

'I'm Just What I Am by Just What I've Done'

DOROTHY CHANDLER

MARCH 1945 An eight-month strike by a film studio workers' union polarizes Hollywood.

AUGUST 6-15, 1945 US drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. World War II ends.

MARCH 1947 Cold War begins.

NOVEMBER 25, 1947 First systematic Hollywood blacklist instituted.

JUNE 25, 1950 Korean War begins.

Born in Illinois in 1901 and raised in Long Beach, California, Dorothy Buffum grew up watching her father, Charles Abel Buffum, build a small dry goods business into a chain of sixteen Buffums department stores. Her mother, a former music teacher, taught Sunday school. The couple were engaged in their community. Her father served as mayor of Long Beach in the 1920s.

Chandler was valedictorian of her high school class, played basketball, and competed in track and field. With thoughts of becoming a writer, she went to Stanford University, where she met Norman Chandler, the son of the publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*. The two left before graduating to return to Los Angeles and get married. "Buff," as she came to be called, married into one of the wealthiest, most powerful, and most conservative families in Southern California. Executive Director Ernest Fleischmann formed a close bond with her over many years of working together.

Ernest Fleischmann, Future Executive Director

She told me about not ever being totally accepted into the Chandler family, because she came from the Buffums, who were, after all, tradespeople. They were shopkeepers, and that was beneath the Chandler line.

Chandler herself, when asked, didn't think it was her upbringing that made her an outsider.

Dorothy Chandler, Southern California Symphony Association Chair

It was not true that the Chandlers felt he [Norman Chandler] married below. . . . I think, naturally, older sisters are always trying to tell their younger sister what to do or the bride of their brother. They felt I should join a garden club, and I should go to this bridge club . . . but the social part of going into Pasadena, being a part of the ladies' garden club and the card clubs and things like that, I never felt that that was for me, never. And I'm not against them or against what they were doing, but it just was not for me.

And so, I saw much more of my husband and his business and read newspapers, magazines. . . . I would write my husband's speeches when he made his talks at Christmastime or anything downtown. Worked very hard with him to help him, because he was more of an introverted person than I.

The social pressures on her were strong, though, and as a young wife, she struggled to find her place and her purpose. A severe bout of depression hit her ten years after her marriage, and she checked herself in to a mental health facility.



Mehta and Chandler (top);
Chandler thanks Hollywood
YMCA for Bowl support.

Dorothy Chandler

I think it was just building up to this idea that I did not want to fit into this mold that was sort of the mold that would be the wife of Norman Chandler. And so, I think subconsciously it just builds up. And then you begin to think it's your own fault, something is wrong with oneself that makes you not wish to conform. And so, it just gets deeper and deeper until you withdraw from people and activity because you feel that you are a misfit. . . .

There was a friend of mine who said why don't you go and see this Dr. Jackson, Josephine Jackson, in Pasadena. And so, Norman took me out there, and she was an older lady. She lived in a funny old house in Pasadena. She said that she would take me as a patient, and that I should come and live there. And so, I did. . . .

The main thing was that I was helped by Dr. Jackson . . . to reverse my thinking that I was not a misfit. That I was maybe different from what people maybe thought I should be. But it was nothing against them because what they did was right for them, but it just was not right for me. But that I had a very important place in life and responsibility. It was really to turn to civic things and to doing things related to helping Norman. She said that "if you know that two and two makes four, don't keep asking yourself that." You have a role to fill, go ahead and do it. And so, I left there in six months.

Chandler found her role—actually several. At the side of her husband, Norman, and then her son Otis, she went to work at the *Los Angeles Times*, beginning as an administrative assistant and ultimately serving as a vice president and director. She also ran its sister publication, *The Los Angeles Mirror*. She was instrumental in turning the *Times* from a conservative, partisan newspaper into the West Coast paper of record. She also figured prominently in the history of Children's Hospital Los Angeles, helped expand the University of California as a member of its Board of Regents, and was sent to Vietnam on a fact-finding mission by President Lyndon Johnson at the height of the war. Her life is an Oscar-winning biopic waiting to be made, but the pages ahead will focus only on her contributions to the arts in Los Angeles, for which she was later called by Governor Pete Wilson "the heart and soul of Southern California's cultural life."

Asked about her lifetime of achievements, she said:

Dorothy Chandler

My life wasn't a planned life. It was an organized life in the way I lived it, but I was never playing: I want to be this and I want to be that, and I want to be the head of this, and I want to be the head of that. I just evolved. I'm just what I am by just what I've done.

Twelve Days in July

DOROTHY CHANDLER SAVES THE BOWL

SEPTEMBER 4, 1951 President Truman makes first coast-to-coast live TV broadcast.

1952 Jonas Salk discovers polio vaccine.

JULY 27, 1953 Korean War armistice.

DECEMBER 1953 First issue of *Playboy*.

MARCH 9, 1954 Edward R. Murrow broadcast sparks backlash to McCarthyism.

Large-scale opera productions at the Hollywood Bowl had been dormant for several years when, in 1951, the Hollywood Bowl Opera Association, a subsidiary of the Hollywood Bowl Association, re-formed with plans to open the season with an expensive, five-night production of Johann Strauss, Jr.'s *Die Fledermaus*. Director Vladimir Rosing boasted of 30-foot sets that "will be among the most spectacular ever constructed for the Bowl or for any other stage."

Ticket sales were anemic, however. Three-quarters of the seats were empty. Mounting debt meant the Hollywood Bowl couldn't pay its artists or staff, and the season had to be suspended.

Jean Hersholt, the then president of the Hollywood Bowl Association, and the County supervisors formed an emergency committee. They picked Dorothy Chandler, who'd been on the board for several years, as chair. She leapt into action.

Dorothy Chandler, Southern California Symphony Association Chair

I came into town and stayed at the home of Alfred Wallenstein, he was the downtown music director, for about three nights and days. He had, of course, all these connections. We got on the telephone, and we called every top artist, locally or internationally, that he could get his hands on, and asked them if they would donate their time to come out and do a concert. And so, we had a wonderful response, even [Jascha] Heifetz and [Gregor] Piatigorsky, people like that. They would receive no compensation.

Then I appointed Neil Petree to head a committee to get the public to give the money to pay off \$100,000 of the debt, and I organized a women's committee to sell tickets, and we just got the thing going. That started the whole era for the Hollywood Bowl.

Stars donated their time. Articles about the campaign to save the Bowl filled the pages of the *Los Angeles Times*.

Dorothy Chandler had the Hollywood Bowl up and running again in twelve days.

Chandler shortly was named president of the Hollywood Bowl Association itself. In that role, she convinced the County Board of Supervisors to assume long-term financial responsibility for the venue, while her corps of volunteers raised money for the programming.

Her leadership ushered in a period of revitalization of the venue after years of neglect dating back to the Depression.