

**Monterey County Theatre Alliance: Oral History Project**

The reminiscences of

Walt deFaria

HCOM 350s: Oral History and Community Memory SL  
California State University, Monterey Bay  
2020

## Preface

The following oral history is a result of a recorded interview with Walt deFaria, conducted by Jason Little on April 7, 14, and 21, 2020. This interview is a part of the Monterey Theatre Alliance Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that she/he/they is/are reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

Zoom

Session One

Interviewee: Walt deFaria

Location: Carmel-by-the-Sea

Interviewer: Jason Little

Date: April 7, 2020

00:00:00

Q: I was curious if you could start by telling us the story of your name?

deFaria: Oh my name. Well my parents came over from—my father came from the Lisbon area of Portugal and my mother came from the Azore islands. But in Portugal I think my fathers name was—it varied between Faria or de Faria and it depended upon I guess where you lived or what you did and as I look back on, I mean as I look into the history of it, I can't get a definitive—I think frankly the de part is an affectation somebody dropped in along the way, which I've kept.

Q: Nice. The name of Walt, is that short for Walter?

deFaria: Yeah. I—My mother liked Sir Walter Raleigh, or something rather. Cause anybody with a Portuguese background that has the name Walter is really bizarre. Why would they? It's usually Joseph.

Q: Nice. So, in talking about your mother and father. Is there a story about your mother or father that you maybe heard from them about before you were born—something that connects to your older family history?

deFaria: Well yeah, my father was, um, one of twelve children and he was sent off to live with somebody else because they couldn't handle one more kid and so he was kinda raised in a very difficult situation in Portugal, but he learned how to bake, because he was living with a baker—I think. And, um, I—there's a huge gap and then he came to the United States when he was nineteen. Uh, you know they come over and can't speak English; they have no references to anything. But he came in and uh, a lot of the Portuguese people had moved to California. California by the way—all the dairies in California in those days were run by people in the Azor Islands, which is my mother's heritage. Anyway my father came over, ended up working on the dredges outside of Grass Valley, California. Now the dredges literally were dredging up dirt and gold, they were searching for gold in the rivers. So he got a job as a short order cook—I don't know, something like that. I think he did cook along these barges that went down the river and eventually he ended up in Sacramento, where at one point—he meet my mother who had come over when she was three with her family and uh, how they met, where they met—you know—I have no idea, but they did get married and um, in 1900's—somewhere—because I was born in 1926, so they must have gotten together sometime in 1925-1924. He opened a um, a counter restaurant, short-order kind of thing where just sit at the counter and they cook for you. The good news is he did that during the depression (The Great Depression), so while I was raised during the depression, as a kid very young, it was—we were never hungry because we didn't—you know it meant nothing to me anyway because I was too young. But because (he) was cooking food, whereas many of our neighbors didn't, or have very little. So it was a tough time. But that's kinda like, that's the background story about how they got here.

Q: Yeah, and I really, one of the things I was going to get to in a moment was about the Great Depression and seeing how that did have any effect on your life. Outside of the, um having food is there any other way you can describe how the Great Depression had an impact on you and your family?

deFaria: Well one of those—on my family—its hard for me to know exactly—any great details. But I do remember one thing as a kid. There was a Chinese family that lived across the street from this restaurant that my father called a restaurant—it was a hole in the wall. Um, and they invited me for dinner one night and I remember going up with them, and it was a large family and what they served for dinner was rice, period. Nothing else, just rice. It's all they had. And nobody made any fuss about it and for me it was an adventure; I didn't realize how difficult that was. But, unfortunately I don't have a lot of depression stories. I really got effected more by WWII (World War Two), and that's really where—there were different times than—well not so different than we have now in many respects.

Q: Well, I will just quickly say that I spent time in, and have family in Grass Valley; I've seen the dredges.

deFaria: Great

Q: Yeah, I've seen some of the evidence and have been to some of those big fields and those mines.

deFaria: Yeah, the crap they left behind. It was terrible.

Q: Most definitely, and that's incredible that your family's connection and that's—And so something that you said real fast about your mom is that she was from an island, what island is that again?

deFaria: The Azore Islands.

Q: Azore Islands. Where is that located?

deFaria: Just off the shore of Portugal. It's owned by—well not just off, it takes a little while to get there. But the Azore Islands is really a very beautiful, beautiful different kind of—so different that the main land of Portugal. And um, very isolated. And so many, it's amazing how so many of the people from that particular island came to California, got in the dairy business, and literally controlled all of California's dairy, for a short period—that's long gone. But they were the—there's a huge book written about the whole thing.

Q: That's incredible. I definitely want to do some research and learn more about that. So in our earlier conversation you'd mentioned that you were born in 1926, and grew up in Sacramento.

deFaria: Yeah

Q: Which is also my hometown. Can you, uh maybe tell me a story about growing up in Sacramento?

deFaria: Well yeah. I mean, because I—my parents didn't speak—they spoke reasonable English. Um, so I went to grammar school and in those days school was from kindergarten to eighth grade, it' all one school, and run by the nuns. And uh, so I remember we—my first memories are the fact that I—I really had to interpret for my family, I mean—because I always knew English and I would come home and give them information and stuff because they were really kind of lost, in terms of what was going on; they had no background, that kind of thing. Uh, my father never going to school and my mother going to about, I think she said about the third or fourth grade before, for reasons—a death in the family—she had to go back to the farm and work and not go to school anymore. Any rate, uh you became an adult very quick, when you, you're in grammar school, because of this language problem, my father couldn't even read English and it wasn't until many years later that he learned how. And the amazing thing of course is that, while he—he kind of—his real first business was selling insurance to the farmers, who were mostly Portuguese, out in the areas. And all he needed to do—he had a contract and they taught him where to fill in the date, and his signature and the name of the person and he had no idea what the hell the contract said other than they would explain it to him. And he would go out and sell insurance. Got started doing that, then he went into real estate and it was the same problem again, without any prior knowledge or education he got into that business and did amazingly well. Eventually of course he did begin to read English and you know it changed over time. But in the

beginning the amazing thing of how anybody could do that just floors me. But, they came here to get a better life; they got it.

Q: That is, that is awesome. That is, that's incredible that he went through all of that and continued to—

deFaria: Oh yeah

Q: Yeah, just succeed—that's fantastic. So on the topic of Sacramento in the (19)30s and getting in the (19)40s. Can you maybe describe how Sacramento looked or the uh, aesthetic of the area.

deFaria: Not like it looks now. Yeah no. There—It was really [clears throat] a lot of the bypasses and stuff that they put it in; none of those were there. It was more like, frankly more like a kind of a mid-west, a mid-west town, you know the blocks are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and A, B, C, D. Uh, the parks were fantastic, I mean it was all—it was all just very congenial, much more so than it is—now it's just a bigger city with all the problems that go with that. And there were not a lot of the structures. I mean we—as a kid I remember we used to spend a lot of time in the capitol building (State Capitol Building), you could go in and they would let you climb up to the top [laughs] then you would get a certificate. It was all very—you know—it was all very casual and much more relaxed then it could ever be again, but uh I guess now you would have a guard go in, I don't—But um, it was just a much more



friendlier atmosphere I guess—at least that's my memory. Uh, I may just—in living in an area that was friendly, who knows what all of Sacramento was like.

Q: What area of town did live in?

deFaria: Well, I—our original home was on 10<sup>th</sup> and H. Which is now a parking lot I think. Yeah, it was—the thing I remember as a kid there was—they had—we all had automobiles, my father had an automobile—everybody had some kind of an automobile and they were pretty much all the same car. But uh, there was a woman who would drive by everyday, once a day, in a little electric carriage. It was literally like a—it was like something you put on, you know a carriage in England with the horses—only there were no horses, there was no—and it just totally electric. She drove up, and at the end of the day she drove back. We'd spend a lot of time admiring that one vehicle; she was way ahead of her time, obviously.

Q: That's incredible [Laughs]. So what were some of the things that you did as a child and as a youth to keep yourself occupied?

deFaria: [Laughs]. Well the big thing—the big thing we did was uh—lemonade stands were a big deal for grammar school kids and uh, I remember my sister and I putting—we created a café on our front lawn: tables, chairs and the rest. I don't think we sold any more lemonade then if we just left it alone. But it was fun to do. You spend a lot of time alone, that's the difference—cause socially we didn't have a big social scene. There's a Portuguese community in Sacramento, which had events, and we would all go to these events. But on a

day-to-day basis, you didn't see hardly anybody like that. And your only contacts were at school, that's where you'd meet people. And I was never into—you know baseball, I mean I loved to look at it, but I knew I was never a great baseball player or a great basketball player [laughs]. And so—I didn't have a lot of that going on. And I spent a lot of time on my own, which is where I developed; I think my love of the theater—by being alone.

Q: So yeah, this kinda just goes on into my, uh my next question, which is can um, who was a mentor for you as a youth. And can you tell me a story about this person that illustrates their impact that they had on you?

deFaria: Well by youth you mean—how old do you mean?

Q: Anywhere from, I would say—from like twelve through the age of eighteen—in that span.

deFaria: The major, although—there were a couple of nuns that were, quite frankly very good. And you know the stories you hear about nuns are always: they're beating people and all the rest. I had very little of that at the school I went to. Our—our experience with them was not like that at all. It was much more positive. But be that as may, in high school, I went to the Christian Brothers High School in Sacramento, and the Brothers (Christian Brothers), there were about two of them there, or three that were a great influence. Had a lot to do, really with raising me in one sense. They like theater, so we all did theater, in the high

school as high school projects. So all the years I that I was there we do—well you know, maybe two productions a year. But uh, and these Brothers they were into it. So it was great.

Q: So, and then you attended college at St. Mary's, after Christian Brothers--

deFaria: Yes

Q: Can you tell me about your decision to attend St. Mary's?

deFaria: Well it's the logical thing. If you'd been to Christian Brothers' high school with all the Brothers—the Brothers ran St. Mary's College. As a matter of fact, a couple of teachers that had me in high school had moved to the college, so it was easy to make that transfer. And the only difference though was that the war started and I was—when I was my senior year of high school, or junior year, right in there. And um, so I had to get out of high school—I wanted to get out of high school early to get some college in cause I enlisted and I was going to be called up in about six months, or so. So—so I actually—I got out of high school six months early. I was able to cram some courses in. Went off to St. Mary's College, which at that time was one building, cause the entire college had been taken over by the Navy.

Q: Oh, wow

deFaria: And uh, they had—it was really almost like a camp. But off in one little corner was this one building, which they allowed St. Mary's to conduct college in. Well obviously the enrollment was rather small [laughs]. And, I stayed there six months till I had to leave. But—then eventually I went back to St. Mary's to finish years later

Q: Oh wow! So could you tell me a story about your time at college, maybe in the first six months?

deFaria: Well [laughs]

Q: In that one building

deFaria: Sure [laughs]. The thing I remember vividly is the fact that when I was in high school—at Christian Brothers high school—you had to take Latin whether you wanted to or not. Latin was definite. So when I went to college they—I said I'm gonna take Spanish, I don't want to take Latin. But they make you take a test, because you're gonna take Latin they say, unless there's a problem. So [laughs], I remember when my test came back the guy said to me "did you deliberately flunk this Latin test?" I said NO [laughs] that's what I know. But you know what? They said we don't care; you're still going to take Latin [laughs].

Q: [Laughs] And did you take Latin?

deFaria: Oh yeah! Of course I did. And I did just great [laughs].

Q: So with Christian Brothers and St. Mary's their both—I mean tied into the Catholic Church. So how did the church influence your life growing up?

deFaria: Well—In my case I think rather substantially, yeah. You know I consider myself a church going Catholic. Not a perfect Catholic, by the way, but certainly trying.

Q: [Laughs]. So, moving on from—uh I appreciate that thank you. Moving on from the—uh just from college, then you were en—enlisted and after six months at St. Mary's. What happened next?

deFaria: Well [clears throat], this is where the story gets a little bizarre. Um, I enlisted and [inaudible word] seventy-something called the Armed Forces—you know I can't think of the name of it anymore—but they would take you if you were—because I had six months of college, they took me and put me in a program. And what they were trying—they needed engineers really badly. And believe me I'm the wrong person [laughs]. But nonetheless—I mean you went where they sent you and you know, you're going to go and take these courses to become an engineer. So they sent me to the University of Utah, which had this huge barracks filled with guys like me and we would go to class everyday in uniform taking these specialized courses—leading towards an engineering degree. Uh, but then when—I was seventeen at the time. When I turned eighteen they said, now you have to go to Boot Camp. So they pull you out of the program and went off to Camp Roberts and [laughs], I'm not a very large man and I was really quite an oddity amongst these really big, strong guys.

And uh—I got through it, I mean, there was—there’s some stories about that weakness of being not so great—I don’t really want to tell [laughs].

Q: By all means

deFaria: Anyway, somehow I got through—three quarters of the way through they called me in, they said—you know, you can skip the rest of this if you want to move on to something else. They’re saying that because I’m struggling to keep up with every—you know. And I said, oh no, I’ll finish. I finished. Not well, but I finished. Then I went—then they said to me—now, when that was done instead of going back to the University of Utah—for the rest of the courses they sent me to Oregon State. So I’m suddenly at another college and then after that, they—I left that course, because I was putting on great shows there, but not doing too well in engineering courses. So they sent me to Washington (Washington State), I can’t remember the name of it, there’s a major station in the State of Washington, where I was at, anyway Fort, doesn’t matter. Anyways, stayed there and because I had experience in the past in writing and so on, I ended up working as a writer, for the Army at this Washington place. Where we ran the weekly newspaper and we did all kinds of things like that until I was mustarded out because the war winded down and was gone. So my experience in WWII was really nothing. I mean—I didn’t go overseas, I learned how to fight, if you want to call that experience at Camp Roberts. But I just—frankly kind of coasted out. That’s only half the story though; it gets worse [laughs]. Well I—because I felt guilty quite honestly—I re-opted and stayed in the Reserves. And there was a period there, which is another segment but we’ll skip ahead a little cause in 1952 Truman called up the

Reserves. So I was called back in service. And I remember going to Fort Ord, and—in a room with a whole bunch of guys like me who'd been called back in the service. And they—this is how it worked in those days. They said—how many of you have a college education? By the way I had graduated from college by then, and I raised my hand along with a couple of guys. They said all right, you guys go over to that part of the room. And how many of you have had actual combat? Couple of guys raised their hand—you go over to that part of the room. Now they did two things—they took those so-called college kids, put them in a room and gave them an exam to prove that they were who they claimed they were.

Q: [Laughs]

deFaria: I passed. The other guys we found much later—had been airlifted to Korea to get back in the battle and that was really a shocker, we found that out. The story gets weirder and worse because what happens is they said to us after we proved college quality and—in their minds, you'll get your orders, go somewhere and wait. So I waited. I got orders—to ship me to Washington D.C. And uh—well actually I had to go to Virginia first. And there's a—a defense department—I had to turn up in some office and it turned out to be an Admiral's office. Because the defense department was made up of different—at that time there was this section made up of Army/ Navy/ Marines, you know the whole bit. So I was called into this guys office, I don't know how an Army guy salutes an Admiral, but anyway I sat there with the guy, he said- now—I'll never forget this sentence—what do you want to do? [Laughs] what do I want to do? I said I want to go home. He said no, besides that. I said I have no idea. And he said well what's your experience—and I told him about the PR work

I had done in Washington and so on. And he said okay, I'll tell you what. I'm going to assign you to the Armed Forces Press Service, in New York. I said, okay. So they sent me to New York. Where I lived in a cold-water flat—I mean that literally. Where you put your milk on the ledge outside the window. Because there was no refrigerator—and it was cold water. And down the hall was—cause it was—here's the thing—they gave you some money and said go find yourself an apartment. So that's what I was able to find. And—so what I would do each morning was get up, get on the freeway—not on the freeway—get on the subway, go down to the federal building in Lower Manhattan—work, and come back and that was it—day in, day out. The Armed Forces Press Service wasn't—was an office, in which all the newspapers—I'm sorry, service newspapers throughout the world received both like the associated press of the services. So we would write stories and they would be sent out and that was it. And then suddenly, one day they decided that there was a problem with the guy who represented them in Washington, and so they decided that I should go to Washington. So I was sent there, now I had a desk in the Pentagon [laughs]. Remember I'm a Buck Sargent now; I'm not a Lieutenant—somebody. Okay, so then I get to my office and there's—I'm sitting in a desk that is bumper to bumper with another desk—but there's nobody sitting there at the moment. And so I asked someone, I said 'who's this?'—I was going to sit here—they said, well he's uh-Marine Corp Colonel who's done too many stints in Korea—he's a flyer. So they assigned him here to make him calm down and get some rest, you know. So the guy shows up—now he's sitting across from a Buck Sargent that's never shot a rifle at anybody, opposite a guy whose got medals and who's flown—he's done everything. Well, for some odd reason—I guess he took pity on me, and he was really very nice. And he took me under his arm cause he knew Washington, I didn't. So he would take



me to meetings and places where—you know—my most memorable, if want to call it that, was—he said one night to me, I want you to hear this guy, he's gonna give a little lecture—are you busy tonight. No, I'm not busy—okay good, come with me. So we went to this place and there was a whole group of people in the room and a guy comes out and—before he's going to speak, and this Colonel looks at me and said, I like you to meet Joe McCarthy [laughs]. And I said—and by then I already had an impression of him. And I almost—it was everything I could take to shake his hand. And I had to sit and listen to his lecture—it was like—and literally in that meeting he waived a piece of paper and said—I have a list of the communists that are in Washington. So, that I never forgot [laughs]. And—well that's one of the memories—that's the shocker. Eventually they got rid of me because the war ended.

Q: Wow!

deFaria: Little bizarre. You haven't hear that story anywhere.

Q: No. No, I have not heard that story anywhere. So this—this is totally transitioning to where I wanted to take the interview—and talking about theatre in New York.

deFaria: Yeah

Q: Before I do that, I have to ask more about the cold water flat. I will admit I've never heard that term before

deFaria: You've never heard of a cold water flat?

Q: No!

deFaria: Oh well, then you are very young. A cold water flat is a term they used in New York—cold water flats. And that literally means the facility—there's a bed, there's a closet. You go down the hall to use the bathroom. And uh—you know it's like a room, and there's no hot water--Literally no hot water. So and the—oh, I forgot to tell you this—the little (inaudible word) you get. Every night when you come home and turn on the lights—the roaches scatter

Q: [gasps]

deFaria: And there's hundreds of them--And at night—but other than that. The same building now—its on 76<sup>th</sup> street, is now a very expensive, redone building that I couldn't afford even to—anything. Times change.

Q: How times change, exactly. So can you tell me how you um—so you started to write a column that had some of the review--

deFaria: Yeah

Q: So can you tell me how that started—things that happened with that?

deFaria: We were sitting there writing all these—these crazy stories and uh, I said to the guy—you know why don't we write something about what's happening in New York in the theatre? And they said—we don't care go ahead. So I wrote a column—because you know what I was doing—every night that I could afford I was going to the theatre. I saw more theatre in that short period when I was in New York—I was only there about six months—in New York. It was longer in Washington. And I must have seen every major show that today is now considered a classic. So what I did was write. You know I wrote about the ones I've seen, and what was happening—as if anybody out there really cared [laugh]. But I did it anyway. And—one of the highlights of that particular thing was because of that—there was a tribute to Rodgers and Hammerstein and I was invited to come meet them. So—and I did. Well, meet them—hello, how are you, nice to meet you—nice to meet you, goodbye—you know. But I did meet them [laughs]. For whatever.

Q: That's incredible. What was the uh—do you remember the first play you saw in New York?

deFaria: Um, it might have been *The King and I*, with Yule Brenner and whoever replaced that lady that died—I can't remember. But uh, talk about tears [laughs]—fantastic. Unbelievable show. And I saw the original production of *Guys and Dolls*—trying to think of some of the others—Some of the great classics that are played over and over again by everybody now.

Q: Do you remember maybe the worst play that you witnessed while in New York?

deFaria: Well I'll tell you the scariest one. It was called *The Blacks*.

Q: Okay

deFaria: And when we sat in—it was in the theatre in the round. And it was about the black experience. And—the difference was you were sitting in the round and they were in your face—there was no separation—it wasn't a theatre where they were on a stage—they're in your lap practically. And—and saying things that are true, and it was frightening. It really was. It was well done, but it was still frightening.

Q: What year was that. Do you recall? Cause it sounds pretty progressive

deFaria: Yeah, it was. Well, there was this period in New York where black productions were rather big, meaning—a guy named Van Pe—I can't get his name right. He was a black gentleman who's a director. And he directed three or four shows. And there were—there was a period in there, where there was a tremendous amount of black involvement and there was a show called *Pearly*, which was a great show that had to do with black, you know—servitude. And there was uh, just a lot. I mean I was amazed. And then all of a sudden he just disappeared. But there was a period of I think black awareness, uh on Broadway and off-Broadway. At that time—I was there around the fifties—around '52—somewhere in that general time this was all taking place.

Q: Wow, I--

deFaria: *Pearly* was a little later than that. But nonetheless

Q: That's definitely a part of history that I have not read about, especially in my research for this project

deFaria: They didn't make that much fuss about it, to be honest with you. But I just remember that uh, I saw at least two or three plays done by this black director. They were major musicals. But they were mixed cast, wasn't as if they were all black. But he was using black actors and dancers and so on. Um, Van Peebles—I think that's his name.

Q: Yeah

deFaria: Van Peebles. And uh—he was a pioneer in that. He did a lot. But I think we forget—I mean even here you know black actors wasn't always white—and that was a major show. Trying to remember some of the others. Nah—*Two Boys in Verona*? I don't know, anyway. And there's a lot, a lot more than you might think—is what I'm saying.

Q: Well, thank you. This is—this is really insightful. And so—and this is on Broadway and off-Broadway? They were able to—Wow!

deFaria: Both. There could have been more off-Broadway then on, because I—I didn't have time to see everything [laughs]. But uh, I just remember that—I remember the Van Peebles shows, of at least two or three or four that he did. And uh—and *The Blacks*, unbelievable.

Q: One of the things that I have heard about this era of theatre are people possibly—like sneaking in through the entrance during the intermission. Do you have a story of not paying full price for a ticket?

deFaria: No, I actually—Well I didn't pay full price, because I did standing room quite often. And literally stand in the back of the show. It was real expensive to buy tickets. Although in those days it is a lot cheaper then they are now. But then of course the dollar was different and you know--

Q: That's awesome that standing room was available. You could buy a ticket and stand behind.

deFaria: Yeah, I saw *Guys and Dolls* standing. Yeah.

Q: [laughs] So to kind of to cap our talk about your time in the Armed Services. The um—so as the—the war ended, what—how did you—how did your time end in the Armed Services?

deFaria: Well, I mean—they just released you—get your papers and you go home—you know. And then I went back to Sacramento for a while.

Q: So—Yeah—then to kinda close the chapter on Sacramento. All these travels to Washington, Washington D.C., New York—how did all that compare to your experience and upbringing in Sacramento and how--

deFaria: Well it was eye opening—it was a whole different ball game. I mean—I ways always interested in New York—one of the great desires I had had as a high school kid was—was to go to Broadway, but as a director that was really what my calling was. And I remember I wanted to go to Pasadena Playhouse for college [laughs], my parents said no we're not going to pay for that. So they would pay for—if I wanted to be a lawyer or doctor or engineer but not if I wanted to be a—you know a theatre person. So that never happened. But I still--it didn't matter I still fought on in my own way, trying to get there.

Q: So when—when was your first theatrical production that you were a part of? Was it back in high school or--

deFaria: Well my first one was when I was seven years old. I used to take a card table, turn it upside down, put lights on it. Turn on the radio for something, and use my sister's doll for the actors. So I was doing it very early—in the game. And when I got to grammar school I was trying to—somehow trying to sneak events.

Q: Did you always have a gravitation to want to do the production and the directing

deFaria: Yeah, yeah. I'm a very bad actor. So yes, I really wanted—I mean I retired from acting by popular demand.

Q: [laughs] And then as far as deciding to write and produce, what was the—was there any major influence you had of maybe a director or producer that you really wanted to emulate?

deFaria: Well you know—I don't know about that. At that time I really admired Soroyan. Um, he wrote a couple of plays—not great plays but he did write a couple. And there were some other people that—you know that you read their stuff and like it. But, I never had a mentor in that field. Pretty much I had to do it—I ended up directing and I went back—I ended up directing high school plays for kids. And I had been in them when I was in high school. And one of the stories that is—talk about politically incorrect, back when I was in high school—that was a long time ago. They used to do minstrel shows. Now I'm not sure if you know what a minstrel show is?

Q: I don't think I could accurately

deFaria: Minstrel shows go back to the 1800's and so on. But it's a group of guys, white men—it started out with black men doing this kind of variety show where they sat on the stage and sang and give comics and so on. Eventually white guys did it in black face. And



that went on for quite a few years. To the point when I was in high school, the high school kids did minstrel show in black face.

Q: Wow

deFaria: Yeah. And when I came back to teach later we did it white face [laughs]. No more black face. My directing really started in that high—in high school, when I came back I directed and wrote some high school stuff for the kids. And I directed something for one of the theatres in town run by a woman named Eleanor McClatchy. Now you've heard of McClatchy broadcasting?

Q: Yeah

deFaria: She owned all of it. He's now passed away. But McClatchy was a theatre buff. Crazy, little old spinster who just loved the theatre. And so, they eventually started a studio—she bought, only this is a little bit later—she bought a station in Fresno, California KMJ TV and um—I got a job there—and that's a story between how I got there—it's a whole another story—but anyway I'm there, I'm hired and they haven't opened yet and we all opened together. But what she did, and this is only a point I'm trying to make, she believed in theatre so much so bought for this studio, out of New York, major cameras--not little old cameras but network quality cameras and even a boom in this little tiny theatre—I mean stage. And she encouraged us to do original material, which I did. So I learned more about theatre doing television because of what she had mandated and allowed. And we

were just—it was bizarre. We were doing original theatre, but televised you know? But that's a whole 'nother story.

End of interview one.

Zoom

Session Two

Interviewee: Walt deFaria

Location: Carmel-by-the-Sea

Interviewer: Jason Little

Date: April 14, 2020

Q: I would like to open the floor to you and ask—yeah about our current time—and how this-

deFaria: You mean the pandemic

Q: Yeah

deFaria: Well you know, obviously I was—I was supposed to retire—anyway, but I was sneaking in one last show. I was going to do *Annie* at the Outdoor Forest Theatre. It's cast, it's ready to go—rehearsal schedule has been worked out—it was perfect—it was right on schedule. Then of course came this and the way it looks at this moment is—I don't think we're going to make it. Because we have a fixed date in—in the theatre, and we have to rehearse a fixed number of weeks before we get there and—and it's being compressed now to the point where if we don't—if everything isn't sprung loose by May 15<sup>th</sup> the show is done and I would have officially have retired. So the pandemic has affects but I'm just one of a dozen examples here on this peninsula, cause there's a lot of good theatres, a lot of good people. Pac Rep, which is a major theatre in the area, is closed down and they have a very extensive schedule. They do nine shows a season. So that's all those actors, all those directors and of course what's keeping that theatre alive is the real problem—but that's the

top of the heap. All over there's a whole bunch of other theaters doing the same thing. If you can't perform you don't exist. And that's really where we are. So, we just have to wait and see

Q: Have you—you—when we talked before you made a comment that this would be something that my generation would remember

deFaria: Oh absolutely, yeah. Well for me, you know WWII—even though I was born in the depression my experiences with it are not enough, personally because I was too young. But the um, WWII I lived through it as a high school student. I lived through it in the service, and um, you just—that isn't going to go away. In other words, no matter what age you always go back to, that kind of situation—and there's a lot of similarities—well some similarities in that—during WWII there was rationing and things like sugar were very hard to come by even though you may have had a ticket that allowed to get it. But you were limited by what you could buy and all of us had what was called 'victory gardens' and—and people today are doing the same thing. They're growing vegetable in their own backyards. And it's kinda interesting to see it repeated. Um, it's just amazing as a matter of fact—I have friends who completely—have a complete garden of everything you could want in terms of fresh vegetables and so on, not fruit of course. So—there's a similarity [coughs].

Q: Yeah, I—I can totally see the parallel to how you describe that era compared to now. It's made me want to prioritize one day having at least my chickens would be fantastic. That would be--

deFaria: It's a good idea. Don't give up on growing the fresh stuff though. Actually it's better, cause when you pick the lettuce, it's outstanding.

Q: So did you say after the—post WWII, did you notice a lot of changes? Did you feel that life changed after that era was over?

deFaria: Dramatically. Because what happened is all the restriction and all the shortages and all the rest—they didn't just come back over night by the way. But they—but they built up very slowly—not too slowly. Fast enough so you felt the difference. An uh, there was a minor period where—just because rationing was gone didn't mean that the shelves were filled. It just took a little bit time for it to work out. I mean it's like this pandemic—I mean everybody just hopes you can—as they say, turn the switch and we're all back to normal—impossible. It would be my opinion that this thing will go on through the end of the year in some form or another. That we will be stuck in our houses depending what we do in life, uh and how important you are to the general economy. So, I just think of something of a new way of life that could last certainly to the end of this year and perhaps into next year.

Q: Yeah, I completely agree and just from looking at—you're such a social person, it's a big part of your life. I was curious if you have any thoughts of any of the consequences this might have socially for people?

deFaria: Well, I think quite a bit because we loved to go out—you know everybody likes to go out and do something. Whether it's a movie, or theatre or whatever—and that's a social inter-change. I mean watching a comedy with a group of people and laughing together is really not the same thing as sitting in a room, on TV and laughing at something on the screen. Yes, sure you love it, you enjoy it and so on, but there's a communal thing you lose and—which is part of who we are as people. And so, regretfully I think that's going to be the slowest thing to come back, which is [unknown word] regretfully, because that's the sort of thing I do. So if you can't get people to come to the theatre or to the movie screen—uh, we got some serious social things we have to work out.

Q: Yeah, I have tickets to a show in San Francisco next month and--

deFaria: Which one?

Q: Um, the Harry Potter

deFaria: Yeah

Q: And

deFaria: Yeah, it's a shame

Q: I bought them a year ago and--

deFaria: Of course

Q: And uh, so—they haven't refunded it yet, but I can only imagine they can't have the show

deFaria: What in May or June?

Q: May 10<sup>th</sup>

deFaria: Bad news [laughs]

Q: Yeah, ugh. Well, I will just say that um—yeah that during this time—just—it's something that, it's—I think there's no blue print for how to act and—I was—my thing is about—as someone that is 93 years old, like—do you feel that these restrictions—how do they affect you?

deFaria: As you get to be this age you're not quite as active as you were before. I'm still active, b-but to me it's not—for me to spend the night at home watching—relaxing with TV—it's what I was doing before when I wasn't working on a show. So, you know the hardship comes—the younger you are, the greater the hardship. And, and, and when you get to be up in the—we'll call it the older generation it's a little easier. But—so that's the tragedy for me is, is kids uh, not being able to play with their friends. I mean that's part of growing up, and that's just—you know restricted.

Q: Yeah completely. It really—yeah, it's something else. Uh, Walt this kinda leads to a question I was going to get to um, just throughout your life narrative but, do you have any children, Walt?

deFaria: I have three, yeah. They're all adults. They're all married. They all have children of their own. And um, two of them live up in Washington State, where all of this was really intense. And my son uh, lives in Los Angeles, he's uh, motion picture producer—very busy. Even now, cause he developed a method continuing the work he's doing and they're all doing it on the computer—talking to one another, yeah. Well it's animation, and he's developed along with some companies, a method to keep the animation going—literally animating and working on this project from home—the entire crew—just amazing.

Q: Wow! And, that—that is amazing. The uh—Do you think that maybe 30 years ago this kind of pr—you could still work on these projects at home or how do you think this pandemic would have effected it before all of our internet technology?

deFaria: [laughs] We'd be dead. No, nothing would happen. Because really, if it happened 30 years ago you would just have to be home and talk on the telephone [laughs].

Q: That be tough. That'll be really tough. And you said that um, you had grandchildren?



deFaria: I have—I have seven, I think seven grandchildren and three—and two great grandchildren.

Q: Are you able to this ZOOM—ZOOM conferencing with them at all? Or--

deFaria: That's a new thing. I didn't generate it, one of my daughters did. But we now meet every Saturday at 4 o'clock, on ZOOM. And everybody—everyone isn't there every time, but most of them are and they come and go. And, there's always a game to play, that's why we get together. So for me, I couldn't really care less about the game, but the important thing is you get to see them all you know, and it's really great. That's one of the better things that have happened. In fact ZOOM should live on way past this, because when you got distant relatives—perfect answer to the problem.

Q: I agree. I think this is one of the benefits; it's one of the positive things that have come out of all this

deFaria: Yeah

Q: It's really simple and—you're right, you can see everyone. It really allows for more of a connection.

deFaria: Yup

Q: Well thank you for talking about all of this Walt. I feel that somebody with—with your perspective and with all the years that you've lived—it's really great to get—yeah what your thoughts are one this whole—yeah pandemic.

deFaria: It's [laughs], it has a lot to say to us.

Q: Yeah. Alright, so—I'm going to hop back into the interview and again feel free at anytime you want to add anything, it's all relevant because it's all about you. Um, so last time we were talking we were getting towards the end of your time in the um, Arm—the Armed Services. Being stationed, I believe

deFaria: The Pentagon

Q: Yeah, yeah. The Pentagon. So

deFaria: Just awful stuff [laughs].

Q: So you eventually made your way to Fresno, but you spent some time in Los Angeles first correct?

deFaria: No, no. Actually I went to um—I went to Fresno and in Fresno working at the television station that had just opened and I got a chance to write, direct, produce and simultaneously though, to show you the theatre connection—the guy that I was rooming

with was also working for the station and together we founded the theatre called *The Pillow Playhouse*. Cause we were renting a farmhouse out near the edge of Fresno and so on the front porch people would come and bring their pillows and on the front porch we would put on a production. So even though we were in television we were constantly working on theatre. And so—anyways—at any rate at that time in my career I got married, I had one child and then I decided it was time to go to the big time. So I left Fresno, went to Los Angeles, got another job while in Los Angeles, went through most of my savings and near the end of that—at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour the head of the television station KMJD in Fresno was playing golf with the head of Disney and he mentioned to the guy—this guy—I know this guy who's pretty good with us, he needs a job. Could you give him a job, and the guy said sure. Well, in one instance I had a job in Hollywood working for the Mickey Mouse Club. And what I did on the Mickey Mouse Club, they had something called the *News Reel Division*, it's part of the show. And so I would—I was hired to write for that division. Did I go over this last time? I don't want to repeat myself.

Q: No you did not. No we did not get into

deFaria: Well, what I didn't mention—what they would do—they would buy freelance photography of events, you know fair—a cake winning an award at a fair—around the country. The raw material would come back with some minor notes—there were about three or four of us in front of a—of—I can't remember what they're called anymore, cause they don't use them anymore. Uh, so anyway the film would run through it and we would make up a story [laughs] about the film—but a humorous story, that's the whole point. And

that was the television thing. So that lasted but when—they closed down that division and I was out of work. And by that time we had been desperately trying to sell scripts and so on—got lots of interviews, but no work. So uh, went off—I was offered a job at St. Mary's College where I had graduated from in the development department. So I took a detour, went away from other business to help raise money for the college and then, while there met a guy named Lee Mendelson, who ran Lee Mendelson productions. Which is the Charlie Brown group, in other words, the Charlie Brown animated series were all made by Lee Mendelson. So when I joined him, cause we were going to make a film about the company, uh the first film had not come out yet. And so I joined him and a few months later, *A Charlie Brown Christmas* went on TV and suddenly he was in business, and by [laughs] misdirection I was in business. So I worked—I worked with Lee until the Seventies and uh, he made—my kids were the voices of the Charlie Brown characters in the beginning, for the first or five. After that, of course they grew up and moved away. I uh, I did—I produced live action shows for Mendelson involving Snoopy at the Ice Follies. There was a series of shows we did, not animated with uh, Charles Shultz as the host and Snoopy as the star and they were all on ice. Anyway that is what I did, I didn't do the animated shows, my kids did. So eventually I—we split up, his company from our companies, but I stayed there and had my own company. And I began doing other stuff. One of the earliest things I did um, was an off-Broadway show, which I raised the money for in—in Fresno and it was about JFK, and um—it was pretty good, it lasted one week [laughs] before it folded. It was a good experience. At any rate, I came back. I worked, I—I was given the property, I'm sorry—I was led to the property of *The Borrowers*, it's a series of books about children—about people who live under the floorboard and borrow all the things that you lose. It was a

major major children's series, out of England and we made—I made a television special and I spent quite a few years in television. And *The Borrowers*, by the way is something that has kept with me all through the years and quite honestly, it probably kept me alive, [laughs] because of the various versions I was able to do with it over the years. All the other things are marvelous; this is like the annuity you're always looking for. Um, so let's see where am I now, I'm still in Fresno, but I'm still—but I'm--you know what, I'm sorry. I'm in Burlingame, California which is where Lee Mendelson's offices are located. And that's where I was working out of, all that time. In fact he was kind of amazing. He got us major television shows—we never left Burlingame. Had nothing to do with Hollywood, never was down there. If—if we were down there it was to do some recording. For example one of the shows I did—I produced and directed Charli—Travels with Charlie, based on the John Steinbeck book, and Henry Fonda was the host. So the only time we went to Hollywood was for him to narrate it. And then, you know, then we come back—cause what I did with that particular show which is—probably the most interesting one I've done was uh, we got a truck that resembled what Steinbeck had traveled in. I rented a dog out of L.A. The photographer and I got in the truck and we drove from Buffalo, New York back to California, which was the top half of his book. And filming along the way, interviewing along the way to create *Travels with Charlie*. And um, it was interesting because when the show was over I showed it to—we all went to New York to show it to Steinbeck, who at that time was pretty elderly and not well you know, but he was okay, he was able to sit through it. And when it was all over he was in tears because it kind of relieved his—what he had done. And he wanted the dog—I said no problem, we'll get you the dog. So I returned it by then. I rented it from Riverside, California—it lived with me for about four months. At any

rate, when I called back someone had stolen the dog. So it was really very sad [laughs], we had to tell Steinbeck, ne-yeah you're not going to get the dog. But that's a long adventure, that one in itself. And um, so the television thing was rather intense, you know uh, even though it kept—I kept theatre alive on the side. I mean for example, when I was in Fresno I did—I also directed something for the Fresno Community Theatre, but when I got to Burlingame uh, the only theatre I really did was in my own backyard and we do some plays occasionally. But eventually I left Mendelson and went back to Hollywood, but this time uh, my wife and I were divorced and so I went back to try and try again and met my second wife and lived in L.A.—I eventually ended up working for something called San Rio. If you know what *Hello Kitty* is you know what San Rio is. At any rate, they um, they underwrote a couple films I did and eventually uh, that kind of dried up after a number of years, I don't know how many, it was either four or five. And I decided, I the kinda stuff I wanted to do at that time, unless you had your name Disney on it, wasn't going to sell. My timing was really bad, because now anybody with any kind of decent family story can get it done. At any rate, I moved to Fresno—I moved to Carmel and even—I was going to go into retail. I decided this is enough, I had had all of the theatre I could want—I mean all of the television I could want. So um, and I started doing a little bit of retail. Through a series of circumstances I got back into theatre here am spent the next almost thirty years doing theatre in Carmel—in the Carmel area, not just in Carmel. That's a long journey, but that's where we are.

Q: Yeah, wow! I--there's a lot in there that's absolutely just amazing. I'm still just in awe that you got to meet John Steinbeck—that's awesome.

deFaria: Yeah, and he autographed his book for me, wrote a little message in it. So I keep it hidden—so it won't fade [laughs].

Q: That—that—that is absolutely incredible. I—I was really interested in the Pillow Playhouse that you were talking about. And I kind of have this larger question—that is—how does small, local theater, including like on a front porch—how does that compare to Broadway theatre.

deFaria: Well I was doing off-Broadway remember, I wasn't doing Broadway--

Q: Yeah, yeah. Of course, but just in general, like how does that small

deFaria: It's far more intimate to begin with. And you know, you're—you're—as far as you're concerned, you're doing it—it's Broadway. I mean—that's what you convince yourself it is, not to worry about it. You know there's a big difference, of course. First off, just we do it with—practically as a freebee. Nobody gets paid; everybody does whatever they're going to do. We beg, borrow and steal to get settings and so on. And uh, the comparison is rough, for that kind of—little tiny theatre. Uh, when you jump to something like PacRep, here in this area—that's a professional theatre, well they're an equity theatre. Which means they have some professional people, but not totally. And uh, they have to raise—I mean raising money for them is rough, because you have to—you depend heavily on gifts and grants. And your ticket sales are important but they don't pay the total bill. So there's a lot—there's a lot they need to continue. Broadway on the other hand, is you go out

and raise money, and—I may have mentioned to you, typical Broadway opening stature costs 14 million dollars to mount. So when you spend 14 million dollars to get on to Broadway, you now have a commercial enterprise that cannot depend on just goodwill. The show itself has to bet great, audiences have to want to see it, and in that case—the ticket prices do cover the cost. If you live long enough—I mean typically you have to run at least a year to break even. And then after that you start making money. Now every show is different, I mean that's just a generalization I'm giving you. But uh, some shows only cost 10 million, so [laughs] isn't that nice. So, if they're really—it's a major investment. The people who are investing they're the one that are really kind of grant givers, in the sense that they—they're in it to make their money back, and—but they know the business well enough to know—you can put 500,000 dollars into it and never see it again. But you know that going in. Cause when I did my—and a typical thing is that—when I did my little off-Broadway show, did it in the circle in the square in downtown New York at the village. It uh, we raised \$49,000 dollars from friends and then most of the friends came back for the open, went to the party and then when it closed—of course I was devastated because I felt like I owed all these people \$49,000 dollars. Every one of them said, nah we knew—we knew that it may not have made it, and secondly we had a hell of a time. Well if you have that kind of money to make that kind of statement then it makes sense. So most investors have money. They're not people that if they lose the \$500 it's the end of the world. So, the Broadway thing is a whole different par—it's a different ballgame. But the little, tiny off-Broadway thing was kind of like a micro version of it.



Q: It sounds like it's an experience of its own. And how you talked about it, like—that's [laughter with Walt]. So how much money would it cost then for a more local production, like at the PacRep production would cost?

deFaria: Well let's take the Forest Theatre, like a show that I've done more than enough times, *Beauty and the Beast*. Uh, a show like that cost about \$50,000 dollars to mount. Uh, and it depends upon—you know that is a very successful one. I was very lucky to—when I did that for PacRep. We had—it was the largest group of people ever to see a show the Forest Theatre—is *Beauty and the Beast*. It hadn't been done anywhere around here. Uh, there were about 10,000 people who came to see it. And at the Forest Theatre that's just wild. Well that was over a five-week period. None-the-less it was really very amazing. But that \$50,000 is give or take—some cost more by the way—depends on what you're doing. And—and the—the Forest Theatre—PacRep I should say at the Forest Theatre often—they can afford to get an equity actor—one equity actor into the show, which lends a certain professionalism to it. But equity actors you have to pay a certain fixed fee to, and while the rest of the—the majority of the cast are doing it free, for the love of theatre. So you're only paying someone like an equity player and occasionally a guest player, who may or may not be equity. So even with all that these shows barely break even and the bigger ones like *Beauty and the Beast* make money, as does *The Wizard of Oz*, *Peter Pan* and all the shows I've done. And um, it's really a crab shoot. The guild—The Forest Theatre Guild which is another group that I've worked with at the Forest Theatre, um, have not drawn the same audience—same large audiences, because they went through a bad period some years ago and it's been very hard trying to get the audiences to come back. Even though there shows

are very good, it's been hard getting audiences. They don't have enough money to advertise properly, and in this market now that the newspapers are worthless it's really hard to get advertising out there that you can afford. Television being the one you want—television is the one you can't afford.

Q: Wow, and—I can only imagine that you've seen how things have shifted

deFaria: Yeah

Q: The newspaper not being worth anything.

deFaria: That was one of the biggest blows to local non-profit theatre was the loss of space in the newspapers. Well the loss of meaningful space because some people get the paper but not enough.

Q: Wow. Well—Yeah so, in relation to—now we're talking about acting and theatre. In one of our first conversations you mentioned that you had a story about acting, how it's not something that you—you've retired from it. I think--

deFaria: It retired from me

Q: [laughs] Yeah, it retired from you. Would you mind telling that story about you not acting?

deFaria: [laughing] Many summers ago—I can't remember when, but I was in college. Or at least that age--college age. And uh, a good friend of mine was in theatre in Sacramento and uh, he and his father rented a theatre and we got involved. But anyway they—Sacramento's city college was going to do a production of Shakespeare and so these actors that I was hanging out with conned in me into being in the show. I done it in college, but I wasn't very good even then. But so, I said no I'm not an actor. They said, yes you are, you're going to do it. So I—my great moment in the theatre was to walk—was to open this Shakespeare play with words 'what new on the Rialto'. And that was my line, and that was the end of my career. [laughs] I just decided, no more, not me. So from that point on, um I've acted very little. On a couple of occasions—a couple of fundraisers when they conned me into playing somebody. But um, no I produce, direct and write. That's me.

Q: I'm sure that you were fantastic

deFaria: Oh yes [laughs].

Q: So even though—you're maybe not—even though acting retired from you. What do you think people get from acting that they don't get from other forms of expression? What about acting do you think makes like--

deFaria: Well, you know the thing about an actor—you've got to—you have to really want a couple of things. You want to be accepted, you want to be loved. You—and also you believe

in what's happening in the play for example and the character that you're playing. It's a combination of wanting to impress the audience and also, quite often, searching deeply within yourself. Depends on what kind of actor you are. But assuming that you're a really good one that really works on the part and you know, believes in what they're doing, you can get lost in the character. And sometimes that's the best acting that happens. So, different actors have different methods, but um I think all of them have to really want the admiration of the audience, otherwise they wouldn't go out there. It's their ego, that's what makes them. They have a—they have a strong feeling about themselves and what they can do, what they can say and people respond to that.

Q: I love that answer. You are—you can tell that you have this wealth of experience of being around actors and that's.

deFaria: [laughs]

Q: So with that being—how do you feel about being an actor? How do you feel about being a director, producer and writer? How maybe that might contrast to

deFaria: Well, its—it's control. [laughs]

Q: [laughs]

deFaria: You get to lead. You know, the thing about it—if you do a normal little situation, you write something and then you have to go out and convince people to underwrite it, so that you then could have it done. And then if it's done, then you direct it. And the best example I have of that is um, I wrote something called *The Borrowers Musical*, based on the books and we—on the first time it was done, it was done by something called the “Salt Shaker Theatre” in Salinas. And I was just the writer, meaning they have their own director, their own producer, their own everything. And that was—it was interesting, uh but it was kinda like you sat back from it and you can learn by the way, about your writing. So—but fortunately it was very successful. And years later I was able to re-write it slightly, and then get the Forest Theatre Guild produced it—they underwrote it and we produced it at the Forest Theatre. And—and there was a chance that I—in that instance I was the writer, producer, director. And we had a marvelous cast and it really was well done. I was really very happy with it. But your chances of doing all three of those roles are—you know somewhat slim. Mostly you're doing one or the other, or a combination. But—to answer your question, control [laughs].

Q: I was about to say, that's what I love about that is, how quick that was to [laughs] yeah, to express. That was awesome. So, speaking of that control that um, I just—I have a couple thoughts, and the first one is—I'm that you have taken your fair share of criticism--

deFaria: [laughs]

Q: --over the years, and I—I was curious to how maybe, that, that effects you, or that has affected you. Or maybe, you could give a story of a particular time when you were criticized for any--

deFaria: Well I think—the one time—the most serious time in my life, that I never forgot of course. Was when I was very young and I was working on a film, like an esoteric film. You know what Esalen is? Esalen up in Big Sur, it's a kind of a

Q: Yes

deFaria: --you know, whatever. And so I've gone there a number of times. We were working on a film that I was—that I directed with a guy who was the guru of the film. He would—kind of a co-directed kind of thing. And I had one idea, he had another, and—it was the only time this ever happened to me in my whole life. The producer of the film was Lee Mendelson and we were really good friends, there was no problem. But in consultation with the guy, the guru they decided I had to get off the film. And that's the only time I've ever been dumped and it stuck with me [laughs], believe me because it's the kind of thing you don't want to have happen, but it's not bad for your ego to kind a get a good shot, maybe, occasionally. And so that took care of that. But fortunately that has not happened since. Um and, but that doesn't mean you don't get criticism. The local reviewers here in town, you know there so few—I mean they don't exist hardly anymore. You don't even get a review. But when you did get them—I did so many children's stuff, they would involve young people, from all ages. Most of the productions, some of the kids were six years old up

to adults, I used the whole group. These were the original shows I wrote with a man named Steve Tosh, they were youth musicals, but uh, you get a—parents sometimes would be upset because somebody was not cast in the role they wanted them to be cast in, and those were the king of things, you kinda gotta roll with that, you know? I mean and try to explain it. You didn't win because—because a parent walks away convinced that their boy or girl is as good as the person that got in their—doing that roll. So that's what I, you get a lot of pressure on that. You just gotta keep going, you know? And find another roll for that kid [laughs ].

Q: [laughs] Yeah, I can only imagine the pressure that parents must—can put on.

deFaria: Oh yeah they can [laughs]

Q: [laughs] Well, the um—you had a, let me see if I can pull it up—you had a quote from an article that I was reading about—on you that had a—you had a really insightful, let me see if I can find it. In discussing—basically let me put it into context for you. You said that there's, there's like an excitement that you have when the curtain goes down and the people react.

deFaria: Oh yes, of course. I mean I can remember—there are a couple of things. When you've written something, you know, and you get the first laugh, that's exhilarating, I mean that's just amazing. And then when the curtain goes down [laughs] and people applaud [laughs] that too is exhilarating. Because, you know it's just an affirmation. I mean, you've

spent—A typical—It would take a year to get something done, up on a stage and by that time, you know you're exhausted, emotionally. And when it works—they don't all work that well but that ones that do work it really great, it's really great.

Q: Yeah, that—I can only imagine because you're right all that work in to something, to have that affirmation that hey, this is something people are excited--

deFaria: and speaking of actors, it works because they take to heart and do it well. I mean, you know. But it's meaningless on the page.

Q: I like that, meaningless on the page. So speaking of pages, um I saw that you have some pages of productions that you have

Muffled discussion over each other

Q: I was curious if maybe we could spend um, yeah just a little bit of time before we end our session, if you wouldn't mind maybe going through those pages and maybe mentioning some of these productions that stand out to you, maybe why they stand out to you?

deFaria: Well I've already mentioned *The Borrowers*, which is uh, a really important thing that started with a Hallmark Hall of Fame show, went on to make it a motion picture— motion picture in England. And uh then a series, a BBC series and then eventually another series and right now, it's not dead yet. It's still, there's stuff going on. Um, things that I really



get excited about—well the last thing I did was *Hello Dolly*, and that was probably one of the best stage musicals I've done at the Forest Theatre. But I--

Q: What made it so great?

deFaria: The cast. It was just, well no—Two things. It's a very enjoyable show, with great music. And then, when you get the right cast it's really astounding. There's a gal named Grace Pelletti, who did—who played Dolly. Who is one of the best actresses in this area. And she was the lead and it was really great. Uh, and a guy named Michael Jenkins played opposite of her, uh—and he's an equity actor, and has worked at PacRep a lot and uh, an amazing actor. So we had I mean—plus other people but, it was really good. Um, well huh, I trying to remember anything that would be kind of-oh, in terms of—I know in terms of the youth musicals, we made ten of them—one a year. Steve Tosh who wrote the music is deceased but he was a wonderful composer, he and I worked great. We made a lot of—but the one that has been repeated a couple of times is called *If wishes were horses*. And uh, it's really about a girl in a wheel chair who uh, is confronted by an evil person and an angel, and she's torn between what she's gonna do—now that she's in this wheelchair forever. And it was played by a bunch of young kids and um, I tried to write stuff that's age appropriate rather than a ten year old trying to play fifty year old man. I'll bring in a fifty year old man to play him and the let the kid play the ten year old. And that was really my philosophy through all of these shows that we did. But um, it's hard to know which one you like best.

Q: So you wrote this play, *If wishes were horses*?

deFaria: Yeah. Yeah and I wrote the music, I mean the lyrics and the book and uh, the book and Steve Tosh wrote the music.

Q: So quickly, real quickly—what happened? So she has two forces kinda telling her--

deFaria: Well, I mean the plot is that her friends try to take her to a ball to dance and the boy dances with her in the wheelchair. Eventually though, it's time to go and the angels say, let's go. It's a terrible, corny twist of course, called the Lazarus factor and it saves her from dying and we move on. It's super corny, but it worked. It worked.

Q: Yeah, no I think it's fantastic; it has a timeliness kind of feel to it. The story itself does.

She--

deFaria: Yeah

Q: There's a dance and she has to go, I mean--

deFaria: [laughs]

Q: That's awesome. That's fantastic! [laughs]

deFaria: [laughs] There was another one called *Kid Millionaire*. And this kid in high school wins the lottery prize, but the difficulty of course, he was not liked at all before he wins the money and suddenly he's very famous. But as it turns out he lied about his age when he, when he sent his thing in, so he loses the money and loses his friends, and then eventually it all kind of comes together again. But, high school [laughs].

Q: I think it's fantastic that these are, these are your—these are your ideas—they're acted out on a stage--

deFaria: The marvelous part is watching them done by these people. We got parents, kids, everybody involved in it. Now the signing in it is mediocre but the show itself is charming. One or two voices are good but when you start asking every parent, because you need adults to play parts and then you ask them to sing is kinda stretching it a bit [laughs].

Q: I can understand. Are there any other—I'm sorry to interrupt you, this is all so fascinating, Walt. Um, are there any other um, plays or musicals that stick out to you?

deFaria: Plays, you mean the theatre? Yeah?

Q: Yeah

deFaria: Well, let's see. I don't know um. I did a couple—I did four shows at um, MPC um, one of which was really kind of just a lot of fun. Uh, it was called um, *To Frog and Toad*. And

I know it sounds like a kids thing, but actually it was—it was kind of a general family one. And uh, a year of *To Frog and Toad* based on a, you know the old frog and toad stories. And that was, that was really a local only show. –There’s so many, uh, the other one that I like was *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat*. We did that at Forest Theatre, and um—I don’t know. Hmm, *Funny Girl*, that was at MPC. And too many productions of *Peter Pan*, [laughs] and god, and *Oliver*, which I love by the way—it’s a great show. And um, *The Wizard of Oz*.

Q: How many, how many, how many do you think are on that paper right there—on all that?

deFaria: Well if you put them all together about a hundred. That includes television and motion pictures, and New York opera and ballet. He and I wrote a couple of operas, one of which was done at Cabrillo College, Cabrillo College. And that was fun to watch, to see an opera come to life [laughs]. These are one-act operas by the way; they’re short [laughs].

Q: That is still—that’s still mind blowing, that’s still amazing that—that’s on the repertoire of—writing an opera that’s phenomenal [laughs]. Um, so I have a question that kinda ties all of this together—all of, just—all the different performances you’ve been able to be a part of and all of the writing that you’ve done and—it’s kinda a broad question so uh, best of luck to you. But—what do you think makes a good story?

deFaria: Ah, what makes a good story?

Q: You're a storyteller so I thought you'd be a great person to uh--

deFaria: What makes a good story is—it's gotta have some tension. It's gotta have some, some affection. It's gotta have some, in some cases a little mystery wouldn't hurt. Um, and for me it's got to have a beginning, middle and an end. Although in this day and age the end is not necessarily important [laughs] anymore.

Q: They just keep on going--

deFaria: Yeah

Q: I really—I really like tension some affection and a little bit of mystery. That's quite the recipe.

deFaria: Oh yeah, if you can do it, it's good. And I don't mean mystery in the sense of Agatha Christie [laughs].

Q: Yeah, but a sense of the unknown.

deFaria: Yeah, yeah

End of interview two

Zoom

Session Three

Interviewee: Walt deFaria

Location: Carmel-by-the-Sea

Interviewer: Jason Little

Date: April 21, 2020

*Audio of interviewer was not picked up by narrator and resorted to typing the questions in the chat window to communicate. Time stamp indicates when a new question/theme is introduced.*

00:00:00

deFaria: Okay, I'll start. Yeah, I know you're gonna ask about Steve Tosh. You know I wanted to back up just a little bit to get the scheme [laughs]. I'm in a new location. And the reason I'm here i--is to kind of emphasize these are posters that, some of the posters of some of the shows I've done and I have a little owl cove with all that kind of stuff. Uh, but it's to make a point, you know, there's so many people behind the scenes on all these shows and one of the least ones that are appreciative of the fact that we get original artists to do these posters. And back when I was in advertising in San Francisco, at \_\_\_\_, director of-- what was he technically called? I guess a creative director and new into the years we kept our friendship. But when I moved up here, started doing the children shows with Steve Tosh I wanted to have them illustrated like they do the big shows, why not? So this guy out of San Francisco did a whole bunch of posters for me as we did each show and eventually-- the moral--we began expanding that into the regular shows at the Forest Theatre, the guy's

name in San Francisco was Jack Janice, unfortunately he has passed away. But locally Kathy Smith, of PacRep has done a lot of these posters. And Anthony Trangala has been doing them for the guild. So they're just kind of like the background of where we going. As to Steve Tosh, well he and I first met when I was working at Dance Kids at the Carmel ballet Academy and um he was doing an accompaniment to some shows they did and I was--I came in to do as a producer, producing *The Nutcracker*. And then we also did a couple--an original show, which you payed for but we didn't write the music we used other people's songs and that's how I got to know him. Eventually he and I were together on Oliver, that's the poster behind me [laughs], done by the San Francisco guy. Uh no, it was done by Kathy Smith, I'm sorry. And so we got to know each other. We worked on the show of Oliver and I suggested, and I said what about we do something original that is for youth, youths. So we did, and we did a series. And the most successful one though in our head, was the *Borrower's* musical. Which unfortunately when we finally mounted it at the theater guild he had passed away. This guy was an unbelievable talent. He started out when he was a very young boy, as a genius kid singer, believe it or not, as well as a musician. And he moved to this area long before I did. Did a lot of shows up here and eventually, he wrote symphonies, and he wrote operas—he and I wrote two operas together. Me, me I did the libretto he did the music [laughs] and uh just in general, just a wonderful guy. His biggest problem, it was delightful though, I mean, he had perfect pitch and it just drove him absolutely insane with some singers, of course, and when the kids wouldn't behave, you know, and I used to rehearse with all the parents present when we did the kid shows for many reasons that presents--all parent were present and were invited to sit during rehearsals. And a few times, he would throw out a couple of really nasty words at the kids and the parents would

be shocked to death. So we all—we all later, we'd have to live a little talk and see, we say, okay, okay, I'll behave. But and--but that's not the point, he played--he did shows in Paso Robles, he did shows for MPC, he did shows for almost everybody in this area and was really a genius. And a good example is this, I could write a lyric handed to him, no matter what the hell the lyric looked like or sounded like. And he could write music to it and he would come back and ask you to drop a 'to' or 'maybe, a single word here or there. I don't think he ever, then I can remember asked me to rewrite a complete sentence and God knows some of my lyrics are rambling. But he was amazing. He really was. And I—we really miss him. That's my Steve Tosh story [laughs].

deFaria: Where would you like to go from here?

00:05:48

deFaria: You have a lot of editing to do [laughs]. I can't see the complete sentence--next thing I wanted to ask is--That's all there.

Q: Oh, sorry, there's a lot more

deFaria: Do I scroll or something?

deFaria: Oh well, bring it back then. It's gone.

Q: Oh, it's the very bottom, it's just--



deFaria: Oh, okay [laughs].

deFaria: Well, interviews. You know, as you get older you get interviews [laughs]. And um, I worked for many years with Charlie Brown, I met with Charlie Brown with Charles Schulz and in fact he hosted two shows that I produced, three shows that I produce for Lee Mendelson company, which were live shows and Schultz was the host and a little side story on that is that one of the first kind of uh kid shows we did at Dance Kids would Steve Tosh was playing the piano. I wrote a show called Dance Kids goes to--Dance Kids goes to the Funnies. Now that's something, I can't remember the name of it, but it was a show--no, that's right, Dance Kids go to the Funnies, and what it was about was looking at the history of how the funny, you know, how the Funnies came through. But the good part about it was hosted—it was hosted by Charlie Brown and Lucy Brown. And uh, I think we also had one other character, the point at that point is, nobody was supposed to do that. I mean, it was totally legal. But fortunately, I asked Shultz, sent him the script and he gave me permission, a one-time permission. So we did one week. It was to raise funds for the for the Dance Kids group. So, and that was--that was really great. That was something that, you know, helped a lot. But interviews, well it's a long way my telling you that because of my association with Charlie Brown and the Snoopy and Shultz--when things came up, anniversaries in San Francisco for Schultz, you know, I'd get some—they send the camera crew guy that asked me how it was to work with him and so on and so on. And most of those went pretty well, occasionally I could [laughs] remember some of the details. Other than that though they

went okay and I've had no—seriously--like not had a serious problems, nor any great stories to tell.

deFaria: It didn't, it didn't . If you need anything more I could rattle off a little bit about the Forest Theatre [laughs].

deFaria: Oh, I've traveled a great deal for, for--I made--I made about because of the *Borrower's* basically. But when I moved up to, to the Carmel area and Hollywood left me. I, I didn't leave it [laughs]. When I moved up to the Carmel area I thought of myself retired. I tried, as I think I mentioned earlier, I was going to do the retail business that didn't workout. But while I was here, and I know all this time I own the rights to *The Borrowers*. And that's a very big British book or series of books. And I got a call from a Working Title Films, who you may not know, but they're a major film producer in London, they wanted to do a series with the BBC based on it. So I would become the executive producer no actually, yeah, and they made it in London, outside of London actually, one of the studios. So I went over there for a month, because you get as an executive producer--you don't work on it on a daily basis, but you get a chance to look at the script, look at the cast, give your opinion go up a little and then go home. So I--but these adventures were my most exciting because later would make a major motion picture and I was able to go back again. And--and I began, I really love London. I must tell you the theater there's fabulous. But the, these--those adventures, were some of the highlights. This one property has been the greatest thing that ever happened to me and I got quite by accident. A very well known mad at the time named Christian Fathom, who worked for the Encyclopedia Britannica is one of the, you know, one

of the people who edit their books in those days, there were books and he, he and I were working together on another project, but he was an advisor. And by that time I was an independent producer, even though I was still in the Lee Mendelson office building. And he said that he was--it turns out he was an expert in children's literature. He was chatting with me, he said, we know there's a book you have to look at and it's called *The Borrower's*. To be honest I'd never heard it, but it had done really well and--so he gave me a copy to read. I read it again tracing the history of--where was it, who had the rights. It turned out that CBS had established a film division in Hollywood and they own the rights to it, not for television, but film, but for a motion picture. They'd hired fabulous people to write the script. Jay Pers\_\_ was the woman who wrote the script, somebody's name--and then Harold Prince had tried to get a hold of--they're doing a great fl\_\_ over before that it died down when the film rights were sold. So I linked with a Charles Shultz's company and we went to LA to meet with CBS to see--because it turns out they were going out of business, fortunately. So we went down there and we talked to them and they were willing to sell us the rights. And the rights came with a script and everything. But we were looking for, at that time--The Hallmark Hall of Fame was on major networks, not, not on their own network like they are now, they were prime time of NBC. So uh, \_\_\_\_\_ building, the ad agency, uh was the producer of the Hallmark shows, so I linked up with three people for Fred \_\_ Golden, Charles Schultz and my company. And we got the rights from CBS. And we made the first major one, which was *The Borrower's* on the Hallmark Hall of Fame, which got five Emmy nominations, won three. The ratings are so high the first year that it was repeated in the second. It was--it went first one on 1972 then they loved it so much for Christmas and they put it on the next Christmas, and it did equally almost as well as it had done the first year.

Sequels sometimes are--you're lucky to get close. And so that opened the door for me. Now what happens through the years is, Charles Shultz too, it was in good shape--I kept telling him--I was trying to sell it as a series over here. And he kept saying, I don't--stop calling me and asking for my permission, just do it. And finally he said, look I tell you what. Here are the rights that I own, I'm out of this, it's your baby. Don't call me if you win, don't call me if you lose. So it was very generous, I mean he gave up the rights for—the \_\_\_ building gave up the rights for a piece of the profit forever. Then in recent years Norman Lear had looked at it as a possibility for a series at Twentieth Century Fox, who are still distributing, by the way, the original one made in 1972. So that's really strange, but that's how long these things live and have a long life to them is all I say. So that's my, that's my Borrower's story.

00:15:10

deFaria: Oh, by the way, one small little detail. I, I still own the rights. I sold all the rights back to the, to Working Title Films, except the stage rights in the United States—well, around the world, as long as it's off Broadway and off--it can be a major. So there are still people in London--someone wrote a script based on it and I own the--you have to go through me to produce it. It is being done in England, almost all time as a Children's Theatre kind of thing, which is, you know, very small potatoes, but they love children. I mean they have theaters for children in in England where that's all they do they're primarily. And so it's a big, big outlet for good old Borrowers and just, I just hope they keep it up.

deFaria: Oh, you did. Oh. Well, you know we made that film the Hallmark that you say you saw, the original one was made in Toronto. It had Dane Judith, you know, Dane Judith Evans in it. No not Dane Judith Evans--oh well. That's strange, I can't remember her name Dane Judith was all she went by and some Broadway actors we found. We found the young boy can play the lead in Sacramento in our audition and it, it, it did very well. I mean, it was, by the way, was a very difficult thing to film because in those days making somebody little/big wasn't quite as--they did it. But it was very, very tough, you have to do it against green screen or blue screen and you had to build a huge box, because when the Borrowers go up the stairs, the little Borrowers, they had to climb these, you know, big stairs. So we had to build a huge box set that went up so that you can show them climbing up and get some proportion and then you'd lay the set in on top of the blue screen. And incidentally, one of the Emmys, that was--one was for the set, and the costumes. And the set design. I mean, the--they call it not set design, but production design and no, the director didn't win an Emmy nor did I, you only get it if it's produced. I mean, if it wins as a, as a film then the producer gets an award. But nonetheless, it did very well. I'll take the nomi—nominations.

00:18:09

deFaria: Yeah, the forest theatre, by the way, is--I'm really very proud of it. In the sense that many, many people have been on the stage, done shows long before I, I came on the scene. Including Dame Judith Anderson, that's who I was trying to say earlier. And she did her Medea there years--long before I was here. But she was a great, great actress, and we got her for The Borrowers, which was amazing--but back to the Forest Theatre. My first production there was Into the Woods for the guild, I produce that. That was back in 1996? I

guess 1996 and then I came back to do--the director that was going to do Oliver at that time, had to bow out, so they call me to do it. And from that point on, I did one every year for--that was 1997 I did--the only time I didn't do is when they close down for to—no I retired. I retired 19—in, in 2007. And then I retired from doing The Forest Theatre. I had enough I thought, but I done them all the way up until then [coughs].

So then I went to MPC and did a whole series of end--because I wanted to get indoors. So I did indoor theater there. Funny Girl, Anything Goes, uh, Frog and Toad, a whole bunch of charming stuff. Then--and then I came back, it was a short retirement. I came back and did a whole series more of shows at the Forest Theatre until they close it in 2013 to repair it. So I did the last show--it seemed like I was doing the last shows of everything. I did the last show before they close the theatre and then I did the first show and they reopened it, which was The Borrower's. Without Steve Tosh, but a guy named George Peterson, a wonderful musician around here stepped in for him and helped us with get the music in order so it could work.

deFaria: My last production at the Forest Theatre is Hello Dolly, and it's one that I'm--thank God I'm really proud of. It was probably one of the—and you always hate to say you love this one or that one; I loved them all. But this one was--it was just at the point where the best talent came together in the best circumstances, with it's--where the best show you can do for them was right down their alley. And, while we didn't get large audiences, because the Forest Guil, Guild always has trouble getting audiences. The people really loved it--got the best reactions and stuff like that for a number of shows for years. Now I was going to

retire this year, but the virus, I think, has helped me retire [laughs]. We were supposed to do Annie in June and that--I don't think it's going to happen. Because rehearsals supposed to start May 15--May 16. So in its place, and this is all speculation, I'm hoping to do another Pops, which I created a couple of years ago. Carmel Pops was a place to show off the talent of various people around town, in theater and musicians and dancers. And if we can do it, I mean if they'll allow us to do it in October, it would be a fundraiser for all the little theaters. The little theaters--the theaters in this area that are going to have a tough time getting restarted again over the course of the Corona Virus, yeah. So basically, I guess I'm retired--as of this interview.

00:22:57:

deFaria: You know, I have kind of general thought about and it's more a matter of--people forget, I mean, you talk to a director, you talk to a producer, you talk a writer and the talent maybe--wonderful. But what everybody forgets is theater, at this sort musical comedies, is a collaborative thing. It involves sometimes twenty, thirty, forty other people who are doing things like lighting and sound and sets. Designing them and moving them and putting them up, taking them down. There's a huge behind the scenes situation that you can sit and have great ideas, but they won't be worth a thing if they can't be transmitted onto the stage by someone. And the really thing that we need is a shout out to those people [coughs] because they're the ones that make it even possible after you think your genius. It's just you're a genius then it goes down the tube--if they can't make it happen for you. So it to me, it's always been just—and the one other area--when you do children shows, the other thing that you need desperately are parents. And you get parents carting kids back and

forth, and I'm sure that they hate every moment of it, except they find that their kids actually benefit from it. And for me, theater is just an open a door for them to find out what it's like to stand in front of a crowd--to speak without being nervous or scared. And great learning experience and not to go into theatre later, just use it as a youngster.

00:24:40

deFaria: We don't it, theatre--if you're talking about Broadway theater or you're talking about center in general. In general, it goes through ups and downs. I think in the last--just before this epidemic hit it, the Broadway scene had grown so fantastically, that it pulled with it, of course, all the other theaters, because people now aspire to get there. So theater has, has always been with us and always will be, I feel. But if--there had been some expansions, particularly in drawing kids into theater, who now hear about all the great, you know opportunity, that they think of or want. But more importantly, the local theater--always struggled financially, there's never any question to that. Because while people say they want theater, they have to go to make it work [laughs]. And sometimes that happens sometimes it doesn't.

deFaria: Oh, you did ask me about 20 years from now. You know, 20 years from now, not be the theater we see today, it's going to transition in style and subject matter and that's good. It's a growing, you know, evolving medium.

deFaria: I think it's a good experience. And I don't think you lose, you lose anything. Yes, you lose a little bit--nobody's applauding. But [laughs] there's, there's a--I think, I think it's



great value and I really do. Here again, just another, another extension of a way to do theater. And, you know, nowadays, and they're using tremendous amount of projection. They use they'll--they'll photograph you while you're acting and put it on a big screen, so that you see yourself. You don't see yourself, you should be busy acting, but--but behind you is--you're seeing completely enlarged and so the techniques of television, if you want to call it that, are being used, and computers are being used extensively, and it's changed. I mean, I saw the production in London called Ghosts, in which all the walls were small lights that would change into the set and could do--they were just unbelievable. And because the show involved projections of like a subway train running by,, stopping and people get off actual people get off the illusion and step on stage. That's using an awful lot of the techniques and come from computers. So it's going to be dicey. I'm mean it's not gonna be just that easy, but it is an experience. I don't think it's going to hurt anything. You have to grow.

deFaria: I think I said it, unless there's something you heard that I didn't expand on. That's all I got.

deFaria: I think so [laughs]. Okay.

End interview three