spanish. The only thing was, my teacher — it was Miss Kefauver, related to the senator, from the South, and she had a southern accent. Somehow, in spite of it, I came out sounding like the authentic Spanish.

Werdegar: You weren't speaking with a Unites States American southern accent?

Smith: No [laughing], nor American, nor non-Spanish.

Werdegar: Was there any connection in your family to this strong Spanish affinity you had?

Smith: I really don't think so, unless it was so far back we don't know it.

Werdegar: Yes, so it wouldn't explain this at all.

Smith: I don't know. Later — I'm really jumping into different periods — I started Spanish guitar as well. And castanets. I was dancing. I've always danced. I continue to need only the sound of the music and I'm on my feet [laughing].

Werdegar: And your own compositions, many of them have this Spanish flavor. As you mentioned, tangos and —

Smith: Yes, about half of the music has something in it that would relate to that. The result is that I find that I can speak the language, somehow that they never imagine that I'm *norteamericana,* that I must be a, you know, *one* of them. They only are guessing which part of Latin America or Spain — and your friend Jorge[3] — just identified me as *española*, from Spain. It's part of the things I don't understand happening. I don't know anything about it. I simply know they are there.

Werdegar: Now, your family was extraordinary. Were you early identified as the most extraordinary among the extraordinary? I mean, you sound like a clear — what we would call a prodigy.

[3] Jorge Navarette, Assistant Clerk/Administrator of the California Supreme Court, who had escorted her to Justice Werdegar's chambers.

Smith: Well, I was in the right place. I might say that the family never was concerned in any way at all. When you hear about parents helping the students with lessons, I mean, no one paid any attention. They, just at the end of each year, were summoned to the Honor Assemblies when I was given the six-semester star for scholarship in each of the terms, or something equivalent to that. They were never concerned.

Werdegar: What I see that I think is unusual, it's not just that you were a star student, but you have these other attributes of creativity that were amazing and that came to you like a mystery. You don't know their source even —

Smith: It is. It still is. I don't know how one accounts for that, except that they are there. I'm grateful that they're all melodic. I'm grateful that they are of a certain length, that, well — I hope that they add pleasure to someone. I guess, obviously, it had to be an expression of my own, coming from me. I'm often asked to explain, but I have no explanation, just that it happens. With regard to the Spanish, I've carried that out. In fact, at high school, I remember — at Hollywood High School — the Spanish class teacher wanted to sponsor me as a linguist as my career.

Werdegar: Well, that reminds me, your career could have taken many paths. Certainly, it could have taken the music path.

Smith: Well, you know, when you mentioned my sixth grade list of things, it so happened that when I was doing these [written] compositions, the teachers noted already I was using language. I remember a phrase, "seemed to abate the angry skies." I had used that phrase in a sentence.

Werdegar: "Seemed to have *made*"?

Smith: To *abate*.

Werdegar: Oh, "It seemed to *abate* the angry skies."

Smith: It was the description of a storm. It was enough — the composition — that they summoned my mother to come. They wanted to inform her that I was a writer. They wanted to inform her that that should be my career, and that if it hadn't been discovered in my family, that that's what I should be doing. So my mother listened to it all, of course, said nothing about [laughing] — just thanked them for it and so on. That was how that came about.

Werdegar: Well, how did you find your way to the law? I know you had brothers that were lawyers.

Smith: Well, I think it was taken for granted. It was something that I — this is where everything was. When you're surrounded with something, and you find that you have those same abilities that they're talking about and they're doing, and I was just one more of them —

Werdegar: And, of course, you've used all these talents all your life. Law didn't exclude the others by any means.

Smith: No, no, they could live side by side, and that's exactly what they have done. And in fact I well recall my situation when I was dictating to my secretary — that's when we

dictated to secretaries [laughing] — a brief that I was waiting to file, and in the midst of it I started to hear a melody. And so I —

Werdegar: Would you have to stop what you were doing?

Smith: No —

Werdegar: Just to let it finish?

Smith: Oh, well, for just a moment. And I opened the drawer of my desk, reached for a little notepad, and while I was jotting down notes — just spaces in relative distance to each other [tapping the table]. At the same time, I would have to say I was just stopping to relive it, and see it. And then I would dictate directly to her, and jot down a few more until it was completed. So it was happening at the same time. It has no respect for anything — it just — as it will. And I have been doing dancing, in costume and otherwise. I think I've had quite a rounded career [chuckling], as it were, in dance. And, of course, it happened in singing as well. I was in singing groups, at university, for example at UCLA, too.

Werdegar: But with these manifest, manifold talents, you could have gone other directions, and why was it ultimately law?

Smith: The one thing is that it was my mother —

Werdegar: Ah!

Smith: It was my mother who wanted to have been a lawyer, and never got to be.

Werdegar: And she had ultimately how many children who were lawyers?

Smith: Well, all five of us were, ah — let's say, if there had been more children I'm sure there would have been more [both laughing].


SMS, 1978

Werdegar: And what was your father?

Smith: He was a businessman.

Werdegar: And that means what?

Smith: They had —

Werdegar: Stores, or — ?

Smith: Yes, that very thing. The one *I* knew, of course, was in Warren, Ohio. I would say, it was such a burning desire of hers that it was something she couldn't even imagine not being in, that —

Werdegar: In her time! That's extraordinary that she had —

Smith: Yes — well, that was —

Werdegar: — the imagination, in that day — not to mention you, a generation later, and all your siblings.

Smith: Yes. The fact was that she had such a burning desire, as I say, that it wouldn't have mattered how many children there were.

Werdegar: Well, was she gratified that — especially the sisters, I think, because that was so extraordinary.

Smith: Well, as a matter of fact, my sister actually decided it didn't suit her after all, and she didn't practice.

Werdegar: So you carried this forward?

Smith: Yes, with my three brothers. You heard me say, "408 South Spring" — where we're going for the reception on June 25? That's where the suite of offices was, on the eighth floor.[4]

Werdegar: Oh, the family suite. I'd like to know, how did your mother — was she gratified and deeply —

Smith: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Werdegar: And, of course, you pursued it to the ultimate.

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: Fulfilled that unfulfilled dream on her part.

Smith: Yes, she had many of the same qualities she could have used herself. She spoke in poetic language at times. When I was on my way to a banquet — of our lawyers — she said to me, "Where you go, my feet will never go."

Werdegar: Well, that's both beautiful and poignant.

Smith: Yes, it is. It was. And she pinned on me, very often when I went to court, something that belonged to her.

[4] Reception sponsored in Los Angeles by the California Supreme Court Historical Society.

Werdegar: Oh!

Smith: Yes, that's how much — now you know how you got that many lawyers [laughing].

Werdegar: But the daughter is the one we're talking about.

Smith: Oh, yes, absolutely. I came from a home where there was no precedent, really, for how *men* do, how *women* are supposed to do, what is theirs, and what is simply not a woman's thing to do. It was completely egalitarian. We were brought up —

Werdegar: Contrary to the mores of the time.

Smith: Yes, yes, and my father was fully comfortable with all of that.

Werdegar: Well, he must have been extraordinary, too.

Smith: Yes, he was. Yes, he was.

Werdegar: Take that as a given.

Smith: And the result was that my brothers and my sister and I, we all grew up believing that women can do anything, and why not? In other words, in their lives, they never did any of the things that we have complained of, that denigrate women. They were simply equals.

Werdegar: [Unlike many other men] that have certain assumptions.

Smith: Yes, yes, very much so. And that, of course, was hardly preparation for the world outside [laughing].

Werdegar: Well, it sounds like you were blessed to be born into that family —

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: And that family was blessed to have you be its youngest member.

Smith: It's fitting — I guess — I think I'm going to say something like this at the end of the whole thing, the entire thing, if I have the opportunity — "I was the youngest. I'm glad to gather them all together at this point."

Werdegar: As they are right now, as we speak about them. They're here —

Smith: They're here, and [with great emotion] I'm so happy to be part of them.

Werdegar: Well, as your conversational companion, I'm so happy to *hear* about them. It's just remarkable.

Smith: Yes.

Werdegar: Before we conclude our conversation, I would like — for our listeners and our readers — to touch on two attributes of Selma that don't come out in the star-student aspect but are a very important part of her personality and who she is. The first is her skill as a poet. And this, too, manifested at a young age. At this time I will read a poem that Selma composed at age sixteen. This poem is entitled, "Dawn and Sunset,"[5] and the first time I heard it, it moved me a great deal, and I've always remembered it, and I'd like now to share it:

[5] First published: Selma E. Moidel, "Dawn and Sunset," *Warren (Ohio) Tribune-Chronicle* (March 21, 1936); reprinted in "A Tribute to Selma" (footnote 1 above).

DAWN AND SUNSET

Dawn — and the world awakens
From its peaceful slumber;
The pinkish hues of the morning sun
Are tinting the hills and valleys.
What can this new day bring?
Perhaps a smile, perhaps a tear.
But always inspiration!
As it turns a page in the Book of Life
It turns our hearts once more and again
Toward the God of Eternal Hope —
Dawn!

Sunset — the darkness has triumphed
And the world returns to its slumber:
But over the distant hills and valleys
Spreads a blanket of flame and gold —
The last farewell of a dying day.
Reluctantly it falls from view
With one brief pause as if to say,
"A day has passed — a day well done;
What matters if there was a tear?
There's always inspiration!"
As it turns a page in the Book of Life
So turn our hearts once more and again
Toward the God of Peace, and Rest, and Memory —
Sunset!

Smith: I've been dying to say to you, that was a beautiful rendition. I have never *heard* it, I mean, said out loud, you know. It's always been in writing.

Werdegar: It's like hearing your music played.

Smith: Yes!

Werdegar: Well, of course, you hear it up here.

Smith: Yes, but actually, you read it just beautifully.

Werdegar: Oh, I'm glad.

Smith: Really, as a writer, I couldn't have wished for anyone to read it, that it would —

Werdegar: Oh, I'm so glad.

Smith: Yes, I'm so glad you suggested it. It added such a nice note.

Werdegar: It's so special.

Smith: I'm grateful that it came to you to do, and —

Werdegar: — that I happen to have it right on my desk [both laughing].

Smith: And so, obviously, that had been with malice aforethought on your part [laughing].

Werdegar: Well, you deserve to hear it, my goodness!

Smith: It moved *me* when *you* read it.

Werdegar: I can't imagine, at age sixteen — you obviously were born with a soul.

Smith: Isn't it funny you say that. I don't know how many people have said that word in connection with either the poetry or my music. You used the word "soul." That word has been used so many times, and one of them was by the one who was presiding judge of our L.A. Superior Court [Charles McCoy] just before our first woman [Lee Edmon]. You met him — I introduced you to him, in fact at the time that we had our thing in L.A. at the *Times* building,[6] if you remember.

[6] California Supreme Court Historical Society public program, June 1, 2009.

Werdegar: Oh, yes.

Smith: I called you over, and I introduced you to both of them.

Werdegar: You did.

Smith: He had been present and heard my music at one of the performances. We no more than greeted each other, and we were standing near each other waiting to go in [on a later occasion], and he said, "You are the soul of that orchestra!"

Werdegar: Ohhhhh.

Smith: And someone else also said, "It touches my soul. It reaches my soul." Somebody else said, "It goes straight to the heart."

Werdegar: Isn't that wonderful!

Smith: So you picked the same — the same location [both laughing]!

Werdegar: Selma's not only a poet. She's also a composer, and I would like to offer something special at this time — a brief recording of Selma playing one of her own piano compositions. This is one of a group that she performed for the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles at their annual Law Day Luncheon in the International Ballroom of the Beverly Hilton Hotel on May 1st, 1966.

The title of this composition is "Waltz in B flat minor, No. 2, Opus 55." And, yes, it is registered for copyright, like the rest of Selma's nearly one hundred piano pieces. [Click below to play music.]