

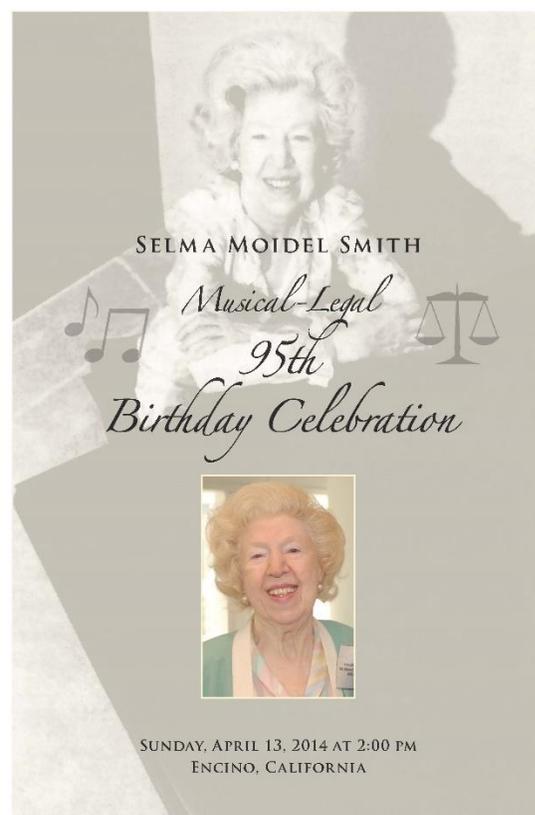
Selma Moidel Smith

Oral History, Session VI — November 8, 2014

Interview by Attorney Rosalyn Zakheim

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

Zakheim: Today is November 8, 2014, and this is Rosalyn Zakheim. I'm at the home of Selma Moidel Smith to continue her interviews for the ABA Women Trailblazers in the Law Oral History Project. Selma, at our last interview you were preparing for your "95th Musical-Legal Birthday Celebration" on April 13, 2014. I was fortunate enough to be invited to this wonderful event and had a wonderful time. And to see you celebrated by all of the people who came — more than 300, I believe — and have people play your music, and to hear everybody wish you well on your 95th birthday was such a pleasure! And I know the people I sat with, who were mostly past presidents of Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, felt inspired to be there and really happy that you had invited us. Would you like to say a little bit about what it meant to you and what happened at that wonderful event?



Smith: Well, yes. You know, one never thinks about it. One never imagines such a thing. I certainly didn't until shortly before — well, about two months before, when the idea occurred to me. Because it was a 95th — at which I was quite amazed myself [both laughing] — it seemed that at last, it would be possible to join together the parts of my life that had special meaning to me. And of course, what would it be but the law and the music, and a few other things that we'll get to, ultimately, I'm sure. So, that's how it all came about, and then it was a matter, of course, of some of the people that came. I really wanted to give medals out [both laughing] for people who put aside other things and came from long distances — just the sheer fact of being able to look around, from the podium, and at that moment from that spot, be able to take a sweeping look around at all of the lovely people who filled in my life for quite a long time.

Zakheim: Selma, some of the people who came from your legal career were the — *are* the giants of the legal profession in California, and some from the ABA as well who came from afar. Could you tell us who came, and what they said about you?



Dear Selma, what a tremendous pleasure it is to be here in this auditorium to listen to your music. I speak from a place of extraordinary respect and admiration for you, for your leadership all these years, and for adding to the pleasure of all of our lives with the music you've composed and played. It's an honor to be here. Thank you for letting me say these few words. Happy birthday, our dear Selma!

Smith: Oh, what they said [both laughing]. Oh, no. Let's put it this way: I was certainly honored by the presence of the chief justice — of California, yes, so we don't get confused with any other states, you know — our own Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye,

Associate Justice Kathryn Werdegar, our former Chief Justice Ronald George — who took occasion to recount an event from his oral history that was published last year — and former Associate Justice Joseph Grodin.

Zakheim: Could you mention that [event involving former Chief Justice Ronald George]? I think it's a very special event. He said only you could have accomplished it. Well, I know he also recounted this episode in his book, and he inscribed it to you in a very special way. I'll read it for the record: "December 2nd, 2013. To Selma, with enormous gratitude for your many efforts and great generosity in so many endeavors — in particular the [California] Supreme Court Historical Society. Best wishes, Ron." And it's in the book entitled "Chief" by Chief Justice Ronald M. George, and he signed that note that I just read. He signed it to you. A very, very special event.



Today represents the coming together of two aspects of Selma's life — her talent and success as a practicing attorney and a leader of women attorneys, and her gift and passion for music. I think this program cover, which you all have, represents that. In the middle, we have a beautiful portrait of Selma. On one side we have the scales of justice — on the other, the musical notes. For those of us who only know one aspect of Selma, today is the opportunity to come together and honor and celebrate the whole of Selma.

I first met Selma when I joined the Board of the California Supreme Court Historical Society. At that time she was clearly a highly-valued member of the Board, but in short order it became more clear that she was its backbone, its soul, and its heart. And she continues to be so today. We are most fortunate to have her wanting to participate in our organization.

A little later, I became aware of the other aspect of Selma — her gift for music in every way — the violin, the piano, the guitar, voice, dance, and prolific composition, which we are enjoying today. Over the years, one could see Selma on television on behalf of the Women Lawyers announcing and promoting Law Day. On another day, on educational television, you could see Selma instructing students — in Spanish — about the joys of classical music. That's our Selma.

In the words of the National Association of Women Lawyers, they recently wrote about Selma, our "indomitable, ever-radiant Selma" — in her, we have a truly renaissance woman, outstanding in the law and leadership of women, and renowned for her musical gifts and compositions.

Selma, happy birthday. We all are thrilled and honored to be here for this wonderful celebration.

Smith: Yes.

Zakheim: Do you want to tell us about it now?

Smith: Well, it was the occasion when four of our justices, including [former] Chief Justice Lucas, were being given the formal copies of their own oral histories. In addition, we had seven [current] justices who were in attendance for the ceremonial occasion.

When Justice Lucas was just

starting to speak, I did hurry over to our Chief, and he looked up at me at his side, and

I whispered into his ear that I really needed to have a photo of all of them before

anybody would have left for the afternoon before the program might have finished.

And so, on that occasion [chuckling], he interrupted former Chief Justice Malcolm

Lucas — who stopped in mid-word, and looked surprised [chuckling], naturally —

and our chief justice informed him —

Zakheim: From what I understand, you proceeded to get all of the justices who happened to be there together for a photographic session, and you preserved for history the justices who were at that meeting.



Selma, what a joy it is to be here among your colleagues in so many venues and to stand in awe of your numerous talents that we're being exposed to here. I've been so pleased to work with you in the Supreme Court Historical Society efforts to preserve and disseminate the work of our courts. And you are truly a force of nature. You have brought that organization to the fore with the incredible publications that you have worked on, and you're a person not only of vision but of detail. . . .

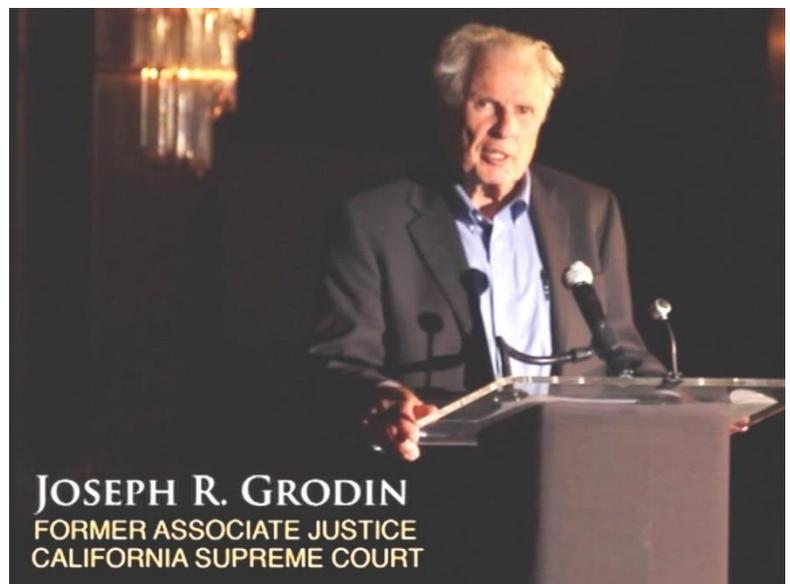
We look forward hopefully to another one in five years, maybe in the same venue here. So keep it up. You're indomitable. Thank you so much, Selma.

Smith: Yes, that is true. Our former Chief Justice George announced at that point that there was just one person on the globe who could have accomplished this interruption of “two chief justices simultaneously” and that was “our own Selma Moidel Smith” [p. 388], as he put it. At that, everything broke up, and I brought over the photographer I had scheduled, and this history-making photo was not only taken but Chief Justice George (at that time) had it hanging in the corridor just outside his door, so it was there for everyone to see. And he had referred to that in his book that he came out with, with his own oral history, which is wonderful to read for *everyone*. It’s not intended just for scholars or research people, but everyone will find many, many very interesting and very nicely expressed thoughts on his part and really getting to know him. I certainly recommend it to everyone, and I cherish the one that I was presented by him with his very kind and generous inscription.

Zakheim: And he did repeat all of this at your 95th birthday celebration, to — also — the delight of the audience, I might add, since I was there. In addition to the current chief, the associate justice, the former chief, there was also former Associate Justice Joe Grodin.

Smith: Yes, I was just about to say that

I was pleased to see former Justice Grodin there. And, of course, he continues on



Selma, you are beyond words. You leave us breathless. Someone said we can’t know where we are unless we know where we’ve been, and you are one of our leaders in showing us where we’ve been with the California Supreme Court and *California Legal History*, among your other enormous accomplishments. It’s a great pleasure to be here and to wish you a very happy birthday.

with his work in the law as professor of law at Hastings College of the Law. I appreciated *all* of the words that I was really very pleasantly surprised to hear from these very nice friends and people in the life of California legal history.¹

Zakheim: Now I know there was another person who gave you a special surprise there — from the California Supreme Court Historical Society. Could you explain that?

Smith: Yes, and that was! Our president of the California Supreme Court Historical Society was Dan Grunfeld, and he was there to represent the Society, and to make many nice comments, and then to



Selma, you spoke a couple minutes ago about the gift of many years, and you certainly have had that, but there's another gift that I think we all hit on that is your gift to us: You have touched all of us with your wisdom, with your patience, with your vision, with your work ethic, with your open heart — so while we're celebrating your 95th birthday, we also collectively, whether we're from your music side, or from your legal side, or from your family side, we're celebrating the gift that is you, Selma. . . .

It is hard to emphasize how important Selma has been to this organization. She is the foundation upon which this organization has been run for decades. She is its soul and its heart. She is as active and as passionate and as engaged as she has ever been in the many, many years that I have been on the Board.

Many years ago Selma, as she is apt to do, had a brilliant idea. It is a competition, a competition for some of the young and best law students to come forward with their best writing about an issue in California's historical past. And as you would imagine, it was Selma who not only came up with the idea, but administers and puts forth that every year there's a competition; there's an award-winner who's published in our journal and then gets to meet with the Chief and the other members of the California Supreme Court who are members of the Society.

The announcement that I have to make is that last week the Executive Committee of the Society decided that henceforward this competition will be named in Selma's honor.

Selma, this is a mere token of what you have meant to the Society, but more importantly, for all of us as your friends and colleagues. Happy birthday.

¹ Also recognized from the podium were California Court of Appeal (Second District) Presiding Justice Arthur Gilbert, Division Six; and Associate Justice Richard Mosk, Division Five.

announce that the week before our gathering that the Executive Committee had met and that a decision had been made to rename the student writing competition — that I had brought as an idea to the Society [in 2007] — to have it renamed in my honor, with my name on it.² I appreciated the applause from the audience at that point because they were certainly expressing *my* feeling, and I appreciated the sentiments that were being expressed by that action. And I felt very — well, it was nice to hear that in the midst of my friends who could share it with me, and that was the best way — to share it.

Zakheim: And you also have a writing competition named after you for the National Association of Women Lawyers.

Smith: Oh, yes. Well, that was back in 2005 when, on their own — again, total surprise to me — I was called up in front of the group [at the Annual Meeting in Chicago] and informed that I had indeed been honored by their naming a student writing competition that would be thereafter the Selma Moidel Smith [Student Writing Competition], which they have done annually ever since, and this is their ongoing project. Again, I'm grateful for their faith and confidence and their expression of appreciation — which I feel is more than earned *by them* by what they do on behalf of our National Association of Women Lawyers.

I'll intersperse: You see, [over there] on the chair, there's a scarf hanging?

Zakheim: Yes.

² Also recognized from the podium were Society Past President Ray McDevitt and his wife, Mary, from San Francisco, Vice President John Caragozian, Treasurer George Abele, Board Members Joyce Cook, Ellis Horvitz, and Mitchell Keiter, and Director of Administration Chris Stockton from Fresno.

Smith: Do you remember the magazine of the National Association of Women Lawyers that was so complimentary —

Zakheim: Yes!

Smith: — That she [Maritza Ryan] wrote that whole page. She couldn't be at the program — I invited her — and she is head of the law department at West Point. She was the one who wrote all that. That wasn't good enough for her. Just recently, she sent me a gift that she bought at West Point, this all-silk beautiful scarf. And on it, it has tiny names, "West Point, West Point, West Point." She wanted me to have that. It wasn't enough what she wrote!

Zakheim: Oooohhh!

And I know that President Dan Grunfeld mentioned you were "the foundation of the California Supreme Court Historical Society" and that they couldn't have gotten along without you.

Smith: Well [chuckling], let's say that I think everyone must have inhaled the same perfume or something because I was hearing these various very complimentary comments, and it helped a great deal that I was in the company of others because they helped me to share what would have been something that I would want to have not just had in isolation [chuckling].

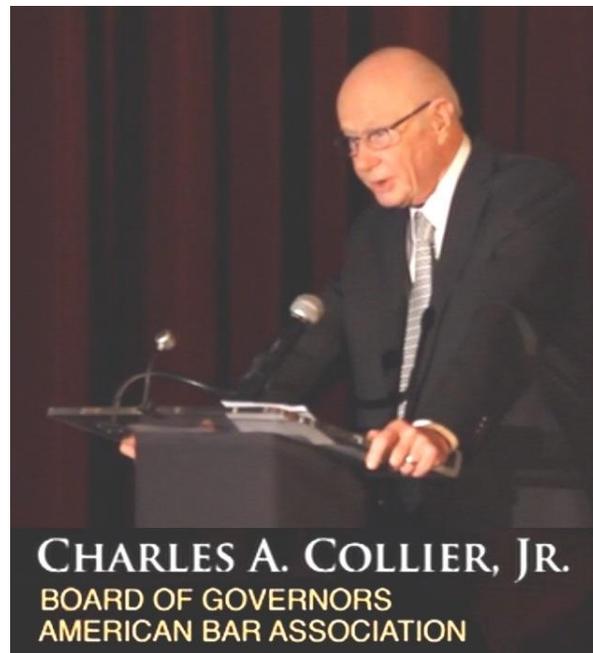
Zakheim: In addition to Dan Grunfeld, representatives of other legal organizations expressed their happiness and joy at your celebration. Could you tell us who was there?

Smith: Yes. There was, for example, from the Board of Governors of the American Bar Association, a member of that Board, Charles Collier. He was referring back, of course, to the fifteen years that he has known me and indicated that when he did come to the American Bar Senior Lawyers Division, I was already chair of the Editorial Board of *Experience* magazine, a publication of that Division, and that since that time we have been good friends, which is indeed true. He indicated also that I had been a member of the American Bar since 1946.

Zakheim: Oh, my goodness.

In addition to Charles Collier, I know that representatives of various women's bars came and spoke.

Smith: Yes, and I was very happy for that. One was Lisa Gilford, the past president of the National Association of Women Lawyers, and aside from her very nice comments, I appreciated her [chuckling] — I was going to refer, you remember — she referred to her music talent?



It was my pleasure to meet Selma about 15 years ago in the Senior Lawyers Division of the ABA. She was then the chair of the Editorial Board for our magazine called *Experience*, and she certainly brought a lot of experience to that magazine. Since then, we've remained good friends. I see her frequently. She's currently an honorary Council member for the Senior Lawyers, and she attends the meetings and she goes on various trips that we have and special occasions.

On behalf of the ABA, and the Board of Governors of which I'm currently a member, we're delighted to be here. It's getting pretty close to 70 years that she's been a part of that organization. In recent years she's certainly remained very active in the Senior Lawyers, and we always look forward to having her participate, which she does.

We're certainly delighted with all you've contributed to the national bar associations of various kinds, ABA among them. The ABA has close to 400,000 members, so it's a very large national organization, and Selma has always been one of the leaders in many of our activities. So we're delighted to wish you the very best on this occasion.

Selma, it's always a pleasure seeing you, doing things with you, spending time with you, and I want to wish you a very happy birthday and I hope many of us can gather again for the hundredth.

Zakheim: Yes [laughing], that it wasn't quite up to yours.

Smith: Well, that she was just the right height [as a child] for the instrument she was playing, being the only one who could hold it straight up —

Zakheim: That's right [laughing].

Smith: And so, that was her fame, you know, that she held it straight up, but that was all. I don't want to really just take her words because people *will* have the opportunity — let me use this diversion to say to you, by the way, that the DVD of our event that we are discussing is now in the Stanford University Law School Library.³

Zakheim: That's wonderful, and hopefully one will be provided to the Women Trailblazers Project with your oral history.

³ 2-DVD set, call number: M3.1 .S635 S65 2014 DISC 1-2.



Happy birthday, Selma. It's such a treat to be here this afternoon to hear your beautiful music. You don't know this about me, but I'm a fellow classical music lover. I played the bassoon growing up in school. Unfortunately for me, my enthusiasm for the music, unlike you, was not matched by my talent. The instrument was chosen for me because I was the only one tall enough in grade school to be able to hold it upright, and I'm afraid I didn't distinguish myself any farther than being able to hold it upright. So I'd really like to thank you for inviting me to hear your lovely music. It was as moving and as inspirational as you are and you have been to me for many years.

I am joined here today by two of my colleagues, two of my NAWL sisters as we call ourselves. First, I'd like to recognize Ellen Pansky; she is a former president of NAWL. We also have a part of the younger generation of NAWL leadership; Sarretta McDonough is here. Sarretta currently sits on the NAWL Board as assistant secretary.

Selma became a member of NAWL when she first became a lawyer, and she has served in a wide variety of positions over the years. You have heard about her work as a historian. In 1999 she wrote the centennial history of NAWL, a history, of course, that she helped to make. Also in that year, we were honored to present to Selma the NAWL Lifetime Achievement Award for her service. But of course, Selma did not stop giving to NAWL in 1999. Upon receiving that award, she kept giving. In 2005 we created a law student writing competition on the subject of women in the law, and we have named that competition in Selma's honor.

Every year the membership of NAWL gathers in the Gold Ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria to hold its annual convention, and for myself and many others it's really not an Annual Meeting until we see Selma standing there welcoming everyone, year after year, into the Gold Ballroom. An Annual Meeting is not an Annual Meeting until we see Selma's smile, her words of encouragement, and her gifts of light that she gives. As was mentioned before, we paid tribute to Selma on the occasion of her 95th birthday and we called her radiant. That was a well-chosen word. So I'd like to thank you, Selma, for being a guiding light to NAWL everywhere for so many years. Happy birthday.

Smith: I've already provided that to her [Project Chair Brooksley Born].

Zakheim: Fantastic.

Smith: Oh, yes.

Zakheim: It's a wonderful, *two*-DVD set of this entire proceeding.

Smith: I thought it would be the best way to explain to her why there had to be a lapse of time for anything of that dimension to take place. And I'm sure she can, from that [laughing] —

Zakheim: She will see, and it'll be in some ways a good oral history in itself because the people who came talked about your legal career and that she could listen to the music and hear what you had composed — and just had such wonderful talent. Selma, it is fantastic.

One thing I did want to say — because I don't know if it will fit in otherwise — is your ability to speak Spanish, because I know that some of the people who were servers at the event, who spoke Spanish themselves as their native language, listened to you, and they looked at me and said, "She speaks perfect Spanish!" And they were very surprised and really very happy that you were able to converse with some of the guests who were there in perfect Spanish.

Smith: Well, I have to tell you that that is something that I'm constantly being told by *them*. And it's always with great surprise because I never look the part.

Zakheim: That's right [both laughing].

Smith: They're sure that "es una nórteamericana — ¿cómo es posible?" I'm happy to say it's been that way from the first word I ever uttered. How they all came out that way, I can't tell you.

Zakheim: But that's really wonderful.

I know that in addition to people who spoke, you introduced a lot of the other guests, very prominent legal guests who were there, and were very happy to be there to honor you. Could you tell us a little bit about them and your relationship with them?

Smith: Yes — Anne Tremblay, who was the current president in April of this year, 2014, of the Women Lawyers Association of L.A., and then Ruth Kahn, who was the immediate past president. I must say that each of them had the same kind of generosity of spirit in comments that they made

that would have been connected to my association with *them*. I am very grateful for all of the words that were said, and I was equally glad to have other representatives who were there from, well, our United States Circuit Court of Appeals, Judges Arthur



I'm so honored to be with you here today — happy birthday, Selma — to celebrate Selma's amazing life, her talents and achievements, both legal and musical. So again, happy birthday, Selma.

On behalf of the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, I'd like to recognize several of our past presidents who are here. So if you will please stand as I call your names. In order of seniority they are, first of course, our honoree, Selma Moidel Smith; Rosalyn Zakheim; the Honorable Judge Margaret Henry from the Los Angeles Superior Court, who's joined by her husband Conway Collis; the Honorable Marjorie Steinberg, also a judge of the Superior Court; and I think you've already met the Honorable Judge Kim Wardlaw from the Ninth Circuit; Elayne Berg-Wilion; Greer Bosworth; the Honorable Karla Kerlin, also a judge of the Superior Court; you've definitely already met one of our recent past presidents, Helen Kim; and also with us this afternoon is Angela Haskins. Finally, I would like to introduce my immediate predecessor, Ruth Kahn, who will come forward and say a few words.

Alarcón, whom I knew very well through years of work together on the Clara Shortridge Foltz project, the renaming of our Criminal Courts Building in her honor — the first woman lawyer in California and creator of the public defender system. And then Dorothy Nelson, with whom I had the great pleasure of working. I had been requested by the Ninth Circuit [Historical Society] to interview her for her oral history. We got to know each other quite well. I have a copy of it here — the transcript.⁴ As you see, it was in her Pasadena chambers, and there's a lot that we talked about that was not on the record, as well. I had one thing that I had to overcome immediately — in her chambers there was a grandfather clock.

Zakheim: Oh, no!



First, I'd like to recognize and acknowledge a few other members of the Women Lawyers Association who are with us today: the Honorable Holly Fujie, president of the State Bar in 2008 and now a judge on the Los Angeles Superior Court; Patricia Phillips, the first woman president of the Los Angeles County Bar Association; Susan Steinhauser, president of the Board of Trustees of the Los Angeles County Law Library and vice chair of the California Arts Council.

Let me share just a few facts about Selma that we haven't heard already today. First, Selma was admitted to the California Bar at the age of 23 on January 5, 1943, and she joined the Women Lawyers Association that same day. Not wanting to waste any time, Selma became president of the Women Lawyers in 1947 and was reelected to serve again in 1948, and she's remained active with our organization for more than 71 years. In 1998, Selma was appointed our first — and only — Honorary Life Member. I have been privileged to know Selma for many years in connection with my activities with the Women Lawyers Association, and I'm absolutely thrilled to be here today.

Selma is such an inspiration to all of us. She is so incredibly accomplished, yet she is humble, thoughtful and appreciative. Selma had perfected the art of multi-tasking before anyone had heard that word, and she continues to excel at everything she does — take this party for example. Some might compare her to the Energizer Bunny. I think she goes way beyond that.

This event is a wonderful way to commemorate the lifelong accomplishments of a lovely lady. Selma, thank you so much for including me in your 95th birthday celebration. You are a role model. You are a remarkable woman. Happy birthday.

⁴ Available at the U.C. Berkeley Law School Library (KF8752 9th .O73 1988c). Excerpt, "Reflections On Becoming A Judge," *Western Legal History* 2:1 (Winter/Spring 1989): 107–13.

Smith: It was — [imitating the tick-tock sound]. At any rate, after overcoming a few simple things, including me crawling under the table that I had my recorder on, to get to the wall to unplug something. As you see, we got to know each other quite well [laughing].

Zakheim: Dorothy Nelson was once dean of the USC Law School, was she not?

Smith: Yes, she was. She was their first woman dean — they have said, also, of major



law schools in the country at that time. That was quite a feather in her cap. And Kim Wardlaw, who was in fact a past president of the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles, and we knew each other in that regard.



And from Memphis — all the way from Memphis, Tennessee — came Bernice Donald who was president [at that time] of the American Bar Foundation, and also, of course, judge of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, but the thing I think that we may be remembered for [chuckling] in that particular regard is that we did a little dance together when the Chris Hardin Trio was doing their jazz versions of my music that they had selected to perform. I was in effect really returning the favor to her because, on a different occasion in San Francisco, during a meeting of the Fellows of the American Bar Foundation, I was surprised to enter the reception area



and, as soon as I appeared, I felt a hand grasping mine, and I looked up and it was Bernice Donald, who was dancing with me, who danced around with me while a trio was playing in the corner of the reception hall. So, she and I had danced, much to my surprise, at that time. So, on this occasion, I waltzed over to her while the trio was performing a samba, and stood in front of her, put out my hands, and she very quickly [both laughing] understood what was expected of her, and she got up, and we did dance — for the rest of the samba performance. And I must say I appreciated the applause of the audience, who had already begun clapping to the rhythm of the samba. So, she and I have a special, additional reason to remember this event, and I enjoyed her very, very much. She's a lovely person.

Zakheim: That's wonderful.

And there were representatives from the California Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District?

Smith: Oh, yes. That was Presiding Justice Arthur Gilbert and Justice Richard Mosk. I'm so happy that each of them, whom I do know and have worked with, were able to be there and to share in all of this as well.

Zakheim: Selma, you've mentioned dancing, which brought up music and the trio, and I know this event was meant to commemorate not only your legal experience but also your musical background, and part of this was involvement with the Los Angeles Lawyers Philharmonic. Can you tell us about that?

Smith: Yes, a forty-piece orchestra appeared, led by their founder-conductor, Gary S. Greene, who is a lawyer of, oh, almost forty years — and on this occasion, in addition, was

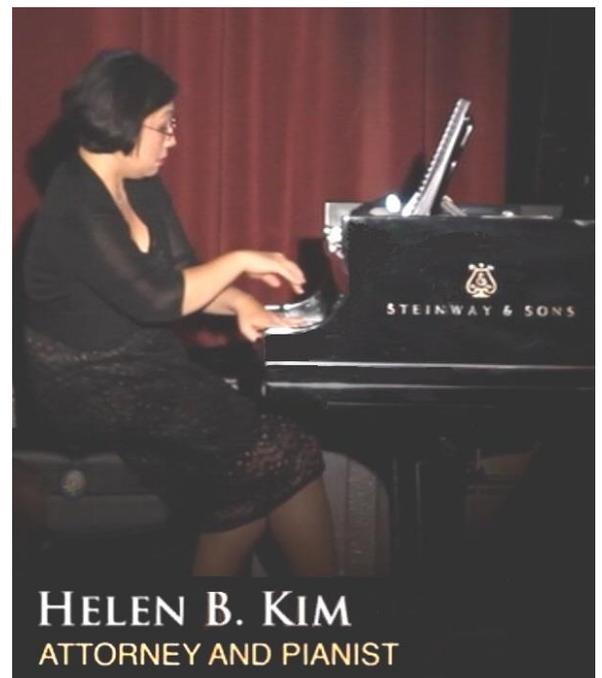
acting as our Master of Ceremonies. In fact, my connection to them was earlier. In 2010, the orchestra performed a selection of pieces of my music in the Walt Disney



Concert Hall in downtown Los Angeles as well — which went off very well, and he used the occasion to ask me to stand and be recognized, which I was. We did a similar thing in June [2014], just a couple of months after *this* event that took place, and he selected other music of mine to perform, which was very nice again.

Zakheim: Helen Kim is another past president of the Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles who has an illustrious musical background. I believe she's a Juilliard graduate?

Smith: Well, yes, in fact, even more than that. She



holds a masters in piano performance. That is coupled with her legal background, and she performed a number of pieces — about fifteen of my compositions. I was very happy to have that combination of law and music. And then, I would go on to say that



the Chris Hardin Trio performed *their* collection of my pieces that Chris, the leader who is a pianist himself, had given the jazz treatment. And so, I noticed the audience was pleased to hear that. And that was where we ended up their work with the dance with Bernice Donald and myself.

Last and not least, a world-famous pianist, Eduardo Delgado from Argentina. He ended up playing thirty-two pieces. He's been a professor — the head of the piano department — at Cal State Fullerton, but also has concertized *always*. He spends a great deal of time going back and forth to Argentina. In fact, among his many things was a prize from Juilliard as well. I was very pleased to be able to mention that in the notes about him.

Zakheim: How did you meet him?

Smith: Actually, at a piano gathering — no surprise! I remember that the first thing that I said to him [laughing], which completely took him by surprise, was in the break in a master class we were attending, and a concert. It was near the refreshment



table, and I looked at him, and I looked him up and down, and I said — and those who speak Spanish will understand why I said that — “Señor Delgado, es de veras, es delgado.”

Zakheim: Could you explain?

Smith: Yes, “delgado” means “slender, slim,” and I looked him up and down and then said, “Yes, Señor Delgado, you are indeed” [both laughing], which was a play on his name, of course, because it meant a name, but also at the same time “delgado” is a man who is slim, and that’s exactly how he appeared. At first, he looked at me in great surprise, and then, of course, he realized what it was, and had a good chuckle over it. So the very first words to him were in Spanish. I met with him in his home, and we have become good friends.

Zakheim: That’s lovely.

Smith: The day before the performance, just before, he sent me an email —

Zakheim: Oh, this is beautiful.

Smith: [Reading] “I hope tomorrow you will hear in your music a combination of your feelings combined with mine. I want to make you happy because I know how much it means for you, but it also means a great deal for me. It is really music from the heart to the heart. I love each piece, and every one means so much to me. Each one is like a different world.”

Zakheim: He very much appreciated your music, as well as the opportunity to play it.

Smith: Isn't that something! When I saw that — and that was the last thing on his mind before his [performance] —

“Although I do not know you so well, I feel I know your feelings through your music. See you tomorrow,” as though we're just talking about anything, you know, “See you tomorrow.” And then he says, “con gran cariño” — with great affection.



I don't have to tell you what a pleasure this is for me. I am so delighted and happy to see all of you and to be surrounded by my friends. I want to say that I take nothing for granted. I want to express my profound gratitude for the gift — the gift of years, the privilege of time, so that I could be here and so that I could have done with pleasure the many things that I have found rewarding. . . .

I want to introduce two members of my family. In equal parity, I want to present the senior of my father's family, my cousins, Attorney Bruce Moidel with his wife Attorney Ritva Moidel, from Montreal, and they have come that distance just to be here today with us for this occasion. And the senior member of my mother's family, Owen Simon, who is a retired vice president of Westinghouse Broadcasting, also known as Group W. . . .

I want to make one last thank-you. It is to my co-worker, and to my host for this occasion — my host, my son, Mark Smith.

Zakheim: That's just really remarkable, that your music meant so much to him, and that he was able to play at your 95th birthday party.

Smith: Yes.

Zakheim: You had quite a career as a composer, and many of your compositions were played by other people. How did you get into composing music, and what did you like about it?

Smith: I did not know that I was getting into composing. I began to *hear* compositions. It came from a place nothing else comes from. And I heard the first note. It played itself through, to the very end, to the last note — and then moved directly into memory, so that I could at any time always recall it. And in fact, it played itself whenever it wanted to. I have no answers as to how that happens, and as you already know, you have seen the table of contents of the compositions, and they total about a hundred. So, that is how they come, at any time and place, here — anywhere in the world.

Zakheim: And they're in various forms.

Smith: Yes.

Zakheim: It isn't that you have one particular —

Smith: No. They're all short pieces. All of them are melodic. All of them, I imagine, are communicating *something* — from what I understand from others. This is what I am surprised myself to be calling “composing” because, rather, I was *receiving* compositions — complete. And all of them have been like that.

Zakheim: Well, that brings up something we were going to talk about, which was the musical forms you have composed. What types of music did you compose over the years?

Smith: Yes, if you think of it as something I set out to do in each case. There are many, many musical forms, for example, dance forms like the waltz, the tango, the samba, beguine, jota, mazurka, minuet, bolero, and also nocturne, prelude, elegy, barcarolle, berceuse, and others. The very first thing was a tango.

Zakheim: A tango just came to you, and that was the first composition that came to you.

Smith: Yes [sings aloud the notes of the complete melody of her Tango in A minor, Opus 1].
There you have it.

Zakheim: Thank you.

Smith: You had an example, this second. We said it — out it came, from that memory place. You heard the whole melody, beginning to end. It stops. You had it demonstrated right in front of you.

Zakheim: Yes.

Smith: That's what it means, that about a hundred of those are sitting up there, on call, or on their own call. Sometimes, I wake up to one. I say, oh! I haven't heard that one for a while.

Zakheim: That's wonderful.

Smith: Yes, and it's there whether anything else is going on or not. It doesn't respect anything else. It's as though it takes care of everything [laughing]. So, you had it illustrated, right in front of you.

Zakheim: Yes, yes. Thank you. I feel very honored, actually, to hear it and to realize how it does just come to you, and is stored in you, at this point —

Smith: — at this point. I looked at a baby picture of mine, when I was one year old, and I look at the picture and I realize, there it was. It was there all the time. When I was five or six and I walked over to it — well, how would I know what the black spots on the paper were, that they even were notes? How would I connect it with sound? I never heard a radio that was with music or anything, only what my brother played.

Zakheim: My goodness.

Smith: And it was a new piece that he had just bought.

Zakheim: Well, he had a good page turner.

Smith: Yes [both laughing], yes.

Zakheim: He had an expert page turner who was to become a composer herself —

Smith: Yes, because he knew I could read the music. Where that came from, who knows? Certainly not from anything that ever touched me. So, I'm glad it happened. It happened right in front of you.

Zakheim: Absolutely, absolutely.

Smith: Oh, my!

Zakheim: Just as you were a member of Women Lawyers and the ABA and other professional legal organizations, did you belong to any professional composer organizations?

Smith: Oh, yes. Yes, I did. I am a member of ASCAP — that stands for American

Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers. It's there for composers.⁵



Zakheim: And you have had many performances and memorable occasions. Could you describe them?

Smith: Yes, in addition to the Women Lawyers' Association and the Lawyers' Club events that we've already talked about, there was a piano master class that took place in 1987, in July. It just happened that it was a one-time event that was done by the Royal College of Music together with UCLA. And this did not mean that the people had to be students at UCLA, or necessarily the Royal College of Music. It was a master class for piano. They had representatives from the U.K., and I remember one woman in particular from Australia, another from Saudi Arabia — she was American

⁵ Separately, on service as a director of the National Association for American Composers and Conductors (later "NACUSA"), see "Music Critic [Arthur Goldberg] Feted," *Van Nuys News* (May 31, 1974): E38A; and "Ralph Heidsiek Honored at Luncheon Event," *Van Nuys News* (June 5, 1975): W-9B.

and was there because her husband was an engineer with one of the American companies doing construction for Saudi Arabia at that particular time, so she taught music in the American School and was a pianist, and she was one of those who came for this master class. And the others were from England. We had to qualify. We had to have references from faculty, and so I provided mine from UCLA. I had enrolled again. I had been at UCLA as a pre-legal, “poli-sci” [political science] major, and so I petitioned and had the major changed to — this time — music. So, it was in the Fine Arts. I was in the School of Music. And so the faculty who became aware of this recommended me.

Zakheim: That’s really special.

Smith: I was informed that I was selected, and in fact, I can show you my certificate from the Royal College of Music, London, and the University of California, Los Angeles: “UCLA/RCM Programme — This is to certify that Selma M. Smith has satisfactorily completed a course of study — Master Class in Piano: Bach, Schumann, Debussy,” signed by the director of studies, by the dean, and by the registrar, issued from London.

Zakheim: That must have been quite an experience.

Smith: Yes, it was. And those were piano teachers who were performers as well. At the end of the term, everyone had to play something. All of them completed their offering with a choice of something from my music.

Zakheim: Oh, Selma!

Smith: They were all delighted to be taking music back with them — one to Australia, another to Saudi Arabia, which I hope was welcome in the American School, at least. So, that was an unusual experience. In fact, the professor in charge, Yonty Solomon, was from South Africa. And so, this is where we spent our time. Once a week, we went to his home, and he showed great hospitality. Well, of course, we had music there, and the rest of the time was in the College. We also went across the street to the Royal Albert Hall where we heard certain concerts they wanted us to hear. I spent several weeks this way. It's something that I will never forget. It was a unique experience — unique.

Zakheim: Selma has shared with me photographs of her stay there, and in the middle of some of these photographs is a very happy, smiling Selma Moidel Smith with the other students. It's really wonderful to behold that you had that kind of experience and that your time at UCLA allowed you to do that.

Smith: Yes. My music has also been performed at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. That was in 1989 [March 15]. I was invited to be present, and I was. It was very well received, and I remember that I had the experience for the first time of having listeners come up after the program and asking me to autograph their programs. So, I can say that has happened in my experience now, too.

Zakheim: A celebrity!

Smith: Oh, my. Of course [laughing]. Just Wednesday, someone who has been in a master class that I occasionally drop in on had invited me to her home. She had attended our thing in April, and she made a musicale evening. She was waiting to do that and —

Zakheim: That's delightful!

Smith: She invited — and she played my music.

Zakheim: Oohhh!

Smith: Then, also, I've played on educational television for something else, which was the Docents of the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Zakheim: Ah!

Smith: But that's a whole subject of its own, and more than we could cover in this session, so why don't we leave it for next time with the Docents.

Zakheim: Okay, I'll look forward to hearing about your involvement with the



At the 95th Birthday Celebration — (l.-r.): Kathryn Werdegar, Associate Justice, California Supreme Court, SMS, Tani Cantil-Sakauye, Chief Justice of California.

Docents and other musical organizations at our next session. In the meantime, we'll close with another of your compositions, one of the pieces Eduardo Delgado played at Selma's 95th birthday celebration. It is a waltz. This is her piano rendition. The title is "Waltz in E minor, No. 3, Opus 66." [\[Click below to play music.\]](#)