

Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library

University of California  
Berkeley, California

Julian Silva

NOVELIST AND SHORT STORY WRITER

Interviews conducted by  
Don Warrin  
in 2011

Copyright © 2012 by The Regents of the University of California

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

\*\*\*\*\*

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between The Regents of the University of California and Julian Silva dated November 3, 2011. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Director of The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, Mail Code 6000, University of California, Berkeley, 94720-6000, and should include identification of the specific passages to be quoted, anticipated use of the passages, and identification of the user.

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Julian Silva, "Julian Silva: Novelist and Short Story Writer," conducted by Don Warrin in 2011, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2012.



Julian Silva



## **Interview History**

This interview took place in San Francisco at the home of Julian Silva during two sessions in November, 2011. Julian talks about family life as he was growing up in San Lorenzo in the East Bay. This was the source for his two novels, *The Gunnysack Castle* and *The Death of Mae Ramos*, in the fictional town of San Oriel (published together recently as *Distant Music* by the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth). And he talks about his links to Azorean culture. As he mentions, “We lived in a town that didn’t have a movie house, didn’t have anything. It had the IDES hall.” We learn of his early interest in fiction writing; and he talks about his short stories, novels, and the novella “Move Over, Scopes.” We also learn of his interesting years of teaching and traveling.

## Table of Contents—Julian Silva

Interview 1: Nov. 3, 2011

|   |   |
|---|---|
| [Audiofile 1]   | 1 |
| Born in San Lorenzo, California, 1927—Great-grandparents—Emigration from the Azores—Grandparents, parents, siblings—Relation of family to his fiction |   |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| [Audiofile 2]   | 14 |
| Growing up in San Lorenzo—Family life—US Navy service—Higher education—Teaching |    |

Interview 2, Nov. 11, 2011

|   |    |
|---|----|
| [Audiofile 3]   | 30 |
| Early interest in writing—Publishing poems, short stories, and novels—Conflating family and fiction—Various fictional characters— <i>Gunnysack Castle</i> —More on the fictionalized family |    |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| [Audiofile 4]   | 48 |
| Destroying various writings— <i>Move Over, Scopes and Other Writings</i> — <i>Distant Music</i> — <i>The Death of Mae Ramos</i> —Discussion of his short fiction—More on the adaptation of family history to fiction—Unpublished: A work on one of his major characters, “growing up gay in the dark ages.” |    |

Interview #1 November 3, 2011

Begin Audio File 1 silva\_julian\_01\_11-03-11.mp3

01-00:00:09

Warrin: Okay, here we are in the home of Julian Silva, in San Francisco. This is Don Warrin doing an interview for the Portuguese project. This is tape one. We are, as I mentioned, interviewing Julian Silva. Is that your full name?

01-00:00:40

Silva: Yes. During confirmation, I took Anthony, but I never used it. I was just born with two names.

01-00:00:52

Warrin: With two names. What was your date of birth?

01-00:00:57

Silva: Six, one, twenty-seven.

01-00:00:59

Warrin: Six, one, twenty-seven. Where were you born?

01-00:01:03

Silva: San Lorenzo. Geographically, it's the same place, but a totally different San Lorenzo than exists today.

01-00:01:15

Warrin: True, yes.

01-00:01:17

Silva: It was all orchards. One little street and one little church.

01-00:01:27

Warrin: Your Azorean family goes back substantially. These were great-grandparents, right, who—

01-00:01:34

Silva: All my great-grandparents were born in the Azores, except one. She was born here, but of Portuguese descent. I know nothing about whether she was from the mainland or the Azores.

01-00:01:52

Warrin: Could you describe your great-grandparents?

01-00:01:55

Silva: Yes. I knew two great-grandfathers fairly well. Actually, the person who started the family connected with San Lorenzo wasn't technically related. He was a cook on a whaling ship, named Enos Stanton. He was Ignácio, which is pretty Catholic for a Protestant sea captain who renamed him Enos, and then when he retired, he took the captain's name, Stanton. He retired, and evidently retired early, because he settled in San Lorenzo with a good number of acres of land, good land, and he fell in love with my great-grandmother, Marianne.

But she was the younger daughter, so he had to marry her older sister, Rita. They came back here, but as soon as they were settled, he brought Mary Anne, my great-grandmother, with her husband, Frank Faria. They lived just a short way away. The Stantons never had children. My grandfather Faria was a sweet man. I thought he was in his eighties. He died in his early seventies, actually. I remember he lived in a little, tiny house. He liked children, and he kept a crock full of butter balls. Butter balls were little caramel candies wrapped in paper. He had a Model A car with a rumble seat. Any time you went to visit him, you got a fistful of candy. And he would drive me. There were two railroad tracks, crossings, through San Lorenzo, and each one is on sort of a hill. He would speed up the car, and we would go riding over and bump up and down. This was a great delight to me. And I think he was child enough to do it two or three times.

01-00:04:39

Warrin:

How old were you at this time?

01-00:04:41

Silva:

About five. I think I was about five. He lived in a tiny house that was about maybe sixteen feet square, but it doesn't exist. It's now the parking lot for the church. Then, suddenly, he wasn't in the house anymore. My grandmother set up a sick room in a day porch. But he wasn't there. He just wasn't there. I didn't know anything about death. There was no fuss made about it. Oddly, there's not a single picture of him that I have. There are all kinds of pictures of Enos Stanton and my grandmother's sisters and nieces, and all the other ancestors, but not a single picture of him.

01-00:05:53

Warrin:

Do you know why? Do you have some idea?

01-00:05:55

Silva:

I just always assumed that my real great-grandfather was Enos Stanton. My great-grandmother died during her fifth pregnancy, during childbirth. There's a stained glass window to her memory in St. John the Baptist Church. The church today is a new church, but the same window. It was dedicated not by her husband, but by Enos Stanton. "In loving memory of Marianne Faria." My grandfather's father came over when he was fifteen.

01-00:06:55

Warrin:

How did he come over?

01-00:06:57

Silva:

Around the Horn. Most of my family came from Faial. My mother's father's family came from Pico. My grandmother was blonde and blue-eyed and extremely fair. She couldn't go out in the sun without gloves, and looked more Flemish. Faial had been a port of Flanders at one time. I'm sure all kinds of Flemish sailors got in there. Even Enos Stanton would not be a classic Portuguese face.



01-00:07:47

Warrin:

It was very true in the Azores, because the Flemish settled, colonized there, too. Very, very early, by the fifteenth century, there were settlements on particularly the western Azores, or the central Azores, like Faial and St. George, for instance.

01-00:08:13

Silva:

Mark Twain's "Innocents Abroad," the first stop is Faial.

01-00:08:18

Warrin:

He didn't like it too much, as I recall. He had a bit of prejudice there.

01-00:08:25

Silva:

That, I think, was pretty standard. I remember sitting on a bus going to school, two women behind me talking about a friend of theirs who was going to marry. They were bemoaning the fact that she was going to marry a Portuguese. It was considered pretty much of a comedown at that time.

01-00:08:52

Warrin:

Right. She might have said Portagee rather than—

01-00:08:58

Silva:

That was when I was in school, except we outnumbered the rest of the school. The standard was black Portagee. That never bothered me, because my grandfather was the richest Portuguese in town. I never felt the least bit reticent about saying I was Portuguese. It just seemed to me perfectly normal.

01-00:09:34

Warrin:

When you're in the majority, or close to it, it's a lot easier to accommodate to that than if you were just a few.

01-00:09:41

Silva:

Yes, yes, yes. I think, also, on the West Coast, there was not a concerted anti-Portuguese [sentiment], as, I think, in Massachusetts, there was a whole underclass. In the East Bay, they were fairly prosperous, or all of this part of California.

01-00:10:10

Warrin:

That was a big difference, because they tended to come over undereducated, and if they ended up in New Bedford or Taunton or some place, they were working in the mills. You dropped out of school when you were twelve or thirteen and helped support the family. Everybody, even the mother, was working. There was no chance for furthering yourself or your education. Out here, with the opportunities in agriculture, they could succeed without a lot of formal education. They could succeed as well as anyone else, and they did.

01-00:10:51

Silva:

My father's family ran a drayage business. Should I finish my great-grandparents before—

01-00:11:00

Warrin:

Yes, let's step back—

01-00:11:02

Silva:

My great-grandfather, Silva, married—there's one picture of his wife. I have it. I don't know what her name was. Even her first name, let alone her family name. A picture of her looking very much like my father. At age twenty-three, she had three children. She was in her fourth pregnancy. An American-born, so she wasn't expecting to become a breeding mill, which so many of them were. She tried to abort the child, and then died as a result of the abortion. So my great-grandfather was left a widow at a fairly young age, and he did not remarry until his first three children reached adulthood. Then he sent back to the Azores for a wife, and bargained for a wife, but only when the one who arrived in San Francisco was not what he expected. She was a peasant woman, and illiterate. He couldn't send her back, so he essentially had two families. He married her, had nine children by her. I wrote a piece about her, called "The Woman in the Doorway." Nobody ever introduced her. She was my grandfather's step-mother, but pretty much the same age as my grandfather. When we went to visit my great-grandfather, she was always there in the background, and the other children were there, but there were two separate families. They were all American-born, but his first family, three children, and the nine others that you met occasionally at funerals or something like that. Two of them worked for my grandfather. The youngest was named Dudley. Was about eighteen when I was, say, twelve. My great-grandfather Silva, we called him Avo, was having children quite late in life. He sat in the front of the church; she sat in the back of the church. She never learned English, and he pretty much kept her in the kitchen and the bedroom.

01-00:13:59

Warrin:

And kept the two families separate also. I've read your very touching story.

01-00:14:06

Silva:

Yes. There's a scene at my grandfather's funeral. Our grandfather ran a drayage business and was, at the time of my parents' marriage, really as prosperous as my mother's father, except he wasn't a natural businessman. Two things brought him down: the crash of 1929, and then the 1934 general strike, waterfront strike, in San Francisco. He didn't take a political position, but there had been some people killed, and he didn't want his drivers going into the city. As a result, he lost, after the strike was over, almost all of his contracts. He pretty much went bankrupt. He died in 1936, at the age of fifty-six, with a ruptured appendix.

01-00:15:30

Warrin:

This is your father's father?

01-00:15:32

Silva:

My father's father. I went to live with my grandmother. I was nine. My grandmother wasn't coping alone, and my brother and I were at war with each other, so I lived with my grandmother from the age of nine until about

fourteen. Of course, we only lived a short walk from the houses, because my grandmother's house, another house belonging to us on the corner, and then Ashland Avenue, and on the other side of Ashland Avenue was our house. Then my other grandfather on the other side. So the entire block was family. On the north side of the street, anyway.

01-00:16:30

Warrin:

How did your parents feel about you moving out of the house?

01-00:16:37

Silva:

There wasn't much choice, because my grandmother wasn't eating. She had just sort of completely given up. I think they thought it was possibly not a bad idea to separate my brother and me from each other.

01-00:16:57

Warrin:

Was your brother older?

01-00:16:58

Silva:

Two years, and infinitely stronger physically. My only weapon was my intellect. Anyway, I lived with my grandmother. Since she's the person I feel most attached to—

01-00:17:29

Warrin:

What was her name?

01-00:17:31

Silva:

Her name was Marie, but everybody called her Mae, Silva Faria. She had been born Faria. She had two children, and the younger, after whom I'm named, was killed violently in an accident. The haybed crushed him.

01-00:18:03

Warrin:

That's in—

01-00:18:04

Silva:

At the age of five.

01-00:18:07

Warrin:

That's placed in the novel at some point.

01-00:18:08

Silva:

Yes. Except it didn't happen the way it did in the novel. I wrote about it while my father was still alive. So he read that section. His only comment was that my brother, the rivalry between the two brothers there, that my older brother was afraid that I was really writing about us. I learned that my father was at school at the time of the accident, so he could not in any way precipitate it. My mother's father—I know nothing about his family except that they came from Pico. They changed their name to Smith. My grandfather was born Joaquin Smith. They wanted to be as American as they could possibly be, and they didn't allow their children to speak Portuguese. Portuguese was reserved for the help, the workers. It was a sign of class. It's a standard procedure with

recent immigrants, no matter what language. I think the same thing happened with Italians and Spanish. You want to be American, so you deny your culture. I know the family came from Pico. What they did, I don't know.

My grandfather had one sister, who died in childbirth right after marriage, and at least three brothers. My grandfather had huge parties, family parties, every Fourth of July, but never once was a member of his family included. He had a brother who lived just a few blocks away. I had a paper route, and Uncle Willie—but my grandfather and he never spoke. I gather there was some ancient animosity. They both had sons, and my grandfather's son was a ne'er-do-well, and a spoiled, awful child. There was a motorcycle accident in which my grandfather's son, his brother's son, and the neighbor boy—the neighbor boy was killed. I think my Uncle Willie always blamed my grandfather's son. Anyway, that's the origin. My grandmother's Cardoza family settled in San Leandro. He came over, Cardoza. He was given seventeen acres of land in San Leandro.

01-00:21:44

Warrin: Who gave him seventeen acres?

01-00:21:46

Silva: I don't know. Land grant or something. I don't know the legal technicalities, but he had seventeen acres to develop. He sent back, after he had been established, for a wife who was thirteen when she came.

01-00:22:15

Warrin: Typical in those days, though.

01-00:22:17

Silva: Yes. It would be considered, today—he'd be arrested for it. [laughs]

01-00:22:25

Warrin: Of course.

01-00:22:27

Silva: She proceeded to have something like—I think eight girls and three boys survived, and something like three of them died in childhood or at birth. There were a whole family of Cardozas, and there's a picture at my mother's wedding of all of the sisters in line. All of the Cardoza sisters, from the top down to the bottom.

01-00:23:01

Warrin: I think there's still a lot of Cardozas in—

01-00:23:10

Silva: My grandmother's brother's daughter, my first cousin once removed, is younger than I am. She belongs to my parent's generation, because there was such a vast disparity of ages from the youngest—the youngest was Vernie. She married a West Point man. Only two of them married a Portuguese. She married somebody called Ingram and had two sons. Her younger son was one

year older than I am. I think they're, as far as I know, almost all gone now, except for this one cousin, Phyllis. I still think of her as Phyllis Cardoza. She's Phyllis Gregory.

01-00:24:14

Warrin:

But now, of course, there are descendants still living in the area, presumably.

01-00:24:19

Silva:

Yes, but they're no longer Portuguese. Well, except my younger brother married a Portuguese, and he has three daughters and a son. Two of the daughters are married. One has children. One is married to an Irishman, and one is married to a, I think, German. The name sounds German, anyway.

01-00:24:52

Warrin:

Do some of them still belong to UPEC, the SPRSI, and so forth? IDES? Those old—

01-00:25:05

Silva:

My grandmother was the only one I knew who belonged to the SPRSI, but she didn't ever attend. It was just formality, and it was an insurance policy or something that went along with it. My father's family, their friends were very mixed, and they were far more cultured than—I remember them having parties in the twenties, in this enchanted dining room. They'd have Chinese paper lanterns strung all over. I was never allowed to go to the parties, of course, and it was during Prohibition, but there was no shortage of liquor. My godfather was Father De Cruz. He was the pastor of Elmhurst Church. He had a big supply of liquor. The people at the party were a mixture, a complete mixture. I discovered, to my advantage, when I was twelve, that one of my grandparents' best friends ran the opera house here in San Francisco. And I got passes to go to the opera with my grandmother when I was twelve. I sort of had free run of the opera house until he retired.

01-00:26:57

Warrin:

This was because of the economic and social level of your family at that time?

01-00:27:04

Silva:

My father went to St. Mary's High School, St. Mary's College, and was teaching history at St. Mary's College, and was working on a Ph.D. when the Depression hit my family, and they could no longer keep him in college. My grandparents had a Victrola, a great, big Victrola. On one side were all the black labels, like "Doing the Raccoon," or "You can bring Pearl, she's a darn nice girl, but don't bring Lulu." The other side were all red seal, with Galli-Curci Caruso and Schipa. At a very early age, I started listening to Italian opera. They went to the opera. My mother's family had a great deal of wealth. They spent all kinds of money on furniture and clothes and one big trip. But I don't think they ever went to a play. I think he maybe went to a wrestling match. I don't think he ever read a book. He read newspapers. He sort of despised my father. I think my father was making about \$2,400 a year. That wasn't as awful as it sounds at that time. We had a house. There was no rent

to pay. The house belonged to my mother's father. But my grandfather always sneered at a man—if you're so bright, why can't you make money? Why are you so poor? There was this silent animosity. Oddly, the two families, and they must have been the two most prominent Portuguese families in San Lorenzo at the time, it was the only marriage that my—the marriage of my mother and my father—the only marriage that my mother's father—grandfather, my grandfather Smith, that great Portuguese name, disapproved of and tried to prevent the marriage. And I found out later—I was certainly in my fifties when I discovered that my father's parents hadn't even been invited to the reception, the wedding reception of their only son.

01-00:30:26

Warrin:

This, in your fiction or semi-fiction, is Henry and Louise? Are these the people? Henry Ramos—

01-00:30:37

Silva:

Yes. Henry Ramos is—and it would be pronounced “Raymos.” Nobody would have said “Rahmos.” They say it now, but when I grew up, a cousin of mine was married to a Ramos who came, actually, from the mainland. I picked the name because it was simple, and actually I gave my mother's family, I called them Woods, because their original name was Silva, and there were probably as many Woods in the Oakland phonebook as there were Silvas at the time.

01-00:31:41

Warrin:

That was a change that made sense. Actually, like Ferreira became Smith, because “Ferreira” means blacksmith, and so you had an excuse to Americanize your name to Smith.

01-00:31:55

Silva:

Yes. Silva, it's a classic Latin word. I'm rambling.

01-00:32:09

Warrin:

No, no, no. This is good.

01-00:32:25

Silva:

Strangely, one of my grandfather's brothers was murdered, and one of my grandmother's sisters was murdered. The brother ran a café bar in Milpitas and was knifed to death. One of my grandmother's sisters was murdered by—it was a famous case. I was young. I knew something mysterious was happening—awful was happening—but nobody would speak anything in front of me. By somebody called the Green Glove Rapist, who was a serial killer. She was showing her house—I don't know, it was up for sale or something—and let somebody in. He was caught and executed later. You think murders only happen to other people and other families. But only on my mother's side.

01-00:33:44

Warrin:

Those things, of course, happen in all sorts of families. It was unusual, perhaps, that there were two murders. That's quite unusual. Let's go back, and if you could talk about where the money came from in your family.

01-00:34:07

Silva:

Okay, on my father's side, whaling must have been a very prosperous business, because the Stanton—there are pictures, photographs, of him taken from—his marriage photographs, he looks like a man in his early thirties. I presume he started working on a whaling boat maybe at sixteen. It must have been prosperous enough. Well, partly, you're at sea for years, so you don't have to spend the money. But he saved and bought the land, farmed. My grandfather started the drayage business. How it began, I don't—well, Enos Stanton must have been the source. He had the land, he built the houses. But he had so little land, actually, compared to what my other grandfather had, that it hardly seemed enough to support. I certainly never heard of any kind of job. My mother's father started out as a farmer. He was a natural-born businessman. There are different kinds of intelligence. At making money, he was way up at the top.

01-00:36:11

Warrin:

It requires a certain mindset.

01-00:36:14

Silva:

And a certain amount of ruthlessness. He didn't marry until he was thirty. He was twelve years older than my grandmother. They had four children, three girls and a boy. He wanted the boy to inherit. The boy was a good-looking fellow and a kind of idiot savant. He could do any kind of math problem in his head. You could ask him, "What's 335 divided by 47?" and he could give you the answer. But he certainly didn't waste any time on education. He began dissipating very young, leading a wild life. Almost killed himself in a motorcycle accident, but I already—

01-00:37:20

Warrin:

You described that already, right. That's in the book, too, although it's a woman whom he kills—

01-00:37:27

Silva:

Arnie Woods. I hated him. As a child, whenever I would go over to my grandparents and he was there, he would get me by the ear. My sister, the same thing. He would pinch her cheek. Not a loving pinch, but deliberately meant to induce pain. He looked older than my grandfather, before my grandfather died. He was a very good-looking man when he was young, and he went to pot so fast. At one point, he had all of his teeth pulled because he was having problems with them. My grandfather had to buy him a set of dentures. He could never hold a job. He was an alcoholic. Eventually, he was given \$300 a month or something to go and live in Mexico. In Mexico at that time, \$300 was—

01-00:38:41

Warrin: A lot of money. One does read that in—

01-00:38:45

Silva: My grandfather just refused to acknowledge he had a son, but the idea that a daughter might carry on something—my mother was the only one who went to university. She went for two years to UC Berkeley. She had to drop out when she wanted to marry my father. Unfortunately, she dropped out.

01-00:39:23

Warrin: Was she the liberal that you paint in—

01-00:39:26

Silva: They were both. Oddly, my two brothers are the most reactionary Republicans alive today. My older brother travels with a loaded pistol everywhere he goes.

01-00:39:42

Warrin: Oh boy. Well, that's the latest thing.

01-00:39:45

Silva: My younger brother is fanatic about gun laws. He has quite a collection of guns. I don't know what—he occasionally goes hunting—what they do with these guns. Neither one of them has shot anybody. My niece by marriage, his pet son's wife, carries a loaded forty-five in her purse. I don't know what they think they're gonna—Anyway, my parents were liberal, and "Roosevelt" was the dirty word. My grandfather kept threatening to disinherit her. Well, he did. My grandfather ended up a bitter, lonely man when he retired, and I don't know why he retired, but he died in his seventies. Final cause was uremic poisoning. I remember going to the hospital to see him. When the war started, he would sit all day long listening to—there would be news flashes every fifteen minutes. He got more and more depressed about the war, you know, it was going to be over in six months, and life. Roosevelt was taxing him to death. He didn't live very long after his retirement. I forget what point I was going to make. The cat distracted me.

01-00:41:56

Warrin: You were talking about the polarization back in the Depression years, which is quite similar to what's going on now.

01-00:42:06

Silva: My mother's father, when I knew him, he ran a huge dryer, apricot dryer. He had all kinds of land, most of it which he owned. He was luck's child. In 1929, he and my grandmother took a tour of Europe, and my grandmother insisted that he sell all of his stocks before they go. There couldn't have been a better time. It was like somebody who, at the beginning, January 2008, sold everything. He sold at the top of the market. He came home after the crash. He was richer than he had ever been, because nobody else had anything. Since he had money, he bought up all kinds of property at rates that—he wasn't an employer that worried much about the welfare of his employees. At the dryer, I remember you cut a fifty-pound lug of apricots, and you got ten cents a lug.



You cut them in half and spread them out on a tray. And the fastest, they were mostly women working. The wives {inaudible}. There was sort of a hierarchy, too. The first tray would be the wives of the foremen. The same women had the same position every year. But the fastest worker could do two boxes in an hour, so that was twenty cents an hour.

01-00:44:35

Warrin:

Of course, that wasn't terrible money in those days.

01-00:44:40

Silva:

It was better than none. Their husbands were also making money. My grandfather wasn't paying great wages. I know that one of his sort of second foremen lived at the house next door to us, and I didn't realize it at that time, but that was the house that my grandfather's parents had been born in. No, pardon me—

01-00:45:11

Warrin:

This was the whaler? This was—

01-00:45:13

Silva:

That my grandfather had been born in, and that his parents had built. There wasn't really a proper foundation. It was a fun old house, with a tank house next door. The foreman was allowed to live there as part of his salary, rent-free, but the house would have been absolute derelict if nobody—so my grandfather was getting somebody to take care of the house and to get paid part of his wages—

01-00:45:55

Warrin:

For taking care of the house. Could you describe this farm and the processing? What did they grow and how did they process these? It's all food, right?

01-00:46:13

Silva:

He had apricot orchards. He had some cherries, pears. He grew a lot of rhubarb, because there were great troughs that you washed rhubarb. Big, wooden troughs with water running in and out. Every stick of rhubarb had to be washed by hand and packed. There were seasonal things. Cauliflower, it seems to me, he grew all the time, because we always were given enough, and I hated it. My mother would never let us leave the table until we ate our cauliflower, so that even today, the very word—

01-00:47:03

Warrin:

You have problems with that. How many acres did he have?

01-00:47:17

Silva:

We lived on two acres of land. We didn't have two acres at the beginning. It's hard to estimate. He had land all over. He had the land where his house was, and everything along the railroad track until Ashland Avenue on one side, and the other railroad—there were two rail lines, and they sort of went—I really don't know what an acre is.

- 01-00:48:10  
Warrin: That's okay. But it was a substantial—
- 01-00:48:12  
Silva: He had land in Alvarado. He had land all over, and he would farm. A lot of it was seasonal. He grew strawberries. Most of it was seasonal, as farming has to be.
- 01-00:48:31  
Warrin: He must have had dozens and dozens of employees, I would imagine.
- 01-00:48:35  
Silva: Yes, yes, yes. My favorite niece enjoys telling me that her mother's family all worked for my grandfather when they were young. He must have been the biggest employer in town, because there were Anglos who were rich, but their riches didn't involve any employment of anybody in town, except possibly a servant or a gardener, something like that. My grandfather was, it seems to me, the main source of employment in the town. And he could make or break you.
- 01-00:49:39  
Warrin: So he had tremendous political power in the town, I would imagine.
- 01-00:49:46  
Silva: It wasn't even incorporated. Of the Bank of America, he was a trustee or whatever, and the Eden Township Water Company, he was a trustee. He had positions of power, and he liked displaying that power and using it.
- 01-00:50:20  
Warrin: I'm sure that's quite a temptation if you're a—
- 01-00:50:25  
Silva: My other grandfather, when he had money, spent it. Had parties. Drinks. Went to the opera. Had fun. I think that was part of the reason my mother's family disapproved of them. They were enjoying life too much.
- 01-00:50:46  
Warrin: This is the Tom Ramos—
- 01-00:50:53  
Silva: They thought the good times were going to last forever. And when they didn't—In fact, my grandfather had bought my grandmother a beautiful diamond brooch just before the crash and had to pay for it after. It spent most of its lifetime in my grandmother's safe deposit box, because there was no occasion for wearing diamonds after that.
- 01-00:51:26  
Warrin: One thing about society there in San Lorenzo, usually we think of Portuguese immigrants coming in and clustering together, but here you're talking about people who rose above that and were socializing with the general Anglo community.

01-00:51:57

Silva:

Certainly my father's generation. My mother and father were never thought of as belonging to an ethnic group. During the Holy Ghost celebration, you would see all of the old world. They would come out of the woodwork. They'd all be dressed in black. It was just an old world look about them. Portuguese was their standard language. One of the big events of the year was the slaughtering of the hog, and all of the Portuguese would come and contribute, because there wasn't any refrigerator. The next time, the next person who slew his hog would share with you. All the women would come together, making *linguiça*, and the blood was saved to make *morcela*, the blood sausage. There was nothing like a ghetto. There was kind of social divide. There were two schools. There was the San Lorenzo Grammar School and there was Ashland Grammar School. We lived on Llewelling, and Ashland Avenue right on the corner. The people who lived next door, the Freitas, my grandfather's second foreman, because their entrance gate was on Ashland Avenue rather than Llewelling, his children went to Ashland. My father was a trustee at San Lorenzo School. The school was fairly well-mixed. There were a number of Italians, too, mostly from Genoa.

01-00:54:46

Warrin:

Involved in agriculture also, to a large extent?

01-00:54:49

Silva:

Yes. Both from the East Bay and in San Francisco, the scavengers are Italian Genovese. Like the Rattos, Ghigliones family, and Sobreros. They all lived on the other side of Hesperian. There were two big streets, Hesperian and Llewelling. But Ashland School, there would have been more Portuguese and Hispanics. Also a small group of Spaniards. The only non-European were Japanese. The Japanese—I was going to say stayed together. They had florists. They grew flowers, carnations. There were about four big families. Our babysitter was a Japanese American.

01-00:56:28

Warrin:

You have a story about—isn't that Mimi or something—the story about a Japanese family who disappeared.

01-00:56:41

Silva:

She was still alive when I wrote that. I called her Kimi, but she was really Momo. My father gave her a copy of the story to read. Her entire family was sent—

01-00:57:00

Warrin:

We're going to take a break in three or four minutes, but if you could relate your experience of—

01-00:57:09

Silva:

She was an educated woman. She was going to the University of California. Her parents were as old world Japanese as you could get. They had a little floral shop. Most of the other Japanese grew flowers and sold them to the

flower mart or whatever. Momo's family had a shop and sold to people in the neighborhood. She would come with lesson plans to baby-sit. Fifty cents a night, staying over. She would sleep over. She taught us how to dance. She had riddles and riddle books and jokes. I loved her dearly.

01-00:58:07

Warrin:

She was very Americanized, obviously.

01-00:58:08

Silva:

Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes. She had no accent whatsoever. The people you love, you think are good-looking. She seemed to be an attractive person. My family never, ever treated her as if—we grew up, I think, totally without prejudice in my immediate family. My grandfather would talk about “the Japs” all the time. The minute the war started, he was all for rounding them all up and putting them in prison.

01-00:58:57

Warrin:

Pretty much what they did.

01-00:58:58

Silva:

Partly because they were also competitors. They were raising strawberries and competing with his strawberries. There was, long before the war, all kinds of anti-Japanese headlines. Japs do this, Japs buying scrap iron. Momo went to a camp. She was offered a job somewhere in the Midwest, and she asked my father to write a character letter. But after the war, because I was no longer there when she came back, I think maybe I saw her once. My father—

01-00:59:59

Warrin:

Did she go to the Midwest instead of going to—

01-01:00:03

Silva:

You couldn't work on the coast. I think it was Minnesota or something like that.

01-01:00:08

Warrin:

So she wasn't interned like her parents—

01-01:00:10

Silva:

She was interned, and then got a job. That's why she needed a letter, somebody vouching for her character, and I guess her patriotism.

01-01:00:26

Warrin:

That was fortunate. We're going to stop here.

Begin Audio File 2 silva\_julian\_02\_11-03-11.mp3

02-00:00:05

Warrin:

Okay, we're following a break, and sitting here talking with Julian Silva. Julian, we've been talking about a lot of other people. Let's talk about your

life. You've mentioned a little bit about growing up, but in general terms, and then move it along.

02-00:00:36

Silva:

I grew up in San Lorenzo. The early years, I had a brother two years older and a brother three years younger. There was great sibling rivalry between my older brother. My sister is almost ten years younger than I am. I left home at nine; after she was born. So eight and a half years younger than I am. My father taught at St. Mary's College. Our life was certainly at least middle-middle-class, if not—. We had a house that my grandfather had built, but he kept the title, which was a technicality. We raised chickens out in the back so that we had chicken on the table.

02-00:02:00

Warrin:

Your father did?

02-00:02:02

Silva:

My parents. We had chicken coops in the back, so we always had fresh eggs, and a chicken every Sunday. My brother and I were involved in the ritual slaughter. I would hold the chicken's legs. My brother would swing the ax. My brother enjoyed it. I didn't. Then you pluck the chicken by dumping it in boiling water. That smell, and it's such a pungent, distinctive smell—anywhere in the world, if somebody were plucking chickens, I would know what was going on. My father, for a while, raised ornamental pheasants as a hobby, and we had an aviary. My father liked exotic birds. When my grandfather died, I was nine, and I went to live with my grandmother, but I had to stop at home every day to make sure—there was a great deal of tension between my mother and my grandmother, but I rather enjoyed being an only child. My grandmother would give me anything I wanted. She wasn't the one who ruled me. I pretty much ruled that house.

02-00:03:45

Warrin:

She was getting on in years, I imagine.

02-00:03:51

Silva:

My grandfather died at fifty-six, and I couldn't understand everybody saying how young he was. Today, fifty-six seems pretty darn young to me, but at that time—my grandmother was in her early fifties, which, today, seems like certainly the prime of life.

02-00:04:15

Warrin:

But to a nine-year-old—

02-00:04:16

Silva:

Yes, but to a nine-year-old, she seemed like a very old lady. She really lost it when my grandfather died. It was the big shock of her life. She was a totally different woman after. She shed torrents of tears. That was the only thing that sort of frightened me. I slept in the front porch, screened-in porch, next to her bedroom. There were French doors open, and she would have nightmares, and

I'd have to go in and wake her up. But I loved living in that house. It had belonged to the old whaler, Enos Stanton. It was just a wonderful house. I got spoiled. When my father got—St. Mary's, they made him a professor, and I think cut his salary. He finally got a job at San Francisco City College in—the war was already on—1941 or something. At that time, if you were a city employee, you had to have San Francisco residence. You had to be a registered voter in San Francisco, so my grandmother wasn't given much choice. She had to sell her house in San Lorenzo and take an apartment in San Francisco so my father would have a legal residence. He would come over and stay maybe two or three nights a week. It proved a great asset to me, because I hated San Lorenzo. I wanted—

02-00:06:32  
Warrin:

You moved with your grandmother to San Francisco?

02-00:06:35  
Silva:

Until she moved to San Francisco. Once she moved to San Francisco, I would spend as many weekends as I possibly could there, because I had access to the opera house. I was an opera fanatic. I went to the symphonies. I had an usher's pass, because my grandmother was a good friend of the house manager. I didn't have to do everything. I could choose selectively what I wanted to see. Most of my friends, contemporaries, were in San Francisco, and pretty much from the time I was sixteen, I really spent more time in San Francisco than I did—the time I spent in San Lorenzo, I didn't even count. All the memories I have are memories of San Francisco.

02-00:07:48  
Warrin:

Your quality time, you might call it.

02-00:07:53  
Silva:

I was the youngest member of a group. Most of my life, I was always the youngest. At a certain point, I became the oldest. There was this big, dramatic change. I went to high school in Alameda, St. Joseph's. The biggest problem with that was I got a ride to school in the morning from somebody, a local person who worked in Alameda, but I had to come home on the bus, and it could take up to two hours on the 81. I'd have to take number 23 to East Fourteenth Street, get off. The 81 ran only every hour. If I missed that, I would take the 82 and have to walk from East Fourteenth Street. I had a fairly good, solid, classical education. There was no choice in that school. You took what you were told to take until the third year. You were allowed to choose third-year Latin or first-year German, and I chose first-year German. I was pretty tired of Latin, except that I learned more about the structure of English language by taking Latin than I did by taking English. I never regretted those first two years.

Then the war was on. Because of my father's connections to St. Mary's College, he got me a scholarship to St. Mary's. I never graduated from high school. At the end of my third year, I had enough requirements to be accepted

into St. Mary's College. At that time, the United States Naval Air Force had taken over the campus. There were just a few little huts on the side, plus classrooms. I think there were only about a hundred students keeping the school alive at that time. Before I went into the Navy, I had a year of college. At that time, they were doing the Great Books. So at seventeen, I was reading Aristotle and Plato and Aeschylus, Sophocles. I don't know whether we did Dante. You had to take history, mathematics. I had a great calculus teacher. Everybody in the class either got A or F. There was no—

02-00:11:09

Warrin:

Is that right?

02-00:11:10

Silva:

Either you understood it or you didn't. His name was Brother Dominic. And an awful Latin teacher. He was a French priest. We were supposed to be studying Horace, but he liked Virgil. His whole idea of teaching was to take every line and every word of every line of a poem and parse it.

02-00:11:50

Warrin:

Sort of a mathematical approach.

02-00:11:52

Silva:

There was some confusion, because he asked me if I were Professor Silva's son, and I said yes. He meant the Professor Silva who ran the Conservatory of Music in San Francisco. I could never disabuse him of the fact that that was not my father. He would tell me how my father would recite Virgil aloud to himself as a pastime. My father had a great memory, and he kept it until he was eighty-five. He could recite more poems than I could.

02-00:12:36

Warrin:

Your father was an historian?

02-00:12:38

Silva:

Yes, yes. He was a well-rounded historian. He read literature. He was in the amateur theatrics. There was a picture of him playing Judas in *The Upper Room*, and my brother used to frighten me with this photograph that my father—looking like the villain in the old-fashioned melodrama. It was awful. I would burst into tears every time I saw it, and try to hide the picture without looking at it. I still have the picture. Today, it just seems more comic. My father also played Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar," and at the Curran Theater, for the St. Mary's College play. Nothing was going on with the theater, so they performed there in the summer. My father was also cheerleader for St. Mary's. When I got to St. Mary's, the only course I really hated was public speaking, because the brother who was teaching it had taught my father. My father loved speaking in public, and he did it very well. No matter what I did, I could never {inaudible}. He would assign us not just Shakespeare to read, but Irish revolutionary poems. There's one, "The river ran red with the redundance of blood." I was not an Irish patriot. I could never

satisfy him, anyway. I think that was probably the only course I got a B in. Probably didn't even deserve a B.

It was the first time I was in an intellectual environment with my peers. At high school, I spent so much time getting to and from. You never had time after to be involved in anything, or you saw people in the classroom and that was it. But at St. Mary's, because you were living on the campus, you saw each other and there was interaction between the staff as well as the students. One Brother Matthew and one of the lay teachers tried to interest me in Bartok's quartets, not very successfully. There was an intellectual environment there. You didn't have time for outside reading because you had to read the whole Iliad by Saturday. You didn't have—

02-00:16:15

Warrin:

That's all you did.

02-00:16:16

Silva:

Yes, yes. And papers. I was always good at tests. Maybe the pressure inspired me. With a pencil or a pen—[phone rings]. Can I just check to see who that is?

02-00:16:45

Warrin:

Sure. Okay, so—

02-00:16:53

Silva:

So we were at St. Mary's College. When I turned eighteen, the war was still going on. I turned eighteen June 1, 1945. If you wanted to get into the Navy, you had to enlist before you were eighteen. The only special branch you could enlist in was the Medical Corps, so I enlisted in the Medical Corps, in the U.S. Navy Reserve. I was sworn in on VE Day, so everybody else was celebrating, and I was feeling rather low. Then I was shipped to boot camp in San Diego. Nobody enjoys boot camp. The first three weeks were horrendous. I got a day of leave. I wasn't feeling well, but nothing was going to stop me from getting off that camp and going into San Diego. By the time I got back to the camp, I was having trouble walking. The next morning, I couldn't get out of bed. I ended up with meningitis. My older brother, who had been on a tanker off the coast of Japan somewhere, for years and years and years, had no trouble. The only telegram my parents got, one of their sons was dying, was me in the—

02-00:18:47

Warrin:

You in San Diego.

02-00:18:48

Silva:

San Diego. Fortunately, it was after penicillin and sulfa were discovered, and it was caught early enough because there was an epidemic. The moment I got to the sick bay, they knew what it was. That took a number of weeks to recover from that. In fact, I was in Balboa Park, which is a rather nice place in San Diego to be in the service, when the atom bomb was dropped. The Japanese war ended, but because I was in the Medical Corps, we were kept



because medics were still needed. I was sent to Great Lakes. I arrived in Chicago something like December 5. It was five below zero. I had never been out of California in my life. I hadn't been issued any winter clothes. I didn't even have any gloves. I had a pea coat.

02-00:20:09

Warrin: They didn't plan ahead at all for you?

02-00:20:12

Silva: Pardon?

02-00:20:12

Warrin: They didn't plan ahead for all—

02-00:20:14

Silva: No, no. I don't know how the Navy thought. Particularly when I was being shipped to the Midwest, you'd think they would consider supplying you at least with a pair of mittens. There was a question whether my hands were going to freeze, or my ears. I took turns. I spent a little bit more than a year as a Pharmacist's Mate Third Class at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Great Lakes. Started in neurosurgery. My first patient, fortunately, unconscious. had just had a brain abscess removed. Because I was a Hospital Corpsman First Class, they assumed I—the top 2 percent or the top 5 percent of the class were given a raise in rate, but I had never been in a hospital room with a patient, never given anybody a shot, and suddenly I've got to sit in there with this patient, giving penicillin. The penicillin needle is about an inch and a half long. Fortunately, one of the WAVES took pity on me, and the patient was still under anesthetic, so I could practice.

02-00:22:01

Warrin: They didn't feel the pain.

02-00:22:06

Silva: It was a pretty depressing ward. I was going to be a doctor, I thought. Working in the hospital I couldn't become emotionally detached.

02-00:22:24

Warrin: As a doctor, you have to.

02-00:22:26

Silva: You have to be, yes. Like the surgeon who operated on my heart, he doesn't have warm blood, but a real professional. He's an athlete among doctors. If you have to be treated, I always prefer that kind of doctor to somebody who's going to have a bedside manner or going to get sentimental.

02-00:23:08

Warrin: I'm sure there are doctors who are professional while they're operating, and then have a side of compassion when they see you later.

02-00:23:19

Silva: Well, probably. The operating is a great skill. It was like playing a virtuoso violin. You've got to concentrate on that, not psychology or worried about everything else. You've got your chest open, and somebody's in there, working at you. You want him to know what he's doing, not to have a good heart.

02-00:23:48

Warrin: That's what they said about my knee. If you really saw these people, they have a saw and they have all these big instruments, and boy, they just go at it.

02-00:24:00

Silva: Are you conscious while they're doing that to—

02-00:24:03

Warrin: No. No, you're not. That would be a little too much.

02-00:24:06

Silva: This I learned in the Navy. Brain surgery, you are conscious. I got so detached, I watched a brain operation. They drill four little holes, and took this patch of skull out, and they're talking to the patient. I watched the whole operation. I was fascinated. The moment it was done, I couldn't wait to go out and eat. I was hungry. Today, the very idea would be enough to make me faint. I don't even like watching them putting the needle in somebody. In fact, patients asked for me to give them their shots because I was better than the nurses.

02-00:25:02

Warrin: You were more compassionate, which—

02-00:25:04

Silva: No. The trouble is, the nurses who are compassionate—I remember the first time I got a penicillin shot when I had meningitis. They didn't want to hurt you, so they hurt you twice as much by trying to make it less painful. But you just slap, bang. Anyway. So I got out of the Navy. I had a year of college. My father was teaching at City College. From St. Mary's, I had something like forty-two credits. I had taken more than a regular course. In one semester, I finished my undergraduate work at San Francisco City College. I had the best teacher I've ever had in my life there.

02-00:26:14

Warrin: What was he teaching?

02-00:26:17

Silva: I didn't take my father. She was teaching English. I had two courses. Boy, I'm having a senior moment. Her name was Dorothy Mercer—was her name. The moment the class was finished, I couldn't wait to go out and get a copy of the book that she was talking about. As fine as anybody at UC Berkeley. I took a year of graduate English studies. She could stand up next to the best of them. So I finished my lower division. I couldn't go back to St. Mary's because I

came out in the middle of the year. There was the Great Books course. Everybody had to take the same program, and you could only begin at January, and I had already lost enough time. I didn't want to wait. I would have had to take another—

02-00:27:22

Warrin:

Excuse me, you could only begin in January or September?

02-00:27:25

Silva:

No, you could only begin in September.

02-00:27:28

Warrin:

August, September.. In the fall.

02-00:27:32

Silva:

So that would have meant wasting. Also, I would have had to take a second year of calculus, and I'd gotten an A in the first year, but I'd forgotten—so much of it is memory. I didn't feel I needed any more math. I enjoyed math very much, because there was an answer. There was a way of doing it, a correct way. Teaching literature was always problematic. You might have one interpretation; somebody else would have another. You'd have to defend yours. With math, two and two is four. There's no dispute about that. All right. Where do I go from there?

02-00:28:33

Warrin:

You went to UC Berkeley?

02-00:28:37

Silva:

As a year of graduate. I finished my junior and senior year at USF, because I could live with my grandmother. When I graduated in 1949, I took a trip to Europe. I thought I was going to study art. I think my roundtrip on the Queen Elizabeth—[phone rings].

02-00:29:25

Warrin:

Here we are, back from the break.

02-00:29:28

Silva:

In 1949, I took a trip to Europe, landing in Paris. I assumed everybody went to Europe with a steamer trunk. I had a steamer—

02-00:29:45

Warrin:

Well, some of them did, I think.

02-00:29:47

Silva:

Well, yes, in the movies. I thought I was the Duchess of Windsor. I took a tennis racquet. I got to Paris with this steamer trunk.

02-00:30:01

Warrin:

You had seen some old movies, I think.

02-00:30:03

Silva:

I realized I couldn't be hauling this thing around Europe, so it got stored in Paris somewhere until the end of the trip. I don't even know how I got it home eventually. It would have been easier just to leave it there. My heart was set on Italy, and Florence was the city I really wanted. Paris was pretty depressing in 1949. The French were not very happy to see Americans. Five days in Paris, then I took the overnight train to Florence. My favorite teacher was also staying at Florence at that time, Dorothy Mercer, and her family. They were staying at a grand old place called the Pensione Annalena.

02-00:31:15

Warrin:

Excuse me, this was your teacher from San Francisco City College?

02-00:31:18

Silva:

From City College. Except it was called Junior College at that point. It became City College I think after I left. I went over and had dinner with them the first night. This grand old palace that the Medicis had once owned right across from the entrance to the Boboli Gardens, and there was an extra room. It was just a hallway, but about twenty-foot ceilings, and opened onto a balcony. She made arrangements for me to stay there. It cost me seventy-five dollars a month for room and full board. I was there eleven days before they repeated a pasta dish. I thought there was spaghetti and meatballs and raviolis, and that was it.

02-00:32:19

Warrin:

You discovered a lot more.

02-00:32:21

Silva:

You had pasta twice a day. To have twenty-two different varieties before they repeated was something remarkable. Because I was the youngest person staying there, I got a lot of attention. Anyway, in Florence in 1949, there were not very many American tourists. I would go to Giglio's, which was a great outdoor café, and have ice cream. I discovered Italian ice cream in 1949. But I would be surrounded by all of these little children, watching me eat the ice cream, and the waiter would try to frighten them away. You can't eat ice cream with a lot of hungry children watching you without giving them ice cream as well. It was a mixed blessing. I got to know Florence the way it would be impossible today to know Florence. In 1956, I went to Greece. I spent the afternoon leaning against the Parthenon, all by myself, reading Mary Renault. You couldn't possibly do that today. I don't think they'd even let you up the stairs. Things have changed.

02-00:34:09

Warrin:

They were less organized in those days. I imagine you were a single tourist instead of going with a huge—

02-00:34:17

Silva:

I bought an amazing number of things. There was a little Giambologna bronze for fifteen dollars that I couldn't afford to buy today. I just thought about it and thought about it. I could live for three days on that.

02-00:34:38

Warrin:

You didn't buy it?

02-00:34:39

Silva:

No. Then, in Florence, there was this wonderful old English woman. True eccentric. She had studied under Freud. She was a psychiatrist. Her husband was the head of Egyptology at Oxford. At that time, the English could not bring money out of England. She would give me a room at her place. Durham Terrace was the address. She would give me all the money I wanted, and then when I got home, I was to send the cash back to a European bank. It was very trusting of her. I needed another twenty pounds. I kept track of it. I saw almost everybody great in the theater. Peggy Ashcroft, Gielgud, Richardson. The theater at that time was cheaper than a movie. Maybe a dollar and twenty-five cents for a performance. I arrived on Guy Fawkes Day. I didn't know what was going on. All these little children running up with their ashes on the faces, asking for a penny for the Guy. Pennies were bigger than a silver dollar at that time. If you gave them a penny, they weren't at all satisfied. They wanted a good deal more than a penny for the Guy. I had to get a ration card. The food was grim—poor Britain. I had been spoiled, because anywhere, Italy and France, who had both lost their war, you could get sumptuous meals for nothing. In Britain, you bought a sausage, and there was such a little—it was regulated by the state how much meat could be put into the sausage. I think the rest was sawdust. I would use my entire week's ration for one meal.

02-00:37:25

Warrin:

Is that right?

02-00:37:29

Silva:

There were a few black market restaurants that we would go and get an omelet. But aside from that, it was an exciting time to be in London.

02-00:37:42

Warrin:

How long were you there?

02-00:37:45

Silva:

Maybe a month. I forget how much money I came home owing Mrs. Grey-Clark. She had the biggest shoes and the biggest feet and the biggest hips in London. She had, like, five dogs, and we would go walking through London. I'm trying to remember the name of the cemetery where Karl Marx was buried. She was quite a character. I kept writing her and asking where she wanted me to send the money. She never answered. And this went on for years. I was going to forget it. Give one more chance. Then she said send it to her bank in England. The whole point of her giving me the money defeated

the purpose. Anyway, I sent whatever I owed her, but without interest, and I'm sure at that time, there must have been considerable inflation.

02-00:38:56

Warrin:

I would imagine.

02-00:38:58

Silva:

She got precisely what she had given me back. I never heard from her again. Then I came back and went for a year of graduate English studies at UC. I wasn't going to teach. I didn't know what I was going to do. I went East. I thought maybe I'd work in government or something. Television was just beginning. I was offered jobs, but I couldn't even pay the rent of my room in Washington with the salary. They said you'd be promoted fast, but the salaries were ludicrous. If I had had family there—

02-00:40:00

Warrin:

You might have lived with the family.

02-00:40:02

Silva:

Yes. Well, anyway. I came back. Nobody wanted to hire me, because I had too much education, and they assumed I wasn't going to stay there. I finally got a job at PG&E. They had different categories of clerks. I was in the second category. The work was so mindless. I could do it so fast and finished, and if I could read a book, but if you finished fast, you annoyed everybody else who was working around you, because they hadn't done it. It just seemed so mindless that eventually I decided I would break down. I still had the state GI Bill, and I went back to get my teaching credential. I would have gone to San Francisco State, but they wanted me to take more English classes. I had a whole year of postgraduate English from UC Berkeley, but they wouldn't accept that. USF, it was their first year of giving a teaching credential. Because I graduated from USF. I could get it in two semesters, so I got my teaching credential at USF, and got a job.

My father's former boss had once been a student of his, who was president of City College, also taught an education course. I don't think I ever read the books—but he thought my essays were great. To get into San Francisco teaching, you were supposed to take a test. Depending on your score on the test, you were hired or not hired. I wasn't going to teach anywhere except in San Francisco. If you went in the middle of the year there was some way that you could get hired and then take the test after. I was hired at Mission High School. There were three of us hired at the same time, and we were accepted as fulltime employees without ever taking the entrance test. I wasn't afraid of taking the test, it was just a formality I didn't want to have to postpone. After five years at Mission, went to Galileo, where I stayed for twenty-one years, seven of which I was head of the English department.

Like most public high schools in San Francisco, there was a hard core of intellectuals. Every year, there were about thirty or forty great students that

could have been going to Lowell, or didn't go to Lowell for one reason or another. I taught something called world literature, contemporary literature, and I started a Shakespeare course. They said I could teach it as long as I could get enough students to fill it. From the first year on, I had—

02-00:43:58

Warrin:

You did?

02-00:44:02

Silva:

Even some of the students could take it twice, because I would not read the same plays in the spring as I would read in the fall.

02-00:44:14

Warrin:

So you did find that there were intellectually interested students in Galileo?

02-00:44:28

Silva:

There were some great students at Galileo. I really loved teaching. When I was department head, I only had to teach three courses. I took an advanced composition, Shakespeare, and the literature course. So I had the cream of the crop. I spent my last two years of teaching at Lowell High School. As a high school, it's superb. But the one group of students at Galileo were every bit as good and as stimulating.

02-00:45:17

Warrin:

And those were the ones that you tended to teach?

02-00:45:20

Silva:

Yes. Because if you're teaching Shakespeare, it's not a required course. They have to sign up to take it. Nobody's going to sign up for a Shakespeare course who isn't interested in Shakespeare. It brought out all the ham in me. I could play Lear once a semester, and Hamlet the next. I never did the two plays in one—my favorite role was Mark Antony.

02-00:46:00

Warrin:

I studied under Frank Baxter at USC, Shakespeare. I don't know whether you know the name. He was a great Shakespeare teacher.

02-00:46:13

Silva:

I was a good teacher. I still see certain former students. I'm the godfather of the daughter of one of them. One runs the elevator at the opera house, and he's an artist also, and part-time teacher. I see him regularly. Most of them don't know I'm still alive. I went to a fiftieth reunion at, I guess, the class of 1956 or '57, a few years back. The last time they had seen me, I was twenty-nine.

02-00:47:13

Warrin:

And you were teaching at that time?

02-00:47:15

Silva: Yes. I was twenty-nine when they graduated. Twenty-nine is practically a child. They had all been seventeen or eighteen. There was only about eleven year spread. They were all in their sixties.

02-00:47:43

Warrin: Didn't expect to see you.

02-00:47:45

Silva: Yes. I was amazed at how many of them I recognized immediately. Distinctive personalities. A few of them astounded me. A couple of them just looked too young to have had—it was an interesting experience.

02-00:48:14

Warrin: You really enjoyed teaching.

02-00:48:16

Silva: Yes. My father couldn't understand why I didn't try to get into City College. I liked teaching. I didn't really like freshmen. Sophomore, all right. You got them before their tastes were fully formed. They were more open. They weren't trying to be sophisticated and worldly and blasé. If you had a group of intellectuals and you were introducing them to Shakespeare for the first time—or we read *Madame Bovary*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Plague*—they really got involved. In high school, there's more reciprocation. In a college classroom, you sit down and the professor lectures. It's much more of an art to teach in a classroom. You have to get the response. The only time I hated is when you got to a class where you couldn't get any response. There's nothing harder to combat than apathy. It has to be two-way. If they'd respond to me, I'd respond to them.

02-00:49:50

Warrin: But you found the high school students more malleable in developing—

02-00:49:56

Silva: Yes, and it was more exciting to watch them getting hold of an idea for the first time, and seeing things that they hadn't imagined before, and opening worlds. They were 100 percent for you, most of them. It was like being in the theater, really. The difference between playing in a movie and playing in live theater, you've got the audience. If you flop, there is no question you have flopped. You're in there on a wing and a prayer. When it was successful, you could come away with a real high. When it wasn't successful, it was depressing.

02-00:51:10

Warrin: That happens to all of us as teachers, of course.

02-00:51:15

Silva: Yes. The reason I retired at sixty—I was teaching the last two years at Lowell. I was teaching an advanced placement class. I was only teaching four classes, but an advanced placement class, and two honors classes, and I always wanted



to teach a regular sophomore class. I had to spend every spare hour correcting papers. The advanced placement class had to do an essay a week, in class, under pressure, in awful handwriting. You couldn't just read the paper. You had to correct and make comments. I had no private life. At sixty, I thought I'd better go out while they still wanted to take my classes, rather than saying, why is—

02-00:52:14

Warrin: Why is he still around here?

02-00:52:15

Silva: Yes, still around.

02-00:52:19

Warrin: You retired at sixty. Do you follow any other line of work, or are you just retired?

02-00:52:26

Silva: I wrote.

02-00:52:27

Warrin: Of course.

02-00:52:36

Silva: The trouble with trying to write and teach, you can't do both well at the same time. When I was teaching, I would write in the summer. When I retired, I could write fulltime. I liked the discipline of writing, even if I didn't get published.

02-00:53:01

Warrin: You published *Gunnysack Castle* in the mid-seventies, I believe.

02-00:53:08

Silva: Seventies—must have been. Yes.

02-00:53:13

Warrin: So you were writing seriously while you were still teaching.

02-00:53:17

Silva: Yes. When I came back from Europe in 1956, I guess, I got an agent. No, '61. I got a story published in *Cosmopolitan Magazine*. They paid a thousand dollars. The agent got a hundred of that. And then I met somebody called Alex Blackburn, who taught at University of Colorado and was the editor of something called *Writers' Forum*, and he liked my writing. I published seven or eight pieces. It was an annual publication. He would accept very long short stories, and would accept them without saying, we're going to throw this out, throw that out. The story I sold to *Cosmopolitan*, the title was "A Scarf for Olaf." It got published as "The Virgin Bride." Nobody had even asked me.

02-00:54:55

Warrin: They just changed the title.

- 02-00:54:55  
Silva: What's this, "The Virgin Bride"? I was so furious, I couldn't even read the thing all the way through.
- 02-00:55:03  
Warrin: But they didn't change the text itself? Substantially.
- 02-00:55:07  
Silva: They edited. They didn't rewrite, but they dropped a lot, which I think is pretty well standard practice. But changing the title without even asking or telling you before. I found that pretty hard to take.
- 02-00:55:28  
Warrin: Are these available somewhere? Easily accessible? These early stories of yours.
- 02-00:55:39  
Silva: I suppose everything is online today. A number of their stories were published in the last publication—well, I don't know. I think only maybe three. There must be copies of the *Writers' Forum*.
- 02-00:56:07  
Warrin: I'd like to check into it and take a look at those.
- 02-00:56:12  
Silva: I have the numbers all down. My niece is going to help me to publish a book online. Just two novellas and a short story. They have nothing to do with Portuguese. Massachusetts is not interested in it. I'm not trying to get money. If somebody wants to read them, fine.
- 02-00:56:44  
Warrin: It's very common today. You can also have print on demand, where—
- 02-00:56:52  
Silva: I don't know how this is going to be done, because I'm paying somebody who's going to come over and do it for me. It was going to be my niece. I'm not very good at computer. I know how to get my email, I know how to order books from Amazon, and things like that.
- 02-00:57:13  
Warrin: Print on demand, you don't publish any great number of volumes at all, but then if somebody wants it, they put in an order, and the printer prints one copy of the book, as I understand it.
- 02-00:57:30  
Silva: I thought they didn't actually make the book, that you just print it—
- 02-00:57:38  
Warrin: You can do that, too. Read it on your Kindle or whatever. Download it. A lot of people do that, too.

02-00:57:54

Silva:

My niece was going to do it, and then she discovered it was too technical. This other—it's a boarder of my sister's who is reading up on it. He says he knows how to do it, so he's coming next week.

02-00:58:18

Warrin:

Why don't we stop here.

02-00:58:20

Silva:

All right. I have to go the bathroom.[laughs]

02-00:58:23

Warrin:

Okay. Then we'll meet again for another session.

02-00:58:30

Silva:

If you want.

02-00:58:31

Warrin:

Of course.

Interview #2 November 11, 2011

Begin Audio File 3 Silva\_Julian\_03\_11-10-11.mp3

03-00:00:24

Warrin: We're here today for the second interview with Julian Silva. This is Don Warrin and it's November 10, 2011. Julian, I thought we'd talk today about you as a writer.

03-00:00:45

Silva: All right.

03-00:00:47

Warrin: And I'd like to ask, first of all, when did this interest first appear to you?

03-00:00:56

Silva: Oh, my grandmother kept a poem I wrote when I was about ten. I don't think I still have it. It's pretty awful. But I was rhyming things. I think it was a means of self-discovery, just finding out who I was.

03-00:01:22

Warrin: And to some extent you've continued that process of self-discovery throughout your whole lifetime as a writer.

03-00:01:32

Silva: Yes, yes. I think the only person any writer knows, truly knows, is themselves. Virginia Woolf or someone said, "All writing is autobiography, even the most outlandish fiction."

03-00:01:54

Warrin: That's some—

03-00:01:55

Silva: They say more about yourself than—as in the character of Henry Ramos. It's supposedly my father but it's as much me as it is my father. Because we had certain parallel careers. We both taught. I could project my teaching experience into his experience.

03-00:02:27

Warrin: What did you write? You wrote a poem when you were ten but at some point you wrote something a little more formal in high school, something like this?

03-00:02:39

Silva: I was always good at papers. I got a poem published in some national magazine. Must have been in university. But I stopped writing poetry in the very early fifties and I think probably destroyed everything I had written at that time.

03-00:03:04

Warrin: How come?

- 03-00:03:06  
Silva: Pardon?
- 03-00:03:07  
Warrin: Why would you do that?
- 03-00:03:09  
Silva: Well, I think most of it was pretty bad. Trying to be T.S. Eliot. An adolescent expressing his unhappiness with the world and life. They were pretty grim poems.
- 03-00:03:36  
Warrin: Oh. What about your prose?
- 03-00:03:43  
Silva: Well, even when I was a teenager, I used to send publications, I mean things to publications. They were pretty awful and naturally nobody accepted them—fortunately for me. I guess in 1960-61, I took a year of sabbatical in Italy and—
- 03-00:04:17  
Warrin: Where were you teaching at that time?
- 03-00:04:21  
Silva: At that time? Galileo High School. And I started writing seriously. Then when I came back someone introduced me to an agent in New York who accepted. Never sold a novel of mine but he did sell a short story to *Cosmopolitan* magazine.
- 03-00:04:52  
Warrin: And what was that story about?
- 03-00:04:54  
Silva: It was called “A Scarf for Olaf.” It was really a study for the character of Belle Bettencourt in *The Gunnysack Castle*. And *Cosmopolitan* magazine changed the title from “A Scarf for Olaf” to “The Virgin Bride.”
- 03-00:05:13  
Warrin: Oh, you had mentioned that. You had mentioned that—
- 03-00:05:14  
Silva: Yes, without asking me.
- 03-00:05:15  
Warrin: —last time.
- 03-00:05:17  
Silva: And I was so shocked when I saw the publication. They paid a thousand dollars, which at that time seemed to be an exorbitant amount of money. But I think I would have given it back.

03-00:05:34

Warrin: Both sound like good titles.

03-00:05:44

Silva: If I'm the author, I give a piece a title—I've changed titles myself but I don't think an editor has the right to change it without at least consulting you or letting you know. That's the great thing about university presses and quarterlies. You're allowed to be your own editor and they may suggest things to you but you don't get paid a penny. You get a free copy of the publication. But that's it.

03-00:06:23

Warrin: Right. And a bit of renown.

03-00:06:26

Silva: Yes. Well, within limited circles, yes.

03-00:06:31

Warrin: That was in the late seventies, I presume, that—

03-00:06:36

Silva: No, the story was published in the sixties.

03-00:06:48

Warrin: Oh, okay.

03-00:06:49

Silva: It had to be. Yes, because I remember a friend gave me a dozen salmon colored roses to celebrate. And she left San Francisco right after the Kennedy assassination.

03-00:07:08

Warrin: Oh, wow.

03-00:07:09

Silva: So it had to be before, say, '62 probably. And I had been writing what turned out to be *The Gunnysack Castle*. I'd been writing a series of stories. One of Belle Bettencourt, one of Arnie Woods, one called "Spanish Ecstasy," which was the episode in *The Death of Mae Ramos*. I decided somewhere along the line they all belonged together. They were a part of one book, which took some manipulation because certain stories. If I wanted things to happen at certain times, you had to change certain locales. The original story about Belle Bettencourt and Olaf—and, by the way, they are not members of my family. Every one of my grandmother's sisters and brothers married. They were truly fictional. I did have a vague model from somebody I'd known. I was a paperboy. I delivered the *Oakland Tribune*, so I saw all kinds of people and you heard things. There was this woman who had a man, not her husband, living in her tank house. And he was something of an alcoholic. Only the situation was reversed. He was Catholic and she was Protestant.

03-00:09:07

Warrin:

But those are the things you changed for reasons?

03-00:09:08

Silva:

Yes. I did because the woman, all I knew about her is what I saw and her name. But it was something to build the character. Sometimes you use models. But a character that is totally fictional like Belle Bettencourt I think is sometimes more successful than the characters who have real models.

03-00:09:42

Warrin:

In a way you're not constrained by memory.

03-00:09:45

Silva:

True. But like when I wrote in one of the—first I think in *Writers Forum*, the first big story was what became “Vasco and the Other,” about the death of my father’s brother. And when I was going to write about that I deliberately did not discuss it with my father or with anybody else. I didn’t want to know what really happened. I knew he had been crushed to death and that’s all but I didn’t until after and my father actually read the story and only then did I learn that the accident happened while he was at school. And I also learned years later, from my sister, that it was my grandmother who discovered the body. I couldn’t have been able to handle that in fiction.

03-00:10:55

Warrin:

No, no. And you handle it very dramatically, the fiction.

03-00:11:01

Silva:

Yes. It’s the old trick of the recognition scene from a Greek play. The audience knows something that the character doesn’t know and you wait to find out how she is going to find out and take it. But because my grandmother’s emotions were so on the surface and so explosive, I just can’t imagine what it could possibly have been like to discover your dead child.

03-00:11:40

Warrin:

And to find him yourself there.

03-00:11:42

Silva:

Yes. If I had known that it would have affected the story. So it’s best to hear family legends, just pieces of them, and then you can do with it what you want.

03-00:12:09

Warrin:

In your stories and in the novel, you blame Henry for this, for Vasco’s death. It’s sort of Henry who’s pulled the—

03-00:12:28

Silva:

Yes.

03-00:12:30

Warrin:

Was that blaming your father in some way?

03-00:12:36

Silva:

Well, it's supposed to be the one who's called the "Other." The men on my father's side of the family were most taciturn. They didn't express their feelings or emotions. When I went to Portugal, then Italy for the first time to see grownup fathers and sons embracing and kissing each other, seemed to me so completely remote from anything I knew. A handshake was as close as one ever got to—

03-00:13:19

Warrin:

And why do you think that's true? These are Portuguese Americans. You would have supposed that they would have brought some of this Latin culture with them.

03-00:13:31

Silva:

Well, I think each generation—see, I'm already the fourth generation here. And trying to become American, and Americans just don't do that.

03-00:13:51

Warrin:

That's what I was thinking. Yes. That they are—

03-00:13:56

Silva:

But I think also there was something instinctive in my father's character. And I tried to explain that. There was a kind of strain between him and his mother. She did everything. Everything he said was absolute gospel but he never seemed to demonstrate any real—I mean he did everything he was supposed to do. He was dutiful. He saw that she was taken care of in every way but there was a kind of strangeness. And I just assumed that—because I had seen it happening with another friend of mine. That one child dies and it's the favorite and the other child knows. This is pure fiction. My father, in my mind, knew that if my grandmother had had a choice and had to lose one son, like Sophie's choice, she would have chosen him to be the victim rather than the—

03-00:15:26

Warrin:

Well, that's very heavy to grow up with.

03-00:15:28

Silva:

Yes, yes. Yes. And there was an exquisite politeness between them and an almost abject affection on my grandmother's part. It's terrible to have a writer for a son because everything gets over-interpreted.

03-00:16:01

Warrin:

Of course, ultimately, it's the fiction that counts, that's going to—

03-00:16:05

Silva:

Yes. Because the character in the story is more important. One problem, as you get older, though, is trying to remember what it was that really happened. That if you rewrite something, you begin to remember that as a part of your real memory.



- 03-00:16:26  
Warrin: So you conflate fiction and—
- 03-00:16:33  
Silva: Yes, yes.
- 03-00:16:34  
Warrin: —memory of reality.
- 03-00:16:36  
Silva: Yes.
- 03-00:16:37  
Warrin: Well, after you wrote this article in the early sixties in *Cosmopolitan*, what were you doing? I've seen your article in *Writers Forum* 1979, so there's fifteen years or so there. What were you writing during that period?
- 03-00:17:03  
Silva: Well, I was writing all these family stories. And I can't tell you exactly when. I met Alex Blackburn here through a friend of mine. Alex Blackburn taught at University of Colorado and was the editor of *Writers Forum*. I'd sent him something. But there was always a hiatus of at least one year, sometimes two years before you submitted something and you actually got it in print. Because the first thing I submitted was a section of a novel, he suggested that I write an introductory part. So that in the *Writers Forum* there's a page and a half of introduction before the "Vasco and the Other" starts.
- 03-00:18:09  
Warrin: Oh, really?
- 03-00:18:12  
Silva: So that took some time. I'm trying to remember. Because most of the stories that he published were not stories related to my novel. But he was responsible. He found me a press in Colorado, an awful press that went broke just as the first edition came out. And he persuaded Ohio University Press, which is a very good press, to take on the novel. Well, that was the second time I actually got money for something I had written. I think it was \$2,000 as a—and because it got a great review in *Publisher's Weekly*, so it sold enough copies that I more than paid for my advance. In fact, I got a couple of hundred dollars extra after. Without reviews, you're absolutely helpless.
- 03-00:19:43  
Warrin: Yes. Call attention to it.
- 03-00:19:44  
Silva: Nobody knows about it. Even if somebody might be interested.
- 03-00:19:54  
Warrin: So during the late sixties, seventies, you were writing portions of this novel and actually publishing some?

- 03-00:20:03  
Silva: Yes.
- 03-00:20:04  
Warrin: I know that in *Writers Forum* volume six in 1979 you published “A Sudden and Violent Death.”
- 03-00:20:15  
Silva: Yes. That was the original title of “Vasco and the Other.” I meant the title, “A Sudden and Violent Death,” it should have been “Sudden and Violent Deaths” plural because it was the death of the heart of Henry Ramos that was the sudden and violent death that mattered.
- 03-00:20:44  
Warrin: Yes, yes.
- 03-00:20:45  
Silva: And I quickly changed the title and it was later republished somewhere.
- 03-00:20:52  
Warrin: And so you introduced Vasco and Rita, which is the grandmother.
- 03-00:21:00  
Silva: No, no. Rita was Rita Stanton.
- 03-00:21:03  
Warrin: Rita—
- 03-00:21:04  
Silva: Did I call her Rita in the story?
- 03-00:21:08  
Warrin: I think so. She is the widow at this point of—
- 03-00:21:12  
Silva: Of the old whaler.
- 03-00:21:14  
Warrin: Of the old whaler, yes.
- 03-00:21:16  
Silva: Who was officially my grandmother’s uncle by marriage. No, because I used my grandmother’s real name in that. Only when the character was going to be treated unfavorably did I change. I changed last names, obviously. But my grandfather was Tom and my father was not Henry, of course. His brother was not Vasco. But the three adults, Rita and Tom and Mae, are real names of the real people in the—
- 03-00:22:13  
Warrin: Yes. Rita, I believe, I can’t remember whether it’s here or in the novel, but she is the widow and she lives in the attic and sort of—

- 03-00:22:26  
Silva: Yes, that's in that part of the story.
- 03-00:22:28  
Warrin: Yes.
- 03-00:22:30  
Silva: That's Rita.
- 03-00:22:31  
Warrin: Is this sort of—
- 03-00:22:32  
Silva: Because I used my grandmother's house and there was an enclosed stairway. Usually like the stairway in my house here. It's an open stairway. You can see. But there was a little mound of stairs and there was a door. Nobody ever saw anybody walking up or down stairs there. And it was completely separate unit once you got up there. And she must have lived up there. Again, she had to live somewhere. That was the most private part. And she was still alive when my father was young. And she spoke only Portuguese.
- 03-00:23:39  
Warrin: She was the second wife of—this is the person you're talking about?
- 03-00:23:41  
Silva: No, no. No, no, no. Stanton was in love with her sister, who was my grandmother, but was the younger. Rita was the older sister he had to marry because she was the oldest sister. But he only had one wife. I can't remember. One of my grandmother's nieces was the first member of my family, and my mother's sister. So the first two generations nobody—oh, pardon me. My grandfather Silva, of course, had two wives.
- 03-00:24:26  
Warrin: That's who—
- 03-00:24:29  
Silva: Yeah.
- 03-00:24:29  
Warrin: —I was thinking of.
- 03-00:24:31  
Silva: Yes. No. The point of his wife is that we never saw her. She appeared at funerals or just made a silent—in fact, she's, in that last book, the woman in the doorway. And the whole point of that is that she's an absolute stranger to me.
- 03-00:25:02  
Warrin: Yes. The contracted bride from the Azores.

03-00:25:12

Silva: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Yes.

03-00:25:16

Warrin: In this article in the *Writers Forum*, “A Sudden and Violent Death” you make a point of Mae being so elegant, being the first person to drive a car and sort of—

03-00:25:33

Silva: Yes, she was. She was.

03-00:25:34

Warrin: —throwing out her wealth there to everyone.

03-00:25:41

Silva: Yes. And this is the first time in her life that she realized that you weren’t in control. I think my grandmother was haughty. She was very, very blond. There were samples of her hair. And very blue eyes. She didn’t look the least bit Portuguese.

03-00:26:06

Warrin: Oh, that’s true of many people in the Azores.

03-00:26:09

Silva: Yes. And we just assumed she was more Flemish.

03-00:26:19

Warrin: Do you think to some degree she was overcompensating for some prejudice against Portuguese?

03-00:26:28

Silva: No. I read about all of this prejudice. I think that was mainly an East Coast thing. Occasionally somebody said black Portagee or something. But I never heard any adult there. And certainly my grandparents on either side, they had friends that were not Portuguese. In fact, my Silva grandparents, I would say most of their friends in their social life were not Portuguese. I think my grandmother was arrogant. And the early pictures of her—and part of it may be because she was probably short-sighted also. Because she was blond, she was very pretty as a young woman and she had a husband that she loved and he was successful. There’s nothing wrong with being proud that you’ve got the first car in town. And there was a picture in the *Oakland Tribune* of her sitting behind the wheel of the car with this big hat on. They got her initials wrong but the picture was there.

03-00:28:13

Warrin: Okay. What year would this have been?

03-00:28:16

Silva: Oh. I probably have it upstairs somewhere but I couldn’t even tell. It was a magnificent old thing. I can’t even tell you the make of the car.

- 03-00:28:36  
Warrin: Well, there were different cars that we don't even remember the names of nowadays.
- 03-00:28:40  
Silva: It wasn't a Stanley Steamer. That I know.
- 03-00:28:45  
Warrin: I think you mentioned a Maxwell.
- 03-00:28:48  
Silva: That may very well be it. Yes. And my other grandparents, the car I remember most, but that was in the thirties, was the LaSalle. But the LaSalle was all mohair inside and on the side windows there were cords with tassels on them that you held. I think little places to put flowers if you wanted in the back. And I don't think the LaSalle lasted very long. It certainly didn't outlast the war.
- 03-00:29:20  
Warrin: So in *The Gunnysack Castle*, essentially the story revolves around Vince Woods and his wife.
- 03-00:29:33  
Silva: Yes, Clara.
- 03-00:29:35  
Warrin: Clara. Vince becomes very rich.
- 03-00:29:39  
Silva: Yes.
- 03-00:29:40  
Warrin: One of the things you mentioned was he—
- 03-00:29:43  
Silva: He's already well off when he marries. He's considered quite a catch and he was, I think—he's twelve years older than my grandmother.
- 03-00:29:53  
Warrin: Okay. And among the various responsibilities that he develops is director of the Bank of Italy.
- 03-00:30:05  
Silva: Yes, and he was. I think in San Leandro.
- 03-00:30:08  
Warrin: He actually was? In San Leandro.
- 03-00:30:10  
Silva: The Bank of Italy, of course, became the Bank of America.

- 03-00:30:12  
Warrin: Right. Yes, of course—
- 03-00:30:15  
Silva: A.P. Giannini.
- 03-00:30:16  
Warrin: Yes. Coincidentally, Manual T. Freitas was as well [director of the Bank of Italy]. You may have heard of Manual Freitas. Have you ever seen the Manual Freitas Parkway in Marin County that leads—
- 03-00:30:33  
Silva: No. That's not the Freitas who was district attorney here, is it?
- 03-00:30:36  
Warrin: No. This is essentially nineteenth century. Yes, nineteenth, very early twentieth century, I think. Manuel Freitas, he had a ranch and it became a suburb called Terra Linda in—
- 03-00:31:05  
Silva: Oh, all right. I know that because before the bridge there was also I think a big Silva ranch over there, too.
- 03-00:31:19  
Warrin: There were many.
- 03-00:31:20  
Silva: Not anything related to me.
- 03-00:31:23  
Warrin: There were a lot of dairy ranches.
- 03-00:31:24  
Silva: Dairy, yes. And most of the Portuguese in California I think started out as dairy farmers. And evidently even my grandfather got his beginning not in his own dairy but working in somebody else's dairy. But that was long before my time and it was not in San Lorenzo.
- 03-00:31:48  
Warrin: Many came at the time of the Gold Rush and, of course, they were prospectors for a while.
- 03-00:31:54  
Silva: Only the great-grandmother on my father's side who died was a product of that. My family came over in the sixties.
- 03-00:32:10  
Warrin: So that was very early. Yes, the other occupation in which quite a few people participated early in the late nineteenth century was sheepherding.
- 03-00:32:23  
Silva: Was what?

- 03-00:32:24  
Warrin:           Shepherding.
- 03-00:32:23  
Silva:            Shepherding, yes. I thought in California that was Basque mainly.
- 03-00:32:31  
Warrin:           No, actually, the Portuguese were probably at one time as participatory as the Basques were. You hear more about it but—
- 03-00:32:43  
Silva:            Oh, and the Portuguese were fishermen and they still are in San Diego. San Francisco is Italian but San Diego and Fort Bragg is still a Portuguese fishing village.
- 03-00:32:58  
Warrin:           Yes. So to get back to *Gunnysack Castle*. Vince's children were brought up without knowing Portuguese.
- 03-00:33:10  
Silva:            Yes. My grandfather insisted they not learn Portuguese. Deliberately. They must have caught a few words here and there. He wanted them to be American, not Portuguese Americans.
- 03-00:33:32  
Warrin:           Or bicultural in some sense.
- 03-00:33:34  
Silva:            And with the name Smith, they could have been—if one didn't know the background, they could have passed anywhere for anything. And I don't think it was as a result of any prejudice against—he just wanted to be American. The same thing happened with Italians, the first generation that came over. You changed your name or you mispronounced your name, like Mancini. I don't know why it's easier to say 'Mansenee' than 'Manchinee.' And C-I-N-I is 'Manchinee.' But the mattress and the music man both insist upon calling themselves 'Mansenee.'
- 03-00:34:35  
Warrin:           It's like Ramos, of course, as you explained.
- 03-00:34:37  
Silva:            Yes. But that's just a matter of changing the vowel sound, yes. Soft vowels don't go off in English or they sound pretentious. And I never heard anybody called 'Rahmos' until political correctness came along and there are reporters in San Jose. Somebody 'Rahmos.'
- 03-00:35:21  
Warrin:           Who exactly was Arnie?

- 03-00:35:29  
Silva: Arnie was my mother's brother. A horrid man. Absolutely horrid man. Both my sister and I have vivid memories. He would get me by the ear and twist the ear until it hurt. My sister remembers every time she came across him he would pinch her cheek, but not affectionately. Pinch her cheek until she said, "Ow," and it hurt. I thought we talked about him last time.
- 03-00:36:02  
Warrin: We did, yes. We did talk a little. I was just bringing it up again because it's part of the novel.
- 03-00:36:08  
Silva: Yes. And before he went to Mexico at my grandparent's expense—and he was paid to stay in Mexico.
- 03-00:36:24  
Warrin: Did he stay there the whole time?
- 03-00:36:27  
Silva: He looked older than my grandfather at that time. He had pulled all of his teeth on an impulse and then my grandparents bought him a set of dentures. Then he did something with the dentures. He drank too much, he smoked too much. I just remember him hacking away. He never shaved. He looked like a sad derelict.
- 03-00:36:58  
Warrin: In the novel—
- 03-00:37:00  
Silva: One thing typical of him. They felt my grandmother was dying and so he came up to see her and he made some comment that the next time he comes up, she better make sure she died. He was an absolute horror. And he had a lovely first wife and a daughter whom he abandoned. His first wife was the most improbable wife for him. She was straight laced. Only he was in the Navy. I have him in the book in San Diego. He was in the Navy in Seattle and he married a Washingtonian.
- 03-00:37:56  
Warrin: A local woman because here in the novel he marries a local San Diego woman who's a—
- 03-00:38:02  
Silva: Yes. Well, he did marry a local Seattle girl. Somebody you could never, never imagine him choosing to marry.
- 03-00:38:17  
Warrin: Or her choosing him.
- 03-00:38:19  
Silva: Pardon?



- 03-00:38:20  
Warrin: Or her choosing him.
- 03-00:38:21  
Silva: Well, except that if she's a spinsterish type and she sees this Rudolph Valentino improbably handsome man who's interested in her; and evidently until she died she had a picture, a photograph of him beside her bed.
- 03-00:38:47  
Warrin: Where did she and the daughter live?
- 03-00:38:51  
Silva: Well, when they married they lived in San Lorenzo. My grandfather built two identical cottages, one for us and one for Raymond and his wife. And they were still living there. His daughter Barbara Jean was a year older than I am and they were still living there when I—maybe five or six. And then he deserted them and she divorced him because she had a teaching credential and he wasn't supporting his daughter or his wife. My grandparents weren't really taking the responsibility. She moved back to Washington, but during the Depression no one would hire a woman who was married. She had to be a single woman. So she got a divorce. And my grandparents saw that his inheritance was tied up so that he only had the income and it went to his daughter.
- 03-00:40:30  
Warrin: And he lived the rest of his life in Mexico? Did he—
- 03-00:40:34  
Silva: Yes, he died in Mexico, too. Guatemala. Not Guatemala.
- 03-00:40:47  
Warrin: Costa Rica?
- 03-00:40:49  
Silva: No, it was in Mexico. I'm trying to think of the name. Guadalajara?
- 03-00:40:52  
Warrin: Guadalajara, maybe..
- 03-00:40:54  
Silva: Yes, I think it was. And I think he was getting something like \$300 a month, which in Mexico in the forties would have been a considerable—it would have been easy to live and I think he had a live-in maid/mistress, as well.
- 03-00:41:27  
Warrin: A sad story. Henry and Louise. Louise in your stories, Louise is quite liberal. She goes to Berkeley but then her father pulls her out.
- 03-00:41:47  
Silva: Yes, he did. She went two years to Berkeley. And because it was really her insistence upon going, with my father. Her father couldn't stand my father's

family and I think partly there was a rivalry and a jealousy and my mother's father was in a sense puritanical. Money was there to make more money, not to waste it on good times, though he did indulge his wife in letting her—she certainly dressed well and spent a lot of time redecorating her house. It's sad. All of these houses that I remember as a child don't exist anymore.

03-00:43:04

Warrin:

Except didn't you say that this main house that—

03-00:43:09

Silva:

Oh, my grandmother Silva's house was sold, cut down and moved somewhere. I never wanted to see it. I don't want to even know where it is because it wouldn't be the same. A house has to be in its setting.

03-00:43:32

Warrin:

Well, the area down around San Lorenzo is something like—I recall the Peninsula before the—and Sunnyvale in places, Cupertino before the technology development. It was all orchards and that's—

03-00:43:49

Silva:

Yes, yes. The San Lorenzo there today doesn't in any way make me feel the least bit nostalgic. It's not the city or the town, it wasn't a city. It's not the town I grew up in. It's a completely different—it's a suburb now. I'll bet there isn't an apricot tree left in San Lorenzo. Possibly in somebody's backyard—

03-00:44:36

Warrin:

But that's all.

03-00:44:39

Silva:

All I had to do was go out in summer and pick the apricots on the trees. They were right there. Pick cherries. And my parents kept up a garden. When my grandfather sold the land, they had two acres. Until my father died I'd never bought a lemon. He had lemon trees all—and never bought a garlic. He braisdd garlic and braided—of the two acres, at least one acre was devoted just to kitchen garden, and boysenberries and bell peppers, eggplants.

03-00:45:36

Warrin:

I know, particularly among Portuguese immigrants in southern Alameda county, even your front yard, you didn't have grass you grew—

03-00:45:48

Silva:

Had kale.

03-00:45:49

Warrin:

Kale, right.

03-00:45:51

Silva:

Kale and mint.

03-00:45:52

Warrin:

That's right.

- 03-00:45:53  
Silva: Yes, my father had kale, too. I never see kale in a grocery store. I guess there must—because kale soup is sort of the basic Portuguese dish.
- 03-00:46:08  
Warrin: That's right.
- 03-00:46:12  
Silva: There's a Portuguese restaurant not terribly far from here. I stopped once but unfortunately not great.
- 03-00:46:24  
Warrin: Where is it?
- 03-00:46:29  
Silva: It's on Pine between Van Ness and Polk Street. It was an old train car or something that was put up after the earthquake and it has been converted. It's an interesting place and they do serve linguica. Better linguica than you can buy. Linguica does not taste the way it does in Portugal anymore here because they've taken all the fat out of it and they've done something that it tastes just like any other sausage. They've ruined it.
- 03-00:47:10  
Warrin: Well, that's—
- 03-00:47:12  
Silva: If you're going to indulge, you can't have foie gras without fat and you can't have linguica without chunks of fat in it.
- 03-00:47:25  
Warrin: Right. Without a little sinful aspect there.
- 03-00:47:27  
Silva: Yes, yes.
- 03-00:47:30  
Warrin: In *The Gunnysack Castle*, you do bring in some Portuguese elements, like the Holy Ghost parade with the IDES and SPRSI
- 03-00:47:46  
Silva: We lived in a town that didn't have a movie house, didn't have anything. It had the IDES hall. Occasionally little traveling minstrel groups would come there, but the Holy Ghost parade was the only—that was the one day of the year that something happened in San Lorenzo. And the Bay Area was very clever. They didn't all have their, as they should have, all have their parade on the same Sunday. They would stagger the parades so that the Portuguese could go from one community to the other, and one queen could be part of three different parades.
- 03-00:48:40  
Warrin: Of course, that goes on today.

03-00:48:41

Silva: Yes, yes. I think probably San Jose would be the biggest. I suppose there's still one in San Lorenzo, but it's hardly a Portuguese community anymore.

03-00:49:00

Warrin: San Leandro, I think.

03-00:49:03

Silva: Pescadero I think has one, too.

03-00:49:10

Warrin: Sausalito.

03-00:49:11

Silva: Sausalito?

03-00:49:12

Warrin: I think so. They've had one for years. There's a very active Portuguese fraternal society over there. At the end of *The Gunnysack Castle*, Vince dies but he has a very traumatic experience before his death. He sort of seduces this young Mexican mother.

03-00:49:43

Silva: Oh, my mother hated that. That's the only scene in the book she—

03-00:49:47

Warrin: She didn't like—

03-00:49:48

Silva: —totally disapproved of. Again, this is fictional. It's about a dying man who's losing power. Sex is a form of power and I'm sure he saw the Mexicans who came in to pick the—they were seasonal. They came in to pick the apricots and then they moved on to another community and they were there for a short time and lived in tents. Nobody knows what another person's—particularly his parents or his grandparents, what their sex life was like. And my grandfather was certainly not—his conversation was never racy in any way whatsoever. But he liked power and he liked people to acknowledge his power.

03-00:51:18

Warrin: Well, that comes through. That comes through in the novel, that it's not necessarily his virility but rather this need to dominate somebody somewhere.

03-00:51:30

Silva: Yes, yes. And he's lost his family really. That's right—he was such a bitter old man. I have it in the novel, or maybe I don't. Somewhere in some story where he would come to the front yard. My grandmother would drive the car but he would not step into our yard. And we would have to go out to see him in the car and talk to him and would sit there like the old iron. He was very bitter, unhappy, lonely old man.

03-00:52:25

Warrin:

I would imagine that that's a rather common result of being so powerful during most of your life.

03-00:52:38

Silva:

And you think you're building something. Hoping you're starting a dynasty and a dynasty needs an heir and that's why the heir was so indulged at the beginning. The punishment for what he does wrong is extreme and indulgence is—both extremes. When he does something awful with his Japanese friend and he's beaten to betray his friend, and it's the only honorable act in the entire novel he does. He doesn't betray his friend but—

03-00:53:35

Warrin:

This is Arnie you're speaking of?

03-00:53:36

Silva:

Yes, yes. And the father goes to the Japanese nursery man and bribes him to have the son take responsibility.

03-00:53:53

Warrin:

Yes. Perception is so important there.

03-00:53:37

Silva:

Oh, yes, yes, yes. My grandfather, no matter how hot a day it was, he was in a three-piece suit. He never went without a vest and a gold chain and fob and watch. He had a shirt and necktie. He never presented himself to the world without a full suit. He didn't even slum at home. I'm trying to remember him. He used to have a big Fourth of July barbeque filled with all of the Cardoza family and, of course, his children, except for his son. We were there. We were the only relatives related to him. He must have been without a jacket and possibly without a necktie but I'd really have to struggle. I can't picture him in an open neck shirt. He just didn't let it down. He was the patriarch and he wanted to be looked up to.

03-00:55:28

Warrin:

And he carried that to his death, really? Right?

03-00:55:30

Silva:

Yes. As a child, you look upon—somebody in his eighties would have been ancient but my grandfather died—I'm not even sure he reached seventy. And I talk about my great-grandfather Faria in some piece, in his eighties when I was a child. He wasn't in his eighties. He died, I discovered later, at seventy-two. But from a five-year-old's perspective, seventy-two seems ancient.

03-00:56:17

Warrin:

Yes, of course.

03-00:56:17

Silva:

And since seventy-two to me does not seem ancient at all—in fact, probably enviously young.

03-00:56:24

Warrin: To a five-year-old, just gray hair means you're very well along.

03-00:56:30

Silva: Yes.

03-00:56:36

Warrin: Maybe we'll stop right here. We don't have too much more time on this tape. And then we'll go on to the second novel.

Begin Audio File 4 silva\_julian\_04\_11-10-11.mp3

04-00:00:00

Warrin: This is tape two on November 10, 2011, Don Warrin interviewing Julian Silva. So Julian, you published this *Gunnysack Castle* back in about 1981 with the Ohio State University Press. As you say, it got great reviews. At some point you kept on thinking of writing more.

04-00:00:47

Silva: Well, I was writing more.

04-00:00:47

Warrin: You were writing more.

04-00:00:49

Silva: There was a second volume which was called *Distant Music* and only later did I decide that was the title. But there were three novels. I had an agent. She wasn't very good. She was mainly interested in detective stories and she never managed to place it. I was never very good at selling myself. I guess I'd had enough rejections. And I kept writing. I still have writings up there. I'm going to publish something online. But when the year 2000 came out, it was a good time to go through all my writings. I destroyed my first novel. I'm sorry because it had all kinds of historic interests and—

04-00:02:07

Warrin: What was that about?

04-00:02:09

Silva: A tour through Italy with a madman. [laughs] But it was interesting because every amount of money that is mentioned in the thing was the exact amount that was paid, involved, and it would be interesting simply just to compare traveling in Italy in 1960 as traveling in Italy today.

04-00:02:48

Warrin: I would think so.

04-00:02:50

Silva: But I destroyed that and I destroyed the last novel I had written, which was pretty bad. And then I started going over what became *The Death of Mae Ramos*, and I didn't have the heart to destroy that. So I started reworking that and then out of nowhere Frank Sousa appears. I get this telephone call first

from the San Francisco Library wanting to know if I was the author of the *Gunnysack Castle*, and I acknowledged. Somebody from Dartmouth [Massachusetts] was asking. Evidently he wrote to my agent, who was no longer my agent, and she never replied to him or notified me. I don't know, maybe she didn't even get the letter. And then he wrote this letter to me asking if I had some manuscripts and, boy, did I have manuscripts [laughs], unpublished manuscripts. And so then I got involved with Irene Blayer, who runs this website, the Azorean Diaspora. Anything I write she will publish. Again, you get nothing for—

04-00:04:27

Warrin: Yes, I'm not familiar with that.

04-00:04:30

Silva: Pardon?

04-00:04:31

Warrin: I'm not familiar with her or that website.

04-00:04:32

Silva: She has a website. In fact, the last two pieces published in *Move Over, Scopes and Other Writings* were from her website.

04-00:04:43

Warrin: Oh, really?

04-00:04:44

Silva: Yes.

04-00:04:45

Warrin: Yes.

04-00:04:47

Silva: The book that was just published, the pieces in there were published on her website and with photographs. Evidently there are a lot of people who check out the website. They obviously don't read everything. Some of it is published in Portuguese, some of it in English.

04-00:05:17

Warrin: Well, if you have a chance to email me the link, I'd appreciate it.

04-00:05:27

Silva: Yes. Do I have your email address?

04-00:05:30

Warrin: I think so. I'll leave you a card before I go.

04-00:05:34

Silva: I'll email you Irene Blayer's—I'm not very good at a computer.

- 04-00:05:45  
Warrin: I can probably just search for Irene Blayer and I would find her, I would guess.
- 04-00:05:52  
Silva: Because she and Frank Fagundes did that publication that I showed you last time.
- 04-00:06:02  
Warrin: Oh, okay.
- 04-00:06:07  
Silva: She teaches Romance languages in a college in Canada and another woman who teaches in Brazil have this website.
- 04-00:06:27  
Warrin: I probably know her, I would guess. I know Frank, of course.
- 04-00:06:31  
Silva: She and Frank Fagundes wrote a book together, too, in Portuguese.
- 04-00:06:40  
Warrin: Oh, okay. So to get back to *Distant Music*, which is your second volume here.
- 04-00:06:54  
Silva: Yes. *The Death of Mae Ramos*.
- 04-00:06:57  
Warrin: Oh, okay. It's called—
- 04-00:06:58  
Silva: There is a third volume but I'm not sure it will be published. I don't know.
- 04-00:07:04  
Warrin: Okay. We'll talk about that at the end. Who exactly is Sarah?
- 04-00:07:18  
Silva: Oh, Sarah doesn't come in the second. She's only in *Gunnysack Castle*.
- 04-00:07:21  
Warrin: Oh, okay. Okay.
- 04-00:07:26  
Silva: And she is a fictional character really. Sarah Furtado. There was a real physical person but my grandmother did not have a live-in. And later she had a paid companion but Sarah and Belle are the two in *The Gunnysack Castle*. Two totally fictional who have no basis in—
- 04-00:08:00  
Warrin: So you're getting in the second part of *Distant Music*. You're focusing more on Henry and Louise.



- 04-00:08:17  
Silva: Well, the first one is on my mother's family, the second one is on my father's family.
- 04-00:08:24  
Warrin: On your father's family.
- 04-00:08:27  
Silva: There are four main characters. Henry and Louise. But Louise as now a Ramos, not a Woods. And my grandmother Mae and—
- 04-00:08:42  
Warrin: Tom.
- 04-00:08:43  
Silva: Vasco. But Vasco was the son of Louise and Henry.
- 04-00:08:50  
Warrin: Okay. And here we have Henry and Vasco, the sons of Tom and Mae, I believe, right, here? Or am I confused?
- 04-00:09:02  
Silva: Well, there are two Vascos.
- 04-00:09:03  
Warrin: There are two Vascos.
- 04-00:09:04  
Silva: Yes. The first one is Henry Ramos's brother. The second is Henry's son. There are four sections. The first section is from the point of view of my father. The second is third person universal. But to explain why, the essential drama that effected all of their lives. And the third section, Foxtrot, is from my mother's point, from Louise's point of view. And the last section, the other Vasco, is from Vasco's point of view.
- 04-00:09:48  
Warrin: And Vasco or Arab is called—
- 04-00:09:54  
Silva: Yes. I never had my name. When I was a child I went by a nickname. Through my childhood until I graduated from grammar school nobody knew I had another name. I was Buzzy.
- 04-00:10:15  
Warrin: Buzzy.
- 04-00:10:18  
Silva: And there was always this kind of identity problem. I picked Arab long, long, long before there was any connection between 9/11 or anything like that.
- 04-00:10:46  
Warrin: Yes, of course.

04-00:10:47

Silva: It was from the song the “Sheik of Araby.” And because he’s named after the dead son they named, and I’m sure that has something to do why not even my grandmother ever called me by my real name.

04-00:11:08

Warrin: Really? Why Buzzy? How did that—

04-00:11:13

Silva: I think my older brother couldn’t say brother and somehow it got to—those things start long before you’re conscious of how they start. But my older brother was given the responsibility for calling me Buzzy. And then today, he wouldn’t call me anything but. He’d call me Buzz. Both my brothers. If I say, Julian, they say Buzz in return.

04-00:11:53

Warrin: Is that right? Where do your brothers live?

04-00:11:54

Silva: Pardon?

04-00:11:54

Warrin: Where do your brothers live?

04-00:11:57

Silva: One in Castro Valley and one spent most of his life in Turlock, but he now lives in Oakdale with his favorite son.

04-00:12:13

Warrin: What do they do?

04-00:12:15

Silva: Well, my older brother is very much like my grandfather, like Vince Woods. He was very good at making money. He started out raising pigs and that somehow didn’t work out. Then he went into eggs. He was the head of the Egg Producers of America at one time.

04-00:12:41

Warrin: Is that right?

04-00:12:45

Silva: And almonds. Turlock’s finest almond orchards. And investing. He spent a great deal of his time following the stock market and even today he’s two years older than I am and sicker than I am and I think his sons have been trying to get control so he doesn’t do something foolish.

04-00:13:17

Warrin: Which is easy to do nowadays.

04-00:13:19

Silva:

Yes. And he's an extreme right-wing. He carries a gun everywhere he goes, a loaded pistol. He wouldn't drive. Now he doesn't drive anymore. They've stopped him. And evidently his sons have taken the ammunition away but he still has the pistol. And my younger brother is also a great gun collector and also very conservative, which is odd since both of our parents were—they were all brought up—probably it's a reaction. They were brought up in a very liberal family.

04-00:14:08

Warrin:

In this part of the book you compare the Woods and the Ramos families.

04-00:14:21

Silva:

Yes.

04-00:14:23

Warrin:

Would you just briefly describe the differences?

04-00:14:29

Silva:

Well, the Woods were power and money. The Ramos's were culture and affection. I loved my grandmother, the Ramos one. My grandmother Silva. In fact, she was for me the most important person in my life.

04-00:14:59

Warrin:

Well, you had gone to live—as you told us last time—

04-00:15:02

Silva:

I went to live with her after her husband—her husband died in 1936. I was nine. It was such a shock for her. She stopped eating. She made no effort to do anything and it was decided that she had to have some excuse to continue living and it was a dispute who was going to stay with her. My brother and I at first took turns. He hated it and I sort of liked the idea of being an only child for a change. And my brother and I were as friendly as Cain and Abel. But it was only a block away, a city block distance away. So I wasn't going into another town or another country and I had to go through certain forms. I had to go home every day from school before I went to my grandmother's and my grandmother certainly indulged me. And then when she moved to the City, I had—an important scene in the novel about her. Took me to the opera at the age of twelve, 1939, and got me involved in the San Francisco Opera House, which was sort of the center of my adolescent life. Most of my friends either—virtually all of my friends, teenaged friends I met somehow—either they were patrons or ushers but they were involved in it. A lot of them were studying music and studying singing and I was the baby. Always the youngest of the group. Then somewhere in life I suddenly turned out to be the oldest member of every group I was in. [laughs]

04-00:17:49

Warrin:

Well, you certainly had a cultural experience that most children at that age did not have to that extent.

04-00:18:03

Silva: I knew all about—because my grandmother’s Red Seal recordings. Mostly Gigli, Tito Schipa and Galli-Curci. And I was fascinated with Italian opera. When everybody else was following the Andrews sisters I was more interested in what Gigli was doing. I don’t think of opera as snobbery. I respond to that music. But pop music doesn’t reach me. I listen and I can understand. I could understand the Beatles, the appeal of the Beatles. I could even understand Mick Jagger. I don’t understand rappers today, the appeal of them. But I never really got involved with pop music in all of my CDs. Except for Louis Armstrong and I did go to see Dinah Washington here. And Louis Armstrong could do no wrong. But if I had a choice between Louis Armstrong and Ezio Pinza, it would have been Ezio Pinza.

04-00:19:47

Warrin: Difficult. So let’s see. Just to finish up our conversation on *Distant Music*. Toward the end there’s quite a bit on Arab. Arab is attracted to the religious life.

04-00:20:14

Silva: Oh, well, the young Arab got attracted and then a very sick Spanish nun. And it’s an episode that in some way almost destroys him emotionally. And that was one of the first stories I wrote called “Spanish Ecstasies,” about the nun, the fanatical nun.

04-00:21:03

Warrin: And then you integrated that into this later novel?

04-00:21:06

Silva: Yes, yes.

04-00:21:10

Warrin: So your most recent book, again by the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, is *Move Over, Scopes and Other Writings*, and here there’s quote a heterogeneous collection of stories. The first one is—

04-00:21:36

Silva: “Move Over”.

04-00:21:37

Warrin: —“Move Over, Scopes”.

04-00:21:37

Silva: Which is a novella.

04-00:21:39

Warrin: Essentially, yes.

04-00:21:41

Silva: It’s really the story of the first two novels taken as a comic. I mean, they were all the same characters but it was presented as comedy and satire and it was written early. So there are certain contradictions. For example, at the end of

“Move Over, Scopes”, Louise Ramos is pregnant with her third child. Yes, with her third child. In real life fourth. And it’s a few months before Tom Ramos is going to die. In fact, November, a few weeks before his death. But the time scheme of the book, the child Louise is bearing would be eighteen months old already before he dies. Because this was written before the regular thing and I never thought this was going to be published. I thought it was a kind of private joke. And I was also playing around inventing the town with the postmistress and Elsie Grub. And there was some basis for the other family. The trouble is I remember the real names. I can’t remember the fiction name now of the one who runs against him as trustee.

04-00:23:41

Warrin: Yes, I haven’t noted it down here.

04-00:23:44

Silva: Anyway, my father was trustee of the San Lorenzo Grammar School and that was always the excuse why we could not go to a convent school. Since my father was the trustee we had to go to the school that he—he could not very well send his children to a school, to some other school, and be the trustee of that school.

04-00:24:05

Warrin: Right. To imply some inferiority on behalf of that school.

04-00:24:13

Silva: So my sister went to Saint Elizabeth’s because my father was no longer trustee at that point. And San Lorenzo had pretty well exploded by the time she was—

04-00:24:32

Warrin: Yes. Dramatic change in mid-century. Your second story is entitled “Brave Cossacks” and it appeared in the *Writers Forum* in 1981. This is totally away, as far as I can perceive—

04-00:24:53

Silva: Yes. I never sort of thought of myself as an ethnic writer. Most of my stories have nothing to do with the Ramos’s or the Woods. The characters may really be Portuguese. Here they aren’t, except—and that was based upon a real incident. A friend of mine who did—she had a very famous father. She just died a couple of months ago. And I’m the godfather of the young child who survives. But I think there can be no more horrible experience for a woman than to have her favorite child killed or die. It’s really almost the same. It’s a repetition of “Vasco and the Other,” except that it’s not a violent death. He dies of cancer. And it was a woman from great wealth and had always been able to buy anything she wanted. She tried to buy doctors. There were no expenses—and she was powerless to prevent her son—but the real story there is the conflict between the mother and the daughter.

- 04-00:26:33  
Warrin: I was impressed by the psychological depth of this. This isn't—
- 04-00:26:41  
Silva: That's the mother/daughter relationship from hell. It's a love/hate relationship that—
- 04-00:26:49  
Warrin: And you really get into the psyche of the mother.
- 04-00:26:54  
Silva: Yes.
- 04-00:26:58  
Warrin: Yes.
- 04-00:26:59  
Silva: And sadly, the mother, the model her husband—well, there were connections to Stravinsky. I won't give you the real family names. But the mother, as she got older, she had this great apartment or condominium on Park Avenue with a Picasso owl. The dining room was all Picasso, Matisse drawings bought in Paris in the thirties from the artists. And some con man got her. Turned out to be famous enough con man that he made the first page of the *New York Times*. But only after she lost everything. And she lost her condominium, she lost—the daughter at that time had moved to New Mexico and she was dependent totally upon her daughter.
- 04-00:28:10  
Warrin: Well, you could see in the personality of this mother how that could happen, how she—the distance—psychological distance there—
- 04-00:28:25  
Silva: Yes. And at the end, when she gets on the airplane, she feels more at home with this absolute stranger, with a stranger of a certain class than she does with her own daughter. And she's going to be subject to flattery. Like my Grandmother Woods, Smith, also was, except that she had her own daughters pretty much. But my grandmother could be flattered into anything by buying some overpriced rug or some overpriced piece of China.
- 04-00:29:22  
Warrin: Well, it's a temptation. If you have the means—
- 04-00:29:28  
Silva: And there are so many people who prey on the old, unfortunately.
- 04-00:29:31  
Warrin: Yes. The third story is called the "Waxworks Show" and it's about three aging minor actors in London. You obviously are quite familiar with London to be able to—

04-00:29:48

Silva:

Oh. I used to go twice a year and I spent summers. In fact, I've written a whole book. That one and "A Visit to Haworth" are both about the same actress. And I've written a whole book called *A Legendary Blanche*, which is a novella and seven short pieces and the two in here—the "Waxworks Show" is the first short piece and "A Visit to Haworth" is the fifth short piece.

04-00:30:32

Warrin:

That's a very touching story sort of. It's, I don't know quite how to say, very subtle.

04-00:30:45

Silva:

You mean "A Visit to Haworth?"

04-00:30:46

Warrin:

"A Visit to Haworth," yes.

04-00:30:48

Silva:

Yes. Because almost nobody understands what she's asking him to do. She's asking him to see that she's going to be cremated, not buried. And the difficulty is they can't admit to each other that each one knows she's dying. And she does die two months after that.

04-00:31:19

Warrin:

What are you doing with this manuscript? You have a novella and more stories.

04-00:31:27

Silva:

Any number of people say they all like it. If this were twenty years ago or thirty years ago it would get published but nobody wants to publish anything that doesn't—I sent it to Ohio just to have—since they'd published, just to give me some advice, and he recommended two presses that might and I couldn't even get the presses to accept that they would read the manuscript.

04-00:32:03

Warrin:

Really?

04-00:32:05

Silva:

Nobody's interested in what somebody of eighty writes. I'm publishing something, somebody's helping me, supposed—maybe tomorrow. I'm publishing something else online and if that goes—I would like to have it published. It reads very well. It's specialized. I mean you have to be interested in acting, the career, but I think she's an interesting enough character to—

04-00:32:45

Warrin:

Yes. I think as you move away from family and their close personal experience, your fiction takes on a different character. I think it certainly should be published.

04-00:33:06

Silva:

Yes. But I wasn't really detached from that.

- 04-00:33:14  
Warrin: No, but perhaps it's a slightly different—
- 04-00:33:15  
Silva: Yes, yes.
- 04-00:33:16  
Warrin: —sense. You follow-up with some more of the Ramos's and Woods'—
- 04-00:33:30  
Silva: Yes. And I wanted to make a big distinction. The “Candle in the Wind” is Henry and Louise Ramos, not my real father. But “My Joe” is not about Henry Ramos, it's about Claude Silva. And it's not a story. It's a memory. And everything that happened—I'm just writing an account of a real event.
- 04-00:34:03  
Warrin: Here in the stories these are Henry and Louise and Henry and Louise. But you're saying that in real life they were different people. Is that right?
- 04-00:34:16  
Silva: Say it again?
- 04-00:34:19  
Warrin: Isn't it true that in “A Candle in the Wind” it deals with Henry and Louise, and “My Joe”—
- 04-00:34:29  
Silva: Is not fiction. Is about my father and my mother. The real Claude Silva.
- 04-00:34:39  
Warrin: Oh, okay.
- 04-00:34:42  
Silva: And that's why the last four pieces are memory pieces, not fiction.
- 04-00:34:48  
Warrin: Oh, okay. And that's obvious in “Coming to Terms with the Facts of Animal Life” because we're no longer in San Oriel, we're in San Lorenzo.
- 04-00:34:57  
Silva: San Lorenzo, yes.
- 04-00:34:59  
Warrin: And we're on Ashland Avenue and so forth.
- 04-00:35:01  
Silva: And the pig belonged to the Mouras and my grandfather is Tom Silva. I think somewhere in the index—not the index, the front page, the title page, does list the four sort of as memory pieces. But there's not a real distinction made. But the last four pieces are. And I had written a slight preface, both explaining the contradiction, Louise's pregnancy at the time when she had already been a



mother for eighteen months. And explaining also the distinction between the memory pieces and the short fiction but that didn't get included.

04-00:36:10

Warrin: And then finally the "Woman in the Doorway." Very touching essentially memory of your great-grandmother.

04-00:36:24

Silva: My step-great-grandmother.

04-00:36:26

Warrin: Step-great-grandmother, yes. A mail-order bride, in effect.

04-00:36:32

Silva: Yes, yes, yes. And from the wrong lot, too.

04-00:36:45

Warrin: This was not uncommon.

04-00:36:46

Silva: No, no, no, no, no. No. I think the Cardoza—the thirteen year old girl that came I think was not—it happened so often I think because there were marriage brokers. And I think they must have been paid from both sides and their object was to get the woman here. And if you paid for her passage you couldn't afford to send her back.

04-00:37:34

Warrin: Now, for somebody as astute in most business matters as your great-grandfather was, surprising that he got taken here.

04-00:37:44

Silva: Well, somewhere along the line you have to trust people. Today you would check on the Internet. You would be spared the—but say that must have happened about the turn of the century. And it was a long voyage. And also because he had come—he had been so young when he came and he had been here for so many years. He wouldn't have any memory of anybody back in the islands.

04-00:38:41

Warrin: Well, you would have to give him credit for marrying the woman and not simply saying, "Okay, I'll support you. You can live in town someplace."

04-00:38:48

Silva: Sure. And they had nine children.

04-00:38:57

Warrin: So there was some attraction there, too, of some sort.

04-00:39:00

Silva: Well, of course, he was a man. He needed a sexual outlet. There were no local brothels as far as I know up in the Bay Area at that time. He was still

producing children when he was seventy. He had needs and the needs have to be—and living together and having all of those children together, they must have—he wasn't heartless I don't think. But he did keep the two families separate.

04-00:39:57

Warrin:

So it was a question of class to a large extent.

04-00:40:00

Silva:

Oh, yes. Yes. I think that was the whole thing. That his first family was unquestionably middle class. The fact that she was a peasant. But we still have questions of class. With an illiterate, uneducated bride and you were a middle class—none of my grandparents, I think, got beyond the eighth grade. But they all did the eighth grade and I think they had gone to school. They were certainly literate. And in my grandfather Silva's case, he was determined his son was going to be well educated. I don't remember my grandfather well enough because I—but my grandmother always read—they tended to be rather religious after he died. But reading was a habit. I never saw my other grandmother, ever, with a book. I don't even think there were many magazines around.

04-00:41:44

Warrin:

Is that right? So we've kind of covered your published fiction and talked a little bit about what you've written in the past. But you did mention also that there is another part to the Vasco story.

04-00:42:14

Silva:

Yes. It starts in February 1944 and it ends a few hours later in February, 1944, but it goes back. And it's simply the sexual coming of age of Vasco and all the complications of growing up gay in the dark ages. And it's explicit. And it's narrow focus—in fact, I meant the three novels, each one like a camera coming in for a close up.

04-00:42:54

Warrin:

Each one narrowing more.

04-00:42:55

Silva:

*The Gunnysack Castle* is not just about the Woods, it's about the town and the whole world. The second novel is about four characters, a narrow—and then the last one is about one character, except it can be read as an individual novel. Except that it sort of assumes you know the background that has already taken place in the previous novels. And I just rewrote it for the last time and Frank [Sousa] has it. I haven't gotten a reaction.

04-00:43:52

Warrin:

Okay. But he is talking about publishing it?

04-00:43:56

Silva:

Well, if it does get published, it can't be published for—he gave me some date. I'll probably not be alive then. I don't know. And if this online

publishing works, I'm just curious. I don't know what happens when you publish something online, how anybody knows about it. But I'm experimenting and I'll publish anything else if that—as long as I can protect my copyright. I'd rather somebody, even if there were only ten people out there who wanted to read it, read it, than it sit in a drawer and nobody reads it.

04-00:44:44

Warrin:

Well, there are ways of publishing if you're willing to pay for the publishing. It's not that expensive. You can—

04-00:44:55

Silva:

No, I know, but what's the point? I would rather online. I think there are ways. Like when I'm publishing two novellas and a short story. Like a one sentence summary of each one and something you would at least be interested in it. I don't know. But evidently people put something online. Because the short story "A Visit to Haworth," that immediately got on somebody's website. There is a special website devoted to the Bronte sisters and there was a picture of my novel—I mean my story, with the cover of my story, with "A Visit to Haworth" mentioned. It astounds me that this kind of thing happens. I don't have any connection with the Bronte Society and maybe they've sold a few books. I don't know.

04-00:46:20

Warrin:

It gives a writer a much broader, ampler possibility of being known and having the work distributed.

04-00:46:32

Silva:

Yes. If somebody connects and it strikes somebody and then it can go—it has a better chance. Self-publishing a book and keeping the copies, there's no point as far as I'm concerned.

04-00:46:55

Warrin:

Well, there is such a thing as print on demand. So if somebody wants the book they order it and a copy is printed and sent to them.

04-00:47:05

Silva:

Oh, yeah. I've heard of that.

04-00:47:08

Warrin:

And quite a few people who write books that won't—that aren't going to be published by Random House or even a smaller house—

04-00:47:21

Silva:

What, do you do that through Amazon or—

04-00:47:24

Warrin:

I could talk a little bit more about it as soon as we finish the interview here. I can explain it. Because I—

04-00:47:39

Silva: Have you done it?

04-00:47:40

Warrin: No, but I've recently volunteered to be the publisher of the—publisher in the sense of the person who arranges the publication of books for the San Francisco Maritime History Press.

04-00:48:03

Silva: Oh. My father had a whole collection of maritime books that we donated to them—used to be at the end of Polk Street. What's the building there? Wasn't that where the Maritime Library was?

04-00:48:24

Warrin: Way down there. Maritime Museum, I think, was down there. Now it's closed but it occupies the old building right down at the end of Hyde Street that used to be the yacht club. That big white—

04-00:48:48

Silva: Yes, all right.

04-00:48:49

Warrin: —right along the road. That's now the San Francisco Maritime Museum.

04-00:48:56

Silva: Because my father was fascinated by ships and made these great ship models. The one I had was great. I started after I was sick. I started giving everything that I—personal that I had in my will to give to family things, I gave them to them now. My sister's oldest daughter was to get the ship model. She has it now, so I don't have it anymore.

04-00:49:33

Warrin: Oh, that's nice.

04-00:49:34

Silva: And I have little carved ships. One used to sit right up there. And I gave that to another daughter of hers. He spent hours and hours and hours working on them.

04-00:49:50

Warrin: You can spend forever. I bought a kit and I put that in quotes because it was so complicated. It cost me a couple hundred dollars for the *Charles W. Morgan*, this famous whaleship. And I tried a couple of times. I even have a table that I bought. And got it all out there and it was so complex I finally put it back in the box.

04-00:50:17

Silva: My father started building the hull and everything. Building it himself, not with a set. I'm going to have to go upstairs again very soon.

04-00:50:28

Warrin: Well, I think we can end this here and just say that I've appreciated this conversation.

04-00:50:39

Silva: It's been a pleasure.

[End of Interview]