

Penelope Fried

Interview

With

Michael Erlewine

INTRODUCTION

This is not intended to be a finely produced book, but rather a readable document for those who are interested in in this series on concert poster artists and graphic design.

Michael@Erlewine.net

Here are some other links to more books, articles, and videos on these topics:

Main Browsing Site:

<http://SpiritGrooves.net/>

Organized Article Archive:

<http://MichaelErlewine.com/>

YouTube Videos

<https://www.youtube.com/user/merlewine>

Spirit Grooves / Dharma Grooves

Copyright 2019 © by Michael Erlewine

You are free to share these blogs
provided no money is charged

Interview with Penelope Fried

by Michael Erlewine

[Bob Fried is in my opinion one of the most important and daring artists of the great San Francisco poster scene. He died so early on that less is known about Fried than most of the other artists. Fried is one of my personal favorites. I had a chance to interview his wife, an artist in her own right in 2001.]

Wednesday May 9th, 2001 San Rafael, Ca, with Poster expert Eric King present and participating.

Michael Erlewine: When was Bob born?

Penelope Fried: Okay, he was born in April 7, 1937 in Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York.

Eric King: Well, he and Victor Moscoso...

Michael Erlewine: Is that how they knew each other?

Penelope Fried: They met here, but they had... I think Victor was a little older or ahead of Bob at Cooper Union. Bob went to school in Brooklyn and wanted to go to art school. His father insisted that he go to commercial art school, so he went to New York City College and studied graphics.

Michael Erlewine: What do you call him, Robert or Bob?

Penelope Fried: Bob.

Penelope Fried: So after that, he did work for a while at an agency, but he got a scholarship to go to Cooper Union ...

Michael Erlewine: Can we back up?

Penelope Fried: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: To the best that you know, how did he get into art as a kid?

Penelope Fried: Oh, he was an artist. He took classes at Pratt, you know.

Michael Erlewine: At what age are we talking about?

Penelope Fried: Probably between 11 and 14.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Penelope Fried: Yeah, Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So, he's always drawn?

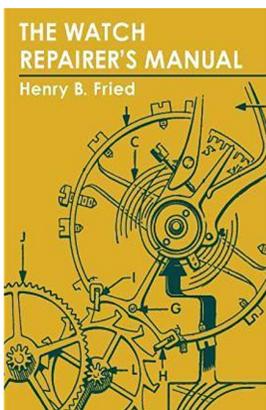
Penelope Fried: Always.

Michael Erlewine: Do you know what kind of stuff?

Penelope Fried: Well, figurative a lot of the time, although Bob's father originally was a clockmaker and a horologist, actually.

Michael Erlewine: Really!

Penelope Fried: Which is a person who studies time. And he's written many, many books and dictionaries of time pieces and mechanisms and he created mechanisms. Well, he did all of his own illustrations, but he also taught Bob. One of Bob's jobs in the family was to do these very, very precise illustrations.



[Henry B. Fried, "The Watch Escapement," "Bench Practices for Watch and Clockmakers"]

Michael Erlewine: Wow.

Penelope Fried: So even as a young person, you know, his father was training his eye.

Michael Erlewine: When you say precise... What would be a picture... of what? An illustration?

Penelope Fried: You know, the inner workings of ancient... antique clocks ...

Michael Erlewine: Do any of these exist anywhere? Are there any copies of this kind of work?

Penelope Fried: Well, you know what... I think there are, but when Bob's father died, about five years ago, his... Bob's sister dispersed the books and gave them to other members of the family, not to my son. And that was a disappointment, so I think they exist with other friends.

Michael Erlewine: I see.

Penelope Fried: Clifford Fried in Florida, I think has some there.

Michael Erlewine: I'd love to get some pictures of that, just to show folks... That's amazing!

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Michael Erlewine: At an early age, he could do technical illustrations?

Penelope Fried: Oh yes! And I mean his father Henry did the first prototype talking clocks and watches for a Swiss company. And he did gyroscopes for missiles and all..

Michael Erlewine: In high school, what was he doing? Was he doing illustrations for his father then?

Penelope Fried: I think he was doing a lot of ... I mean I haven't seen a lot of those works, but he did, how am I going to put this: He liked figurative works. He did a lot of figure work, a lot of portraits.

Eric King: What media was he going to work in?

Penelope Fried: He worked in charcoal and graphite, and he did also...What else? Umm.

Michael Erlewine: Was he involved in school, like high school... A lot of these guys did high school publications, cartoons, etc. It doesn't sound like he was a cartoonist.

Penelope Fried: No, no. He didn't do those. He was more into his personal discovery.

Michael Erlewine: When we were at Victor Moscoso's, we saw one of my favorite Bob Fried pieces, would be one of the ones he did on acetate, the Grateful Dead poster of skeleton on stilts walking across books. I saw it for the first time in person.

Penelope Fried: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: I mean I've seen pictures, but I've never seen the real thing. Really pretty amazing to me, the concept. The concept of time, clocks and so on. Did he ever talk about that? Did he ever have anything to say about that particular poster that you know of?

Penelope Fried: I don't really remember. I remember sort of the time, the era... I mean he's called a visionary artist.

Michael Erlewine: He is that.

Penelope Fried: I mean. In his work so, you know when you say 'conceptual', it's ...

Michael Erlewine: Well that he was.

Penelope Fried: Yes, I mean... but that's what he played with.

Michael Erlewine: When I said conceptual, really that's what I'm talking about.

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Michael Erlewine: The reason I liked him so much is because he was visionary, and also was a master, to me, of a kind of understatement, you know gestures, like in that Euphoria poster.

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Michael Erlewine: It's one of my very favorites, but it's just... a little understatement.

Penelope Fried: Mmmm

Michael Erlewine: So high school wasn't a big drawing event for him, like for the school paper or any of that stuff.

Penelope Fried: No. I would say he was a little shy, you know. He pushed himself out into, you know, sort of more gregarious situations, although he was a very funny, sort of very humorous person. So in high school, he probably wasn't a great student, but he was really, you know, sort of focused on his own work and discovering what his own work might be.

Michael Erlewine: So even then, you're saying in high school his work was art!

Penelope Fried: Yeah, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: That's something.

Penelope Fried: Always.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of more formal art-school training did he have?

Penelope Fried: Well, as a young person he went Pratt. He had classes or went to classes on the weekends and he continued to do that. He went to New York Community College and studied graphics.

Michael Erlewine: Do you have any idea what years these are?

Penelope Fried: That must have been about between 1957 and 1959 or something, as far as I know, because I didn't know him then.

Michael Erlewine: Somewhere we need to know how he came from the East coast to the West Coast. When did you know him?

Penelope Fried: I met him, I think, in the last year that he was at Cooper Union. At that time, he also had another scholarship to do printing at Pratt. He did stone litho work at Pratt, in Brooklyn. And at Cooper he did... one of his teachers was Nick Corone. I don't know if you know him?

Michael Erlewine: I don't.

Penelope Fried: It's interesting, because I just read something about him recently, so you know it came back into my mind., Nicholas Corone was a highly regarded teacher at Cooper Union at that time, and he was a figurative draughtsman. And I think it, that's where Bob became very involved in abstract work, very large abstract paintings.

Michael Erlewine: I've seen some of them.

Penelope Fried: Very large.

Michael Erlewine: I should ask you what you mean by very large.

Penelope Fried: Probably 8x10 feet.

Michael Erlewine: Very large!

Penelope Fried: Yeah. These were expressionistic, abstract expression... big.

Michael Erlewine: What ever happened to them, you don't know?

Penelope Fried: You know, I don't, because, we were out of the country for some time. And I think they just got dispersed. I don't know where those very early pieces are. I don't know if there's anything at the Brooklyn Museum. Maybe they gave him a show, you know a local show in 1967... 1968 maybe, or 1970. Maybe later. Oh yes, maybe then! But anyway, so he graduated from Cooper Union, I think, if my memory serves, in 1962. And he then got a Fulbright Scholarship to study in Spain.

Michael Erlewine: Really!

Penelope Fried: And he actually had two Fulbrights, one after the other.

Michael Erlewine: That's great!

Penelope Fried: We were there by that time. I met him an art exhibition in Brooklyn, New York. And that was in 1961.

Michael Erlewine: When did you marry?

Penelope Fried: In 1963, in Queens. His parents had moved to Queens, by then. We were married at their house.

Michael Erlewine: And what did you study? Where you an artist also?

Penelope Fried: Yes. In England, I studied in South Hampton. That's where I had gone to school. However I came to New York as a diversion, I think, not with any intention to stay. And I definitely suffered from culture shock, when I first arrived.

Michael Erlewine: I believe it. (laughs)

Penelope Fried: (laughs) At first I didn't work. I was just going to visit and I really didn't like New York. It was overwhelming. I left and went to Canada, just for a vacation, like six weeks. And then I came back to New York and it was a more gentle entry. And that's when I started to work.

Michael Erlewine: What medium did you use?

Penelope Fried: I was doing watercolor and tempura at that time, when I was in England and I wasn't working. I wasn't doing artwork. I worked for "American Home Magazine," in the advertising department.

Michael Erlewine: You were doing graphics and stuff?

Penelope Fried: As a gopher, I think. (laughs) Yes! it was a very strange time. The early '60s was an odd time.

Michael Erlewine: I remember that.

Penelope Fried: Do you?

Eric King: I was living in New York at the time.

Penelope Fried: Were you? Right.

Eric King: I was born in New York City.

Michael Erlewine: Well, Eric and I are the same age. We are just going to be sixty.

Penelope Fried: Oh yes, well I'm the same. (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: How old are you? When's your birthday?

Penelope Fried: Mine's March 17, 1942, so next March I'll be sixty.

Two Years in Spain

Penelope Fried: Yeah, so Bob actually went to Spain to I mean, the premise...

Michael Erlewine: You were with him right?

Penelope Fried: Yes, we married in January and we left in March, I think it was.

Michael Erlewine: What was that like? What was happening in Spain for him?

Penelope Fried: Well, he wanted a Fulbright, and you know everyone wants to go to Italy. If you paint, you go to Italy. Well, it seemed to him that it wouldn't be wise to have that kind of competition.

And then everybody that went to Spain wanted to study Goya! And as much as he loved Goya, he decided that Zurbaran was less recognized. And so, he got his scholarship based on his desire to ...

Michael Erlewine: Well, what did he actually do there?

Penelope Fried: Painted!

Michael Erlewine: What kind of things?

Penelope Fried: Big paintings and these two little oils. [she points to the wall]

Michael Erlewine: The ones on the left?

Penelope Fried: Yes, he did those.

Michael Erlewine: Wow! That's incredible.

Penelope Fried: So, we had a very large, very large, flat right in the middle of Madrid.

Michael Erlewine: Hmm! Sounds like fun!

Penelope Fried: Oh it was wonderful, really wonderful.

Michael Erlewine: Spain is also great.

Penelope Fried: Oh, Spain is wonderful! Spain is very deep and very mysterious and I felt very, very comfortable. For a southern climate country, it's very northern, in my experience.

Michael Erlewine: So you both enjoyed it?

Penelope Fried: Yeah, very much. It was a phenomenal time. And so he painted and did a lot of work, and you know, I didn't tell you, also, before we went to Spain, he taught at the Provincetown Workshop. Victor Candell was one of the founders, and I'll remember his name, the other painter. Anyway, it's been in existence for quite a long time. So in the time frame that I knew Bob before we went to Spain, we spent summers in Provincetown. He worked there and he worked with Robert Motherwell. He was Motherwell's assistant. And I modeled for Helen. (laughs).

Michael Erlewine: And then he did a lot of painting there. Did he bring those back? What happened to them?

Penelope Fried: Yes! on the top of the Chevy. Tied on. (Laughs) Yeah, he was tremendously prolific.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Penelope Fried: He was, all the time.

East Coast to West Coast

Michael Erlewine: So then... how did you get to the West Coast?

Penelope Fried: When we came back from Spain, we were in New York for a year, in 1965, and Bob had applied to different schools, to Yale and UCLA and I think the San Francisco Art Institute.

And he decided at that time, that he didn't want to go to Yale, because it was on the East Coast. He had some idea he wanted to go to the West Coast. And UCLA didn't accept him. And he wrote a very stinking letter to the chancellor (and I can't remember his name) at that time, and the chancellor was stressed that Bob hadn't been accepted and offered him a place at UCLA in the art department to get his masters. And I think by the time that letter came, he'd also been accepted to the art institute here, and so we came to San Francisco. And we drove across country.

Michael Erlewine: Was that fun?

Penelope Fried: Yes! It was a good thing to do. It was boring, I thought. I didn't much care for it. Our first child was born in Spain.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, so you had a kid.

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Michael Erlewine: Did you take the northern route?

Penelope Fried: No, we came sort of through the middle, and it was very uneventful, I think until Colorado.

Michael Erlewine: Well, that's about right.

Penelope Fried: And then it seemed to be exotic to me.

Michael Erlewine: Well, I think that's true for all of us. Those are the plains, right? After that, you get excited by the mountains. Right?

Penelope Fried: Is that right, Yes! The West was something I had never encountered.

Michael Erlewine: You hit the Rockies and it gets interesting.

Penelope Fried: Yes, very wonderful. And we spent time in Colorado, in Aspen, which was a little nothing town at that time.

Eric King: Yeah. That is not what it is now.

Penelope Fried: No, and then we dropped down and came through New Mexico. And Zephania, I guess, was, well a year and a half at that time.

Michael Erlewine: How many children do you have total?

Penelope Fried: We had two. I have three, but Zephania was the first one.

Michael Erlewine: And then you had a son?

Penelope Fried: And yes Arniel, and he was born in San Francisco in 1968.

Michael Erlewine: And your daughter was born?

Penelope Fried: In 1965. She was born before we left, by a couple of months.

Michael Erlewine: So, so you ended up in San Francisco. That must have been kind of a neat place to be.

Penelope Fried: Yes, it was. It was. I mean, you know, it was also a struggle, so it was sort of tempered, you know, interesting and neat.

Michael Erlewine: What is hard to make money then ...

Penelope Fried: Yes, and to be in a new place and find your way and, you know, have all of those little challenges, all immediately. And then for Bob to be involved in going to school, as well.

Michael Erlewine: What did he work on?

Penelope Fried: At that time, well I guess he was painting! And that's also when he first started to do silk screens, again. He'd done litho before, years ago, but he started to do silk screens and do hand cuts.

Michael Erlewine: But not posters?

Penelope Fried: He did start to do posters then. I think it was that first year he did graphics. You know he did free lance work.

Michael Erlewine: This was like in 1967 or something?

Penelope Fried: We came here in 1966, maybe sixty-seven. We came back, maybe early 1967.

Michael Erlewine: He started doing posters?

Penelope Fried: That's when we came here, so as he looked for work. He did graphics advertising free-lance work, and then he started to do posters. And I think that the first posters he did were for the theatre, and then he did, I guess, Family Dog posters, maybe first.

Michael Erlewine: And Eric, you probably know...

Eric King: Yeah, I believe that the first thing he did was some early... some of them just around the middle of the Family Dog.

Penelope Fried: Family Dog, yeah.

Eric King: He came and started working.

Penelope Fried: Yeah. It was in the first year that we were here.

Michael Erlewine: Did he enjoy that? What did he think of it?

Penelope Fried: Oh yes! He really enjoyed that. He liked that. He really enjoyed knowing the musicians and I mean it was, it was a full experience for him, I think.

Michael Erlewine: Were you in that too. Did you meet them?

Penelope Fried: A little bit. Yeah, I did. I met, you know, lots of ... whoever was coming through. (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Penelope Fried: And at that time, I was making clothing, I made garments

Michael Erlewine: Really!

Penelope Fried: And I was involved with a fellow, an English fellow, named Rose. I can't remember the first name. My memory is horrible. His last name was Rose and he opened the first boutique on Polk Street, It was called 'Orbit'.

Michael Erlewine: Well, what type of clothing?

Penelope Fried: Very, trendy, cool clothing.

Michael Erlewine: Hippie clothing?

Penelope Fried: Yeah, but more sophisticated hippie clothing.

Michael Erlewine: Ok.

Penelope Fried: I made lots of, lots of things for Janis Joplin.

Michael Erlewine: Really!

Penelope Fried: Lot's. Really simple, not, not very intricate pieces.

Eric King: Did you make any of her stage clothing?

Penelope Fried: No, these were all very simple, shifts of different fabrics. But she liked that place and she used to like to hang out there. So, the more posters Bob did, the less other advertising work he did.

Michael Erlewine: But he still kept on painting.

Penelope Fried: Oh yeah.

Michael Erlewine: So, the painting was the # 1 thing for him?

Penelope Fried: At that time, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Even through the poster thing.

Penelope Fried: Yes, although he really liked doing the posters, because I think he had that, you know, he'd had all of that training in graphics.

Michael Erlewine: I guess so!

Penelope Fried: And then also the fine arts, so it was really an opportunity for him to bring it all together.

Joining the West-Coast Scene

Michael Erlewine: And how did he meet the other artists there?

Penelope Fried: I think he met Victor first of all, you know because Victor was already working and had been here. I don't know how long he had been here, but it was before Bob got here. And then also Alton Kelley. I think Kelley had been to Cooper Union. So I don't think he met Kelley until later. So it was Victor Moscoso and Rick Griffin, that I think he met first of all.

Michael Erlewine: Were there anyone among them that he thought was especially. Who did he admire?

Penelope Fried: Yeah, it was Victor. Yeah, he really liked Victor.

Michael Erlewine: As a person? Or as an artist?

Penelope Fried: As an artist. He had great respect for him as an artist. He thought he was a little off hand as a person.

Michael Erlewine: Victor is emerging as a really important person.

Penelope Fried: Is he? Yeah. That's that.

Michael Erlewine: But I also feel that Bob Fried was not recognized enough.

Penelope Fried: Not enough, but I think Bob was known more in the fine art world.

Michael Erlewine: But is that persisting at all?

Penelope Fried: I don't think it has. I mean I think it has amongst people who had seen his shows in the past, and...

Michael Erlewine: And how would someone like myself ever see any of this stuff?

Penelope Fried: Well! I don't know!

Michael Erlewine: You have any pictures of it?

Penelope Fried: Yes, I have pictures, and, as I say, I think the Brooklyn Museum has pieces. I think there is a foundation that has prints, and the Santa Clara University has actually a lot of paintings, quite a number. Yeah, so while he was doing posters, he was also studying at the art institute, and then graduating and having his masters, and then he was teaching printmaking there.

Michael Erlewine: Did he enjoy school?

Penelope Fried: I don't think he did.

Michael Erlewine: But he did go through it.

Penelope Fried: Oh yeah.,

Michael Erlewine: And completed his masters and ..

Penelope Fried: Yeah, yeah. Well he had to really complete a body of work, which you know he had always done. I don't think that he had as much regard for his teachers there as he did for his teachers in New York.

Eric King: Oh!

Michael Erlewine: Did he consider any of the poster artists, able to instruct him in anything?

Penelope Fried: I think he really admired Victor Moscoso and I think he might... they were very different people, but he liked Rick Griffin?

Michael Erlewine: And they knew each other? They were friends?

Penelope Fried: Yes, and at that time, Rick had little children as well, so you know, there was a bit of more backwards and forwards. So that was, you know, socially at least... that was something.

Michael Erlewine: Right.

Penelope Fried: But Bob would be the kind of person who would really go into his studio and be absorbed, and Rick could sit at the kitchen table with everything going on around. You know, so their personalities were really different.

Michael Erlewine: You mean Rick didn't care where he was.

Penelope Fried: No, I mean Rick stayed in one place, basically, the kitchen table. (laughs) Yes, he's an old surfer kid.

Eric King: Yeah. There's all these images of surfing, and when he got into fundamentalist Christianity, he had Jesus surfing.

Penelope Fried: (laughs)

Eric King: You know it's a logical explanation. So did, you actually knew all these people as well!

Penelope Fried: Yeah, yeah... I knew Victor Moscoso and Gail, and Rick Griffin and Ida, and Wes Wilson and Eva, who were also very good friends of ours, very good friends. You know, they had children also, so when the move to Marin County, from San Francisco, I guess, around the very beginning of 1970 and they were already living in Lagunitas.

Eric King: Yeah, Everbody had moved out of the city.

Penelope Fried: Yes, yes.

Michael Erlewine: Was Bob interested in Wes' art?

Penelope Fried: Not very much.

Michael Erlewine: But they were friends, good friends.

Penelope Fried: I think yeah! Definitely friends, and Eva and I were very close.

Michael Erlewine: What about Stanley Mouse?

Penelope Fried: Not very much. No.

Michael Erlewine: Kelley?

Penelope Fried: On and off. I mean we knew them, but, but we weren't close. And Kelley used to be, almost our next-door neighbor in Fairfax, for quite some time, with Cathleen. What Was He Like?

Michael Erlewine: What can you tell me about... One of the things that attracts me to Bob's art is and I'm gonna' stumble around a little bit to find a good word... Let me see if I can put in a way to you. Again, I say things like understatement, a feeling of lightness, just like the name of that Youngbloods poster at Euphoria, there's just, a very lightness, almost like a kindness, that is kind of like a philosophy to me of some kind.

Penelope Fried: Mmm mmm.

Michael Erlewine: I'm curious what were his philosophical interests?

Penelope Fried: He was a pretty political character too.

Michael Erlewine: He was?

Penelope Fried: Oh yes. Bob was very involved in the students strike when the, 30 students were killed at Penn. State. He did a lot of posters.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really! God I'd love to see some.

Penelope Fried: Yeah, I have fliers.

Penelope Fried: A lot of his work, I mean this water color here...

Michael Erlewine: Is this one of his?

Penelope Fried: Yes, on this wall here. This one... was Cambodia.

Eric King: That's marvelous!

Penelope Fried: Even in New York, he went to activist parades.

Michael Erlewine: Did he know anything about Eastern philosophy. What were his philosophical interests?

Penelope Fried: This umm piece was pretty prophetic. I mean, I think, because it is a commentary on Israel.

Michael Erlewine: Hmmm, I would love to sometime get a picture of this or something.

Penelope Fried: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Some of this stuff we need to document somehow.

Penelope Fried: Well I'll bring this and you can look at this. It's very hard to see. I've got a light table. I can get that out, but you could just.... Maybe, when we finish doing this, we could come out and do this as well.

Michael Erlewine: Yeah, let's talk first and .. So he's very political?

Penelope Fried: Yes, he was.

Michael Erlewine: What kind of philosophy?

Penelope Fried: He didn't study Zen and he didn't meditate. He worked a lot. He read all about things. He liked Gustave Corbet for his philosophical and political action. A lot of his prints came from Corbet's action. He like peyote, so he had his own peyote experience and ritual. Yes, so, I think through those experiences, there was a lot of opening and he became very compassionate. I mean he was very compassionate.

Eric King: One of the of my own experience with acid... In his posters, these symmetry of line and these little rows of dots. These are things that I saw, and other people I know saw, when they were taking acid.

Penelope Fried: Mmm Hmm

Eric King: I've wondered about this for some time. This is a common experience that he put down. He must have also seen these ordered lines and 'twink', they would... you couldn't capture it in art but they would 'twinkle' when you saw them, and I had the feeling that that was some of his experience. Is that correct?

Penelope Fried: Yeah, oh yeah.

Eric King: That's really clear to somebody who did acid.

Penelope Fried: Yeah.

Eric King: That this is Acid. This is acid drawing.

Penelope Fried: It's, yes and you know in that sense it's very cosmic and very connected to ...

Eric King: Web to work with time and space, that was what he was trying to deal with. Yeah.

Penelope Fried: ... to the sort of human subconscious.

Eric King: In that space and time. Yeah ok, that's something that I've been curious about for a long time.

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Eric King: Because it most closely parallels my own experience of how you would see things, when you're under the influence of acid. That's, that's interesting.

Michael Erlewine: So you did, I mean all of us did acid. He did a lot of acid? A little? I just wonder..

Penelope Fried: Well.

Michael Erlewine: For many years? A few years?

Penelope Fried: I would say a few years. When we lived in Spain, you could buy Sandos LSD at the pharmacy. We were there from 1963 to 1965.

Michael Erlewine: Oh really!

Penelope Fried: And it was perfectly legal and actually it was sold as a headache remedy.

Michael Erlewine: Woah! That could cure a lot of things.

Penelope Fried: (laughs)

Michael Erlewine: Clear your head! (laughs)

Eric King: (laughs) Oh my god!

Penelope Fried: So, that was so, if you took more than one pill. If you ganged up and you know took another pill, you've got the 300 or 600 milligrams.

Eric King: Sandos was in Switzerland?

Penelope Fried: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Did he treat acid experience like... He did it often? Or was it once and then he'd wait awhile?

Penelope Fried: He didn't do it often. He did it significantly. Yeah, so it wasn't like a recreational thing. Yes, it wasn't a hip thing, at all. It was really a discovery, I think.

Eric King: He was, and I would I ask this question. He was older than the hippies in the same way that we were older than the hippies. He wasn't 15 years old. He was a mature adult with an established identity. So he was gonna' have different experiences of acid.

Roots in the Beat Movement

Penelope Fried: Right.

Michael Erlewine: Did you have any connection or roots into the beat movement?

Penelope Fried: Oh yes, he's considered a Beat artist.

Penelope Fried: Yes, Robert Johnson? Did you know him? Robert Emery Johnson, who is the artist who made this piece.

Michael Erlewine: Which piece are you talking about?

Penelope Fried: This large piece here. He wrote a small book about Beat artists. He'd written something about maybe the writers, but he included Bob.

Michael Erlewine: Even though he's really too young to really be in the beat movement.

Penelope Fried: Right, but, but you know he was sort of in that crossover. He was in that bridge.

Michael Erlewine: I came to Venice California in 1960 and then to San Francisco and even then, I was trying to reach back into the beat movement, but it was already really too late.

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Michael Erlewine: It was already dying out...the end of a culture.

Penelope Fried: Yes, but you see in Provincetown also, a lot of those people were bi-coastal and Eric Somebody or other, I don't know, he was always in Provincetown. There was a big mix and then Malo (SP?) was in Provincetown and, although he wasn't really a beat person by any means, there was this sort of entourage. We used to stay at Millbrook with Timothy Leary and Ram Das, who was still Richard Alpert at that time.

And it was a very... it was a mixed community, and in New York at that time, when things were beginning to happen in San Francisco, the hippie movement was really growing in a different way. You know, it was very intriguing and I think also the fact that we met people who had come from San Francisco might also have been part of his leaning, to accept the San Francisco Art Institute over UCLA.

Michael Erlewine: So he read the beat poets and was he very literate?

Penelope Fried: Yes, he interviewed Allen Ginsberg on WBAI once, as well, when the first rulings came down from the district attorney when LSD was made illegal.

Eric King: Ohhhh! And he interviewed Allen Ginsburg about that.

Penelope Fried: Yeah. A profound, of course, individual, Bob said he came... he came to the studio with a pile of law books with papers stuck in...

Eric King: He was serious.

Michael Erlewine: And so Bob read literature, in general, also at this time. Was he reading European literature like Thomas Mann or...

Penelope Fried: When he was younger, not when we were here. No, not so much.

Michael Erlewine: So here, he didn't read a lot, he painted a lot.

Penelope Fried: He painted a lot. He drew a lot.

Religious Background

Michael Erlewine: What about music? What kind of music did he like?

Penelope Fried: In the early days, he liked jazz and he liked rhythm and blues and rock and roll.

Eric King: Did he go to many of the concerts?

Penelope Fried: Oh yeah,

Eric King: Yes.

Penelope Fried: Oh yes, quite a lot.

Eric King: Yes, because the artists could get in.

Penelope Fried: Yes, especially if he'd done the poster thing. He'd get in. Yeah.

Eric King: Kelley told me that he lived at the places, because he could get in.

Penelope Fried: Yes, he could go in, go backstage, hang out, and all that.

Michael Erlewine: Did he like classical music, do you know that at all?

Penelope Fried: Sometimes. Yes. His father wrote in musical magazines about Mozart.

Eric King: Cool.

Penelope Fried: So, yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Sounds like he had quite a father.

Penelope Fried: All of those Frieds were amazing. And the father's generation. They were, you know, Jewish-Russian Immigrants.

Michael Erlewine: Was he a strict Jew?

Penelope Fried: No, they were conservative.

Michael Erlewine: Did he follow it much?

Penelope Fried: No, it was steeped in him. He'd grown up in a big Jewish family in Brooklyn. He spent Christmas' with his Italian neighbors...

Michael Erlewine: Did he observe Passover or anything?

Penelope Fried: We had a Jewish wedding and I went to the mikveh, before the wedding, so it was, you know, very proper.

Eric King: Oh definitely.

Penelope Fried: It wasn't until we moved to Marin County, and our children, he thought that the children should have some kind of interaction, so they used to, on occasion you know, go to temple. He also, you know, used that opportunity to show his work and sell his work and I guess he did a poster for one of the anniversaries of Israel.

More About Posters

Michael Erlewine: So I'm just trying to trace... In the poster part, we're at the beginning of it. How long did it... he didn't do a huge amount.

Penelope Fried: No, he did some posters and he did some record jackets, LP jackets.

Eric King: He started out... the first one that I know that he did is one that, he must have been close to Rick Griffin, because it's that triptych, the Charlatans one...

Penelope Fried: Yeah, he did one of them.

Eric King: The first two were done by Rick Griffin and then Rick said to him "Oh, would you finish this for me"

Penelope Fried: (laughs) Right.

Eric King: Rick must have felt positively about him, if he gave him part of the commission, because they finished the thing.

Penelope Fried: Yeah

Eric King: And from there, he started to get into them.

Penelope Fried: So, was that one of the first he did?

Eric King: That's the first one he did.

Penelope Fried: Oh! It is! Oh, so then it was Rick I thought it was Victor who gave him the poster.

Eric King: No, it was Rick that gave him the thing. Rick gave him part of the commission. And he finished it.

Penelope Fried: Yes, I remember that.

Eric King: And then, that must have been his entry, I assume.

Penelope Fried: Yes. Well he also did a poster for... Do you remember the play, I think it was 'Billy the Kid', and ...

Eric King: Oh! That's right! He did do the... I had forgotten that!

Penelope Fried: Was with Jean Harlow?

Penelope Fried: Jean Harlow and 'Billy the Kid', was that Michael McCure?

Eric King: Michael McCure's play.

Eric King: I know that poster. I'd forgotten. That is also one of his earliest posters.

Penelope Fried: Yes, he did that. He did one of the early posters for a health food store.

Eric King: It was like, the first couple... he was just feeling his was around. And then when he did the one, I guess it's the Indian, with the violin in front of the Taj Mahal, he hit what he wanted to do,

Penelope Fried: That's right.

Eric King: He was influenced by the others, but then he made it his own. That's the first one.

Penelope Fried: Yes, and it was quite different from the art of the others.

Eric King: Yeah, it was different from all of the others.

Penelope Fried: So, stark almost. Yeah.

Eric King: Yeah.

Eric King: Did he ever say anything to you about his own style, and the way he suddenly had his own voice in this?

Penelope Fried: I think having his own voice was always important to him. Never would he have copied Wes Wilson, for instance. You know there, there may have been things about other people's work that he liked and would filter in, in some way. Apart from having to be interesting and eye catching, he wanted people to get it. He wanted the impact.

Eric King: Yeah.

Penelope Fried: You know, and I think a lot of people, not a lot, but some people were more interested in, you know, sort of describing whatever their acid experience was in a meandering ... and he would not. He didn't meander.

Michael Erlewine: That's very well put.

Eric King: It's very clear, when you look at these different artists posters, when you look at this poster, they jump right out at you and say this is Bob Fried.

Once he did one poster that he finished off the design that had been started by Rick Griffin, the others, when he started doing them, they were very personal. They were very much his own.

Penelope Fried: Yeah, right, yeah there was one, I can't remember which one it was maybe. I like the Indian dancer with the red eyes, and I also like the one with the cat in the background.

Eric King: Yes! Yeah.

Penelope Fried: The one with southern Indian dancer. It's just his head, and it's red and green, and his eyes are red. And then instead of a headdress, I think it's got hands.

Michael Erlewine: What did he like best, if you know?

Penelope Fried: I think it was the experience of doing them he really liked. It was just different, you know. He was always mentally restless, so he would like what he was working on, most of the time. Sometimes not. But then, once it was done, he would move on to another piece. And yet he did a lot of, you know, this little drawing is a very playful little piece, or, you know, Tina Turner. Am I being clear enough for you?

Michael Erlewine: Yeah. I guess I really love that Euphoria poster. Is there anything more to know about that, other than just a vision experience? I just found the handbill for that too.

Penelope Fried: Well, you know, I think that was also a change, a changing time.

Michael Erlewine: Hmm.

Penelope Fried: Because he was probably coming to the end of working at the art institute, you know, studying. He was doing record jackets and posters for other things, and he was doing work for the San Francisco Art Institute and their catalogs.

Michael Erlewine: Mmm hmm.

Eric King: He had his own company for awhile that was called "Food"?

Penelope Fried: That's right. He had Food, and before Food, he had the Singing LSD Mothers Society.

Eric King: Oh I didn't know that.

Penelope Fried: Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: And what was done in that?

Penelope Fried: (laughs) I don't know. I can't remember, but a lot of his posters that were not dance posters or the rock posters, were the Singing Mothers. And I think it came from... he saw a postcard from the Salt Lake Tabernacle Choir.

Penelope Fried: I think it was the Salt Lake Singing Mothers, and so he took that.

Eric King: Ohhh!

Penelope Fried: Yeah (laughs)

Eric King: What an inspiration.

Penelope Fried: So that was first, and then it was the, the "Food."

Michael Erlewine: Have you collected his posters and stuff?

Penelope Fried: I have actually, and unfortunately they've been stolen.

Michael Erlewine: Oh no!

Penelope Fried: I had them in storage, and very clearly marked as to what they were and ...

Michael Erlewine: Ohh, so sad.

Eric King: One of the things I had wanted to tell you, is that on the off- chance you had any posters that he had signed, that you should be aware that these are very valuable, because there just aren't anymore.

Penelope Fried: Yeah. I have some.

Eric King: I had wanted to caution you about that.

Penelope Fried: I have some, but I had lots. I had everything that he had done, because, I mean I had specifically packaged them for Armeil and Zephania, because I mean obviously this is the way they have of knowing their father. And, and my son is a pilot and he goes to places and he sees the posters. And, he's just amazed at the attention they get. Bob's posters get attention, wherever they are!

Eric King: With what's emerging now, there's going to be more, and that was why I wanted to make this point to you, that you be very careful not to sell any of these things without it being for a lot of money, because his signature is simply unavailable, and there are collectors who want signed posters.

Penelope Fried: Yeah.

Eric King: And in the same way that Rick Griffin is not around to sign anything anymore, Bob isn't, and you should be aware, that a poster that might be you know \$100 might be 5 or 6, 7 times that.

Penelope Fried: Mmm Hmm.

Eric King: ...because of the signature. Be very wary of parting with any of these things. I wanted you to be aware of that.

Eric King: This is what I'm doing. I do something different than Michael does. I'm an archivist, and I wrote a collector's guide to the material, and I'm a consultant to people who either collect it or have worked for some of the artists and made money for them. I've brought them clients who, you know, bought things. And what I've been described as is sort of a cop, to make sure that, you know, people don't do bad things. There have been forgeries, there have been, you know.... I have all this information about how to tell these thing apart, in the guide, but there are people, small numbers.

Eric King: Most of the people who are involved in this are either old hippies who follow the old hippie ethics, about being righteous, but there are this small number of people, who have tried to do things that are, you know, improper or corrupt, and cheap. And there are people... I have no idea what your circumstances might be, but if you happen to go to the wrong person, to sell anything, they would tell you "Oh, this poster is worth \$65, when the thing might be worth 10x that, because it was signed.

Fried's Sudden Death

Michael Erlewine: So we were talking about posters and he didn't do that many posters. I'm just curious how we got out of the period during which he did some. What was the next? What year did he die?

Penelope Fried: He died in January, of 1975.

Michael Erlewine: And how did that happen?

Penelope Fried: He a cerebral aneurysm.

Michael Erlewine: Really.

Penelope Fried: He was in the process of opening a printing studio in San Francisco. And he designed and created a vacuum table that he used at the studio, that he built at our home in Fairfax. And was refining that and I guess it was the beginning of the more automatic... So he was going to print his work and other work, very similar to what others are doing now. One day, he left to go to the studio, and in the early afternoon he got sick and his apprentice brought him home and everyone thought he had food poisoning, and he just deteriorated. He, you know, slowly... he was in a lot of pain.

Michael Erlewine: And this was very sudden.

Penelope Fried: Yeah and he was dead within 24 hours. So, it was very, very shocking. And he died the night or the day of his opening at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The museum had given him and a number of other artists, Gage Taylor, Richard Lowenberg, and someone else, who's name I can't remember. They gave him a grant to travel to Baha and produce works based on that experience. And Bob created sculptures and dry points. These are a couple of the dry points. So they did that. That road trip and camping trip. My whale bone under here, he found on the beach and carried back. And he did a lot of watercolors based on that trip. So that was his part of that show. So at the opening, they announced that he had just died, and it was most dramatic, awful, awful, awful time. And he was 37 when he died.

Eric King: God.

Penelope Fried: And he had done a lifetime of work. I mean he was very productive. Yes, and he had lots and lots of notebooks. Lot's of sketches and drawings and poetry and those, those were collected by the Smithsonian.

However, I discovered recently that they haven't arrived and I know where they are. There's a person who's a friend of Bob's, who wanted, I think... he's a photographer. He wanted to document some of the things, but they are still in his possession. And it was my belief because Robert Johnson had created this, that they had gone back to Robert and back to the Smithsonian. So that's something also that's just hanging out there.

Michael Erlewine: Right. So I'm getting the idea of a large body of work.

Penelope Fried: Well it's a diverse body of work, you know, because it was...there were posters, but there were drawings and watercolors and prints.

Michael Erlewine: What's being done? Is anyone gathering this material?

Penelope Fried: Well, I have most of the material, apart from, as I say, paintings that are the Santa Clara, in the Saisset Museum at Santa Clara, and whatever is at the Brooklyn.

Michael Erlewine: And what is in this volume there?

Penelope Fried: This is actually a catalog of works.

Michael Erlewine: Oh, it's all slides. Yeah.

Penelope Fried: Of different a pieces. In fact, this is what I wanted Richard to bring back, so that you could look at them. So Richard is going to reproduce some of these things in book form or portfolio.

Michael Erlewine: Are these the only copies of the slides?

Penelope Fried: Yes.

Penelope Fried: I painted garments, I was always painting, but I did art and the pieces I did were all hand painted. And it was my painting imagery, which is of dream imagery. I painted on garments. I did some costumes for the Marin Ballet and for a little theatre company.

So that's how I, began to make my living, which was just really different than my painting. I finished the degree that I had never finished.

I also with, a tiny bit of the money that came from the benefit concert, I bought a little cottage in Fairfax, and then I sold that so, so I had income, that I continued to use. And then I developed a decorative painting business and I painted residences and commercial buildings, hotels, murals, buildings ...you know furniture --- like those things.

The Sheets of Postage Stamps

Penelope Fried: Well, people really respond to the work. And then you know when Bob had his show... I think one of his first shows had a suite of prints and it had a Native American sort of drawing, with his arm as the map of California, and it's all squeezed off in the middle and, you know, columns tumbling down, all of those are his statements of what was happening politically at the time. You know and then he made those into stamps also. Are you familiar with the stamps?

Eric King: Yeah, I saw them at a show.

Penelope Fried: That caused an enormous flap with the FBI.

Michael Erlewine: Really!

Penelope Fried: And in fact there's a person in the East Bay, who was in court because he did a stamp that he used as a stamp. Do you remember that guy?

Eric King: Oh, well that's a different thing. I don't know that case, but the thing is, that's different.

Penelope Fried: Yeah.

Eric King: But to make something that looks like a stamp, that's not forgery.

Penelope Fried: No, this was perforated and then sold in sheets.

Eric King: Yeah, I saw them. They were wonderful.

Penelope Fried: Yes. Well kids at the university put their drop cards in the frames of the... which is incredible, I mean it was so moving.

Michael Erlewine: Hmm

Penelope Fried: They really resonated.

Missing Family Dog Otis Redding Poster

Eric King: Well, Bob did preparation and art work for an Otis Redding concert that was canceled.

Penelope Fried: The one where he died

Eric King: Yes

Eric King: There has been considerable talk over the years that it's one of the most brilliant designs.

Penelope Fried: mmm hmm

Michael Erlewine: Just, do you have it?

Penelope Fried: Mmm, I think so. Yeah.

Michael Erlewine: Have I ever seen it?

Eric King: No, there's nothing.

Penelope Fried: No, it wasn't printed.