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INTERVIEW WITH EARL DOLCINI
by Carla Ehat & Genevieve Martinelli
August 9, 1984

INTERVIEWEE: Earl Dolcini (ED)
INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE) and Genevieve Martinelli (GM)
DATE OF INTERVIEW: August 9, 1984

CE: Today is Thursday, August the 9th, 1984. And continuing the Oral History Program for the Anne Kent California Room, this is Carla Ehat. And joining me today is Mrs. Jordan Martinelli. And we are way out in a beautiful part of Marin. It is called Hicks Valley?

ED: No, this is the Petaluma-Marshall Road.

CE: Petaluma-Marshall Road. And we are on the Dolcini Ranch. And part of that -- One of the members of that family has agreed to share a little bit of his family's story with us today, and his name is Earl Dolcini. Good morning, Earl.

ED: Good morning.

CE: What brought your family to Marin County? Did you ever hear the stories?

ED: I have heard some stories and hopefully they're somewhat reliable. My great-grandfather immigrated from Switzerland.

CE: Swiss background.

ED: He was born about 1830 and he was born in the Canton of Ticino in a valley called Valle Maggia in a little town called Cevio. And at 17 he left the area. And the reason he left was, if you've ever seen it, there's really not too many ways to make a living there. It's rocks after rocks after rocks and so the main source of occupation anyone would ever learn would be masonry work, probably. But you can only build so many houses. Well, at any rate, he went to France when he was 17 and he worked there for three years and from France he went to Africa and worked for about a year. And I don't know what part of Africa, but I would suspect it would be French Morocco, due to the fact that he had been working in

France. And of course, that brings us up to the time when there was great news from California.

CE: The gold rush.

ED: The gold rush.

CE: Isn't it fascinating how people came from all over the world and had this fever? Try your luck; go over there and make it, and go back home.

ED: So he was a saving-type of individual, like a lot of Swiss are, and got on a boat, came around the Horn and into California and went up into the gold country. He had befriended a gentleman from Italy on the way over and so they worked together mining gold. They actually only mined for about a month. Toward the end of the month his friend was stabbed, and his gold was stolen from him. And he was killed. And so, coming from a line of cowards --

CE: He didn't want any part of that.

ED: He didn't want any part of that. And so I understand he went down below the Peninsula, maybe below San Jose, somewhere in that area.

CE: Had he -- Had he -- Did he get any gold?

ED: Nothing that amounted to anything. In fact, I should back up just a little bit. He came down to Sacramento, and being somewhat skilled in masonry work, there was someone building a building out of bricks. And he approached them and asked if he could have a job. And they said no; they didn't need anyone. Probably what I tell you following this sums up the man pretty well, in a sense. He waited until they went to lunch. And when they went to lunch he mixed some mortar and he continued doing something which he knew how to do, in relationship to building the building, and when the boss came back at one o'clock he hired him.

CE: Darned resourceful.

GM: Sure!

ED: So from there went on down somewhere below San Jose. I don't know exactly where. And I suspected that he probably milked, worked on ranches.

CE: Do you know what his name was?

ED: Yes, his name was Carlos Martinoia.

GM: What was his name?

ED: Carlos Martinoia.

CE: And then he was down the Peninsula? Ok. He was still a young man in his twenties.

ED: Right. At that point he came to Marin County. Don't ask me why; I really don't know what brought him up here.

CE: There are no letters in the family or journals?

ED: There are no letters that I'm aware of.

CE: Your father ever mention anything, or your grandfather? These are stories you --

ED: These are stories that were told to me by my father, yes.

CE: But you don't know what brought him -- Well, I have heard from other Swiss ranchers that oftentimes they would -- What was her name? Nellie McIsaac?

ED: Yes, she was a Codoni.

CE: A Codoni. And her father sort of ran, unofficially, a Swiss Consulate. He was in touch with villages back in Switzerland and if he heard a rancher needed a milker

he'd write them to come and they would stay at his house. Could that have possibly occurred?

ED: Could very well have been, because if you've noticed, the Swiss population in California all started in pockets, so to speak, and this was one of the pockets here. Salinas was another one. Fortuna was another one.

CE: That's interesting. So he's here, working on some ranch, probably.

ED: He's here. But in 1856 he owned property in Marin County, in Chileno Valley.

CE: 1856? He pre-dates Thompson, then.

ED: I'm sure.

CE: Because they were 1865.

GM: Then they were 17 --

CE: No, no, 1865, the time of the Civil War. OK.

ED: All right. Then somewhere within this time he wrote for his sweetheart, so to speak, Catrina.

CE: A girl back home?

ED: Yes.

CE: This lovely lady?

ED: Catrina Traversy.

CE: Catrina?

ED: Yes.

CE: With a K or a C?

ED: With a C.

CE: Traversy. OK.

ED: Then they were married, of course, and settled in Chileno Valley where he owned his first piece of property.

CE: Did you ever -- She would be your great-grandmother?

ED: Yes.

GM: What was her name?

CE: I have it. Catrina Traversy. All right, now, Chileno Valley is where we are.

ED: No, no. You're on the Marshall-Petaluma Road, sometimes called Salmon Creek area, but not known by a lot of people as the Salmon Creek area because there's another Salmon Creek further north which is better known.

CE: And the Chileno Valley is further west?

ED: It's about three miles from here. Actually, part of this ranch goes down on the Chileno Valley side.

CE: Chileno Valley has an interesting name. Chileno from Chile?

ED: Yes, I believe that is correct, yes. There is quite a story behind that and I really can't --

CE: It seems to me Franklin Burns told me something about that. Do you know about that?

ED: I know Franklin.

CE: And I don't recall it, though, but there is some -- I have to find out about that. Ok.

ED: My great-grandmother had seven children. She had three boys and four girls. During the time that he was getting established and expanding, he provided a dairy for each one of his boys, and this was one of them. And he also operated a dairy, so, actually, he had four dairies going at one time. He was a different man

for his time. After he began to get established here, he got on the boat and went to San Diego. He went fifty miles east of San Diego, to Santa Isobel would be the area, and he purchased ten-thousand acres.

CE: How resourceful.

ED: Which were three ranches. And he got his countrymen to come over and run those ranches for him. But I don't know why he went to San Diego. It's interesting that he would go down there.

CE: Well, Burbank, David Burgess Burbank, do you know that name?

ED: I know the Burbank name, yes.

CE: Okay. When Luther Burbank, which was David's uncle, came out here, he brought potato seeds. And then he wanted some other place to grow them, another climate, so he went to San Diego in that enterprise. Maybe there was communication, climate, you know?

ED: I don't know.

CE: Interesting.

ED: Also, somewhere along the line, he became interested in dealing in property and he was a partner in what they called a commission house, in San Francisco. And, today, it would probably be referred to as an agricultural real estate organization.

CE: A brokerage.

ED: Yes, right.

CE: Well, commission merchants were big. You know, in Marin, in some of these residential districts, like where I live in Ross, for instance, the affluence was derived by many of those families from being commission merchants. And, as I understand the term in the early days, the days of the forty-niners, if you had a little amount of money, and could buy anything and could put it in a warehouse somewhere and trade it off, you know, commission it off, you could make money, and they made a fortune.

ED: I believe it. I believe it. He also acquired a butter factory in San Francisco. And he had a couple of tug boats that he owned that worked on the bay.

CE: Have you had any member of your family research through the archives of the California Historical Society, on your great grandfather? I bet there's something in the archives there.

ED: I would guess there would be. There has been some very light research, but nothing what you'd call serious. Actually, we've been going downhill ever since that time.

CE: I wouldn't say that. But the competition, perhaps, was a little less then.

ED: Yes, and he evidently was a very ambitious man.

CE: Yes, and he had a heck of a lot of initiative.

ED: Yes, yes.

CE: Do you have a photograph of him?

ED: I have a picture. I'll show you that later.

CE: Did he live to a good age?

ED: Yes, he died in, I think, 1908 so that would make him 78, or 1906, maybe. He was in his middle seventies when he passed away. His wife preceded him in death. I think this was one of the last pictures.

CE: There he is with -- There are his three sons and his four daughters, right there.

ED: Yes.

GM: Was he a large man?

ED: No, I don't think so.

GM: About your size?

ED: Probably so.

CE: He looks so European. He's a wonderful looking man. All right.

ED: So then a Peter Dolcini --

CE: Who was who?

ED: My grandfather.

CE: One of these three sons?

ED: No, we're talking about in-laws now. See, my name is Dolcini, this man is Martinoia.

CE: That was your great grandfather?

ED: Yes.

CE: Okay. I always forget you have to get them married and get --

ED: My great grandfather on the Dolcini side came from the same town in Switzerland, but he did not come to America. He left his wife and eight children, four boys and four girls, and emigrated to Australia in order to find employment.

GM: Is that Peter?

ED: No, his name was Joseph.

CE: Well then, getting back to Carlos, he was your maternal great-grandfather?

ED: He was my father's grandfather. I should also probably mention the fact that he changed his name to Charles Martin.

GM: When did he do that?

ED: Well, I don't know, probably when the wheels got rolling and people couldn't pronounce his name, and so forth.

CE: Charles Martin, okay. Now I understand more. Okay, your Dolcini antecedent then, to recap, born in the same village but immigrated to Australia.

ED: Yes.

CE: Ok.

ED: And died within six months, in Australia.

CE: My goodness.

ED: So, wife became a widow with eight children. Now, it was not unusual at that time for these men to go to Northern Italy so seek passage to Australia because a lot of Swiss went to Australia at that time, and there was a lot of competition among the ship owners. They would show you what a grand ship they had and what good food they served, etc., etc. As soon as they got over the horizon things changed drastically. In fact, a good many of them died before they ever got to Australia.

CE: Well what did the widow do with eight children?

ED: Well, she tried to raise them, to a degree. But now the boys started coming to California, and all the boys came to California. Two of them ended up in Marin County: my grandfather, Peter, and his brother, Mike.

CE: Peter and his brother, Mike. Ok.

ED: And the other two boys settled west of Santa Maria: Joseph and Henry.

CE: Okay.

ED: Peter, being a young man with a gleam in his eye, spotted this Martinoia girl, Anita, and they were married. Peter came here about 1880, I think, during those years.

CE: Where did he meet Anita?

ED: Well, Peter worked in the Nicasio area and rented a ranch from Mr. Pacheco, Mr. Pacheco being the Pachecos right across from Hamilton Field.

CE: Yes, I just interviewed the wife last week. And I had done the husband ten years ago. Wonderful man he was; I liked him. Okay, Peter was then working in Nicasio, and Anita?

ED: Anita was Anita Martin and he courted her and married her.

CE: Okay, that's your granddad.

ED: Yes.

CE: Then they came and lived on one of these ranches?

ED: On this Pacheco Ranch, near Nicasio. I can recall my aunt telling me that she would ride with her father, Peter, down to pay the rent at Pacheco's and often he would give them a half a sack of oranges.

CE: Are you talking about the house that Gumacindo Pacheco built across from Hamilton Field?

ED: Yes.

CE: Those beautiful orange trees.

ED: Yes.

GM: They're still there.

CE: Peter and Anita, then, that's your grandfather--

ED: They, as I say, they rented a ranch from Pacheco in the Nicasio area and followed the dairy business. Peter, having married into the right family, was able to borrow the money from his father-in-law in order to purchase the ranch from Pacheco for \$25,000.

CE: Gosh, was it a big place?

ED: Yes, it was about fourteen hundred acres. And that's a good ranch, still is a good ranch.

CE: What year would that be, roughly? That's before -- Let's see -- Trying to think --

ED: At the point that he bought the ranch I really don't know for sure. I would guess that it would have been maybe before the turn-of-the-century.

CE: Just before the turn?

ED: I'll take it back. It would be later than that, wouldn't it?

CE: Sure. Wait a minute, sure. Was he thirty when he bought it?

ED: My father was born in eighty-eight. Yes, it was before the turn-of-the-century when he bought the ranch.

CE: Okay, good.

GM: Did he buy it from the Pachecos?

ED: Yes.

CE: Now is that still in the family?

ED: Yes.

CE: Good. All right, now then, your dad?

ED: Now they had five children.

CE: Five children?

ED: Three boys and two girls.
CE: One of the boys your dad?
ED: Yes, Arnold
CE: And Arnold was your father?
ED: Yes.
ED: Are you very much like Arnold?
ED: I don't know, you'd have to ask someone else.
CE: Okay. Was he born out here too?
ED: He was born on that ranch in Nicasio. And his mother was born in a ranch in Chileno Valley. I often tell -- People ask me, you know, or I get a chance to speak before, you know, local groups sometimes in Marin County, and most of them, of course, are people who have come in the last twenty years, right?
CE: Right.
ED: You know, I say that -- I say I was born in Marin County and spent all of my life here in agriculture. I say my father was born in Nicasio and he spent all of his life in Marin County, in agriculture. His mother was born in Chileno Valley and she spent all of her life here in agriculture. But I say I kind of have to apologize for my great grandfather because he only ranched here for about fifty-two years.
CE: All right then, we can move on a little bit. Your father and mother -- Who did he marry?
ED: He married Catherine Connely.
CE: Catherine Connely?
ED: Yes. I also have a little bit of Marin County historical information, on her side.
CE: Ok.
ED: My great-grandfather was John Gallagher, on her side. And he came from New York and sailed into San Francisco Bay in 1847 with the American Army.
CE: Say that again. He did what?
ED: He joined the army in New York. He was a blacksmith and he joined the army in New York and they outfitted three ships to come to San Francisco in order to take the area away from the Mexicans.
CE: Right.
ED: And so he sailed into San Francisco in 1847. Three ships, two of them with men aboard and the other with supplies. And they tied up at Yerba Buena Island, which was a protected area. And they sent the supply ship over to Sausalito to get the water and so forth.
CE: That's great.
ED: And of course it took them probably a couple of months to get ready to make an attack on the Presidio and when --
CE: This John Gallagher came in 1847 and then, of course, California -- It was the Mexican War and then California became a part of the United States. What happened to John Gallagher? Did he --
ED: John Gallagher went to --
CE: Did he come over here?
ED: Well, first he went to Stockton and he wrote to his girlfriend in New York, Margaret McQuaid, and she came across by covered wagon, and with her sister, and they were married. But he was not in Stockton all that long, and wouldn't you

know, he came to an area quite close to here and bought a small ranch that was partly in Marin County and partly in Sonoma County.

CE: There are a few. Interesting. Okay, now, they had children, of course, and one of them was their daughter, Catherine, is that correct?

ED: Well, no, but they had children. One was my grandmother.

CE: Grandmother, excuse me. I get the generations mixed up. Do you have trouble that way, a little?

ED: I don't have much trouble.

CE: You're smarter than I am.

ED: One of them was my grandmother. She married a gentleman by the name of Bernard Connely, from Ireland, and one of their children was my mother, Catherine Connely.

CE: Catherine Connely was your mother?

ED: Yes.

CE: And her mother's name wasn't Catherine also, was it?

ED: No, her mother's name was Louise.

CE: Okay, and was she born out here?

ED: My mother was born in Petaluma.

CE: In Petaluma?

ED: Yes, and her mother was born in Stockton.

CE: Where was your mother living with her family then?

ED: In Petaluma.

CE: On the ranch?

ED: No, they weren't on that ranch very long. I don't know why.

CE: They lived in town?

ED: My mother lived in town, yes.

CE: And you came along.

ED: Well, she met my father first. My father's mother, Anita, was ill with cancer, and my mother was a registered nurse. And so my mother came to take care of my father's mother as a live-in nurse. And, wouldn't you know, she picked him off.

CE: Interesting. Where did your mother get her training as an RN? Did you ever know?

ED: Yes, I know, but I can't think of the name. It was a school in San Francisco but I can't think of the name of it. If I heard it I'd probably know it.

CE: Could it have been St. Luke's?

ED: No, it wasn't St. Luke's, I know that.

CE: And when were married -- When were they married?

ED: I think about 1914 or '15. Going back to my father, my father grew up on the ranch at Nicasio and attended the little one-room school house in the Nicasio area. From that point his parents sent him down to Santa Clara which was not really a university at the time, but more like we would think in terms of the prep school today, possibly. And this was not a new thing in the family in that his uncles had preceded him by going to Santa Clara in the 1800s.

CE: Santa Clara is a wonderful school and they take pride in this. They were perhaps the only seminary group for men at that time. So that is quite an achievement.

And think of the foresight to want to do that. Even though you're on the land and totally involved in agriculture, this gave him something.

ED: There's another kind of coincidence in the background here, that I mentioned John Gallagher. My grandfather had purchased a small ranch partly in Sonoma, partly in Marin. My grandfather, Peter Dolcini, eventually bought that ranch and we still have it today.

CE: All right, now your parents were living in Petaluma when you were born?

ED: No, my parents were living in Hicks Valley.

CE: Did they get a ranch there?

ED: Yes. Actually my father never lived in town. When they were first married they lived on a ranch in Nicasio, and then, about 1916 or '17, they purchased this ranch in Hicks Valley from the Brown Family. There was a prominent land holder by the --partners, Brown and Brandon, and they had four ranches in the area.

CE: Were they speculators or were they real ranchers?

ED: No, they were real ranchers.

CE: All right now, you were born when?

ED: I was born in the middle of the depression, the only bright spot.

CE: Such modesty! What's your birth date?

ED: Twelve March, 1929. Notice I say that like a Navy person.

CE: I know, and I still write numbers that way and people say, "Why do you do it?" I write my checks that way.

ED: So do I!

CE: OK. Are you one of several?

ED: I'm one of six.

CE: One of six?

ED: Yes, I'm the baby.

CE: The baby? Now, before you tell us about your married life, and your marriage and your children, tell me little bit about the ranches that are in your family and who's interested in what. We have to talk about what you do raise here besides hay and cattle and --

ED: Well, someone was asking me the other day, you know, "Are you in agriculture and have you been for quite awhile?" And I think I answered by telling him that, "You know, you milk cows twice a day," and I said that our family, starting out with my great grandfather, now is approaching 93,000 uninterrupted trips to the barn.

CE: I love it, I love it. Now that is a dramatic statement. They're always talking about demographics today; that ought to be a capital D. You have how many ranches in your family?

ED: Well, there's a group of us relatives.

CE: Relatives -- get together --

ED: Yes and --

CE: Maybe this isn't for public knowledge, I don't know.

ED: I don't know either. But actually all of the ranches that were acquired are still within the family. Now some of the family has separated as far as the collective ownership is concerned, but they are --

CE: Still there?

ED: Yes, yes.
CE: That's great. Do you have them totally in Marin County?
ED: No, they're not all in Marin County. One is partly in Sonoma County and we have one ranch west of Santa Maria, near Guadalupe that my grandfather, Peter, got from his two brothers, Joseph and Henry, because they weren't doing well down there, and he continued to loan them money to the point where he had to take the ranch over.
CE: Are most of the family interested in it? Or, like the Thompson Family over there? Very few have splintered off; they're sort of stuck with it.
ED: We have a surplus of interest in ranches. Surplus of people interested in ranches. Although we've been rather prolific. There are three of us brothers and we have twenty- one children.
CE: How many do you have?
ED: I only have eight.
CE: Eight?
ED: Yes.
CE: Boys, too, in that group?
ED: I have five flowers and three weeds.
CE: I love that. You ought to speak at the Rotary Club every month; they'd love it.
GM: You have five flowers and what?
ED: Three weeds.
CE: Okay, let's talk about this ranch for a moment. Does this ranch have a name other than --.
ED: This is the League Ranch.
CE: League? Why that?
ED: The only thing that I can surmise is that a league is a measurement of land, and hence it must have acquired the name that way.
End, Side A

CE: Okay, now this ranch that we are on, and you have this lovely home was built by whom, incidentally?
ED: By my great grandfather.
CE: Your great grandfather? Do you think of this as sort of the home place?
ED: No, I don't, because I grew up in Hicks Valley and that's the home place for me.
CE: Is that house still standing?
ED: Oh yes, oh yes.
CE: Equal architecture?
ED: Much better house than this.
CE: Really?
ED: Oh yes. This is a -- I mean it's a real house; this is a halfway house.
CE: I think this is charming. All right, what do you do on this ranch? Is this beef cattle or is this --
ED: This is beef cattle.
CE: Beef cattle, okay. How many acres are here?
ED: There about twenty-five hundred acres.

CE: For the lay person, who might be listening to this, you raise beef cattle for market?

ED: Yes.

CE: Any particular kind of beef cattle?

ED: Well, they're Hereford cattle.

CE: Hereford. Are they ranged?

ED: They are what you would call range cattle.

CE: And your responsibility --

ED: We call it cow calf operation. We have a herd of brood cows and then, you know, they have their calves and then we take the calves. We wean the calves from them at about eight or nine months and then we just let the cows do it over again.

CE: How many cattle do you have at one time, would you say?

ED: There are about two hundred head of cattle.

CE: And you have some of these Mexican boys to help you?

ED: The Mexican boys help me primarily on the dairy. I operate a dairy in Hicks Valley, where I grew up.

CE: But this is just -- Getting back to this beef, I'm terribly naive in this. You raise them and then, when it's time to market, do they come here to you? You know, how do you drive them somewhere?

ED: No, no, they're all trucked of course. Most people who are in this type of business, sell their calves at weaning time, and somebody else buys them and does something else with them. I'm a little odd, as you probably noticed. I take the calves and I put them on another ranch and I keep them for a year and we call them feeder cattle at that point. And then I put them in a feed lot and have them custom fed in Oakdale and then they are sold there to slaughter concerns.

CE: So it's really an alive business, the young are coming in, the newer born, and very transitional.

ED: Yes.

CE: Are you happy with the market today or not?

ED: Well, the meat market is about what it was ten years ago.

CE: That doesn't tell me anything. Does that mean good or bad? Average? It hasn't kept up?

ED: It hasn't kept up. It started to move ahead and then it slipped back.

CE: Driving out here we passed a big collection of hay.

ED: Yes.

CE: Is that necessary? Do you have to do supplemental feeding?

ED: Well that was a dairy where you saw that.

CE: Oh, dairy, but do you have to feed your cattle?

ED: I feed them a little in the fall. It is not a very good ranch. You see, the number of acres and the number of cattle tells you it's not a very good ranch.

CE: Okay, but you have an interest in a dairy ranch as well?

ED: Yes.

CE: And how many dairy cows do you have to milk there everyday?

ED: We milk about 170 or 175 cows.

CE: Do you do that yourself?

ED: Well, we have -- It's hired. Although we do it ourselves sometimes.

CE: Milking machines?
ED: Yes.
CE: I saw that for the first time out at Franklin Burns's place. He's got three hundred, he and one man do it.
ED: I know, and he's a bachelor.
CE: Do you find it difficult to get help for a dairy ranch?
ED: No.
CE: In the days when you had to hand-milk maybe it was more difficult.
ED: When I was growing up we were always able to get help with the exception of during the period of World War II, and it was not possible to get the amount of help that you really needed.
CE: Of the two types of ranching, does one take preference over the other for you?
ED: I don't know if it takes preference. I probably am closer to the dairy industry in that that's historically what the family has always done although they did have some beef cattle, too. But when I grew up, and I grew up during World War II, and when I was in the eighth grade I was the one who ran the machines in the barn.
CE: Really?
ED: Of course some people grew up loving it and some people grew up hating it.
CE: Do you love it?
ED: Yes.
GM: Do your children work on the ranch?
ED: Do my children? I have two boys working with me now, yes.
CE: Are they home today?
ED: They're both working, yes. One of them is working on this place, one of them is over at the dairy. And then Sam, my youngest boy, he's working somewhere too, I think.
CE: On the dairy ranch you have -- I've seen those stainless steel containers where the milk goes up and looks like glass, isn't touched by human hands, and travels into this room where it's chilled. And they pick that up everyday?
ED: Yes.
CE: Is that a co-operative? What do you call that? It comes in a big tank car.
ED: There's a co-operative creamery in Petaluma that buys milk in bulk. But there are also independent organizations such as Foremost, Carnation.
CE: And you have these arrangements?
ED: Yes, right.
CE: Come rain or shine, Sundays or holiday, the cows have to be milked.
ED: Exactly.
CE: Does that cause any aggravation or discontent among the troops or --
ED: If you haven't grown up with it, it has a tendency to get in the way sometimes. But if you grow up with it it's just part of your life and you accept it. Sunday is a day off; all you do is what you have to do, nothing else.
CE: When does that occur, early in the morning, isn't it? And by three in the afternoon?
ED: We start at four in the morning and three in the afternoon. It takes about two and a half hours to milk, three hours at the most.

CE: What, in your judgment, are the advantages of the life that you lead? I can see that you are a very well balanced man who enjoys life.

ED: It's a very different kind of life in today's world. It's very demanding in a sense, in that you operate everyday and something could go wrong at anytime, but you learn to accept that, and you learn to adjust to it. I love what I do. In fact, it's sinful, I think, that --

CE: You should be doing something that gives you such pleasure.

ED: Yes. And you are conned into the philosophy of thinking that you are your own boss.

CE: Well, in a way, you certainly -- Outside factors determine a lot of things, but you are your own boss. If you didn't want to work, the whole shebang would go pop.

ED: That's right.

CE: So you have control, somewhat.

ED: It has a tremendous amount of opportunity for learning and for management. And if you are inclined this way there's no end to what you can learn and how much you can improve. I know what should be done but I don't do it all the time.

CE: But it's that teasing challenge always ahead of you.

ED: Yes, yes. There are so many different facets. You know, with animals, you have health, you have nutrition. With the kind of business that we have you have to purchase a great many things, and so you learn the marketplace. You have to maintain what you have and so you learn how to repair many different things. You have to sell your products, with the milk not so much, but with the beef cattle you do, so you have to negotiate, which is not done everyday today.

CE: So you have very well diversified, well rounded actions. You are not locked into one facet of life.

ED: Actually I could spend full time just raising a family.

CE: The disadvantages, by contrast, are minimal to you.

ED: Well, there are some real disadvantages. One of the disadvantages is we don't get to say, really, what we get for our product. We have to take what's given, basically.

C.E: Is that because of that so called "middle man down the road," or what?

E.D: No, it's the nature of agricultural business. When you -- Of course, I'm not a farmer, but when a farmer puts his crop in, he doesn't know how much money he's going to get for it.

C.E: That unknowable factor, yes.

E.D: And so it is risky, it is very risky.

C.E: Like for the farmer, does the weather enter into your operation?

E.D: Oh, very much so.

C.E: In what ways?

E.D: Because we depend on the forage for a great deal of our operation as far as feeding the cattle is concerned, the natural forage. And the reason there are so many cattle in this particular area -- Marin County is a utopian area for cattle. We have an excellent quality of grass, the natural grass. We have air conditioning, provided by the fog, and we don't have what you'd really call cold winters. The climate is perfect for cattle.

CE: Both dairy and beef?

ED: Both dairy and beef. Also, Marin County provides about twenty-five percent of the milk supply for the bay area which most people don't know.

CE: That much?

ED: That much. And it is sought after because the milk from Marin County -- The youngsters in the families that buy the milk tell them that it tastes better.

CE: Tastes better, yes. In talking to some ranchers over the years, they refer to people in San Rafael and Sausalito and those people over the hill don't know much. I sense that sometimes when I go to supervisors' meetings, most people think of Marin as --

ED: Peacocks and --

CE: Well, that terrible program, that's -- You're referring to that television show one October, peacock feathers and hot tubs. Well, that's one tenth of one percent of transients that flop into Sausalito.

ED: Marin County is a really interesting place.

CE: It's diverse there's no doubt about it.

ED: Marin County has the highest income per capita of any county in California and it has the lowest fertility rate of any county in California. And I run counter to both of those.

CE: What I'm trying to say, in a way, is that this Marin started long before we were a county and a state in 1850. Marin was a cow county.

ED: That's right, exactly.

CE: This is the most important thing about this county and all those peripheral interests: light industry, business, whatever you want to call it, along the bay on the other side of the hill, that could exist anywhere. This is what made the County.

ED: That's right.

CE: Do you feel you have proper representation over the hill with the governing bodies?

ED: We have a tremendous educational project to achieve and I think we're making some inroads. We're making some inroads maybe because there are some selfish interests on the other side and they would like to see us remain as ranches so when they take their Sunday drive, we're the picture in the middle of their imaginary frame; and they love that.

CE: How do you countenance the terrible developer mentality who wants to see all this land and do something with it. Do they -- Are they coming in every once in awhile and making little inquiries, or does this Marin Agricultural Land Trust help you in that?

ED: It helps us to some degree.

CE: Are you a member of that?

ED: I am a member. I am the vice chairman.

CE: Oh, good for you. Would you tell us what that MALT -- It's not very old, is it?

ED: No.

CE: What is its mission?

ED: It's in its infancy.

CE: Infancy, it's a baby.

ED: Yes.

CE: Do you ranchers get together now?

ED: It is made up of a heterogeneous group in a sense that we have professional people on it. Mrs. Martinelli's son is a member. There is no membership per say. These are directors. We have some conservationists on it; we have some ranchers on it. So it's a mixed group.

CE: And its mission is to do what?

ED: First I should say it is non-profit and it is private. And its mission is to try to continue the agricultural industry in Marin County.

CE: Is Ralph Grossi a member of that?

ED: Ralph Grossi is a member.

CE: I interviewed him. He impressed me very much.

ED: Yes, he was the first chairman that we had.

GM: What are those initials?

ED: MALT.

CE: Do you have any idea how many ranchers are out here in this beautiful area? Do you have any idea?

ED: Yes, and I can't recall, but there are --

CE: A hundred? Sixty?

ED: No, I think it's maybe like sixty-something at this point. There are, I think, a hundred and twenty-six thousand acres.

CE: Still in agriculture?

ED: Yes.

CE: Great.

ED: We have lost a great number in the last twenty years.

CE: You mean because of Point Reyes National Seashore, GGNRA, and things like that?

ED: That's one reason. There are other reasons. The encroachment of people and they need space. And the other thing is that when a ranch changes hands, by and large, the new owner is not a rancher.

CE: Does the taxation formula apply to ranches as it does to home owners? Like, do you have to pay the current price of your ranch?

ED: No, we are fairly well insulated from that, in that we have what we call the Williamson Act. And if you operate your ranch as a ranch, you are supposed to be taxed for its capacity to produce as a ranch.

CE: Well, why the attraction, in your judgment, for a non-rancher to own a ranch? Just like they buy wineries in the Napa Valley and play at it?

ED: Well, number one, cowboy boots have become very popular. The first thing they buy are boots.

CE: Then the hat.

ED: The hat comes later, yes, and then, later on, the ranch. Actually, it's probably due to the success of the Marlboro ads.

CE: I love it. Are there a few of those?

ED: Oh, we have a lot of it. It's serious.

CE: Do they hurt themselves? Do they trip over their own mistakes?

ED: Not enough of them. Some of them do, but not enough of them. You know they think they're going to come out here and cut a fat hog. They're going to get in the cattle business and they're really going to make some money. And they find out

how little money they make and they say, "Boy, this is no fun." I can name names but I don't want to.

CE: Yeah, don't. Just like the fellows who came for gold. They thought it was just going to flow in the stream. And twelve hours a day in cold water with your feet in that stream, it's no fun, it's hard work.

ED: The ranch right next to me has changed hands three times in the last twelve years. I generally give them six to eight years, but they've been proving me wrong; most of them only last about four.

CE: Fascinating.

ED: You know agricultural land generally in the United States is decreasing in price. And the only thing that I can attribute that to is that the salaries and commissions of the professional and corporate people must be going down.

CE: It appears to me that these people sort of, who buy these ranches want to become country squires.

ED: That's true. And also, take the Nicasio area for instance, George Lucas comes in and --

CE: Oh yes, you've got to talk about George.

ED: George Lucas comes in and he buys I don't know how many thousand acres he has now, close to, maybe over three, close to four. And what happens is that there's a following. They don't necessarily have to be a George Lucas-type or even in the same industry.

CE: But it gives somebody else an idea.

ED: Yes, and they like to be, you know, "I live in the George Lucas area." It has a status to it. Status is important to some people who don't have enough confidence in themselves as individuals.

CE: Did you, like your father and grandfather ahead of you, educate your children away from the area?

ED: Yes, to a degree.

CE: If they wanted it.

ED: Yes. This was something not new in our family. It's like in my immediate family, my brothers and sisters, there's six of us, and we all went to college for four years and none of us went to the same school.

CE: Where did you go?

ED: I went to St. Mary's.

CE: St. Mary's in Moraga?

ED: Yes.

CE: That's a great school, too.

ED: And I have encouraged my children to go to school. They all haven't gone but --

CE: Do they ask you, like your sons, "Well, why, Dad? I know what I'm doing here."

ED: I think it's a lot more accepted today than it was in my time, because, in my time, we were some of the few that went, you know, from this agricultural area.

CE: Well, I know the world, through the communication media, has become so much more available. Knowledge has become so prevalent and a person with -- Just observing in your home, the taste you have, and the interests, become greater than they used to be. You have a beautiful stereo set.

ED: You can blame my wife for that.

CE: All right, it's part of your life too. Your children have been exposed to it. You haven't gone for the computer yet, have you?

ED: No, in fact somebody asked me that question the other day and I said, "Heavens no, I was thinking of having the telephone taken out."

CE: Good. Everywhere you go now they have a computer in the room. And I had that enough with the Navy.

ED: My oldest daughter, Ann, graduated from U.C. Davis.

CE: In agriculture?

ED: No, she's a journalist. She's an English major.

CE: Where?

ED: She's a reporter for a newspaper now.

CE: Is she? In this area?

ED: In Novato. In fact, this week she's the editor because the editor is on vacation.

CE: Is she married?

ED: No.

CE: What's her name?

ED: Ann.

CE: Ann, great.

ED: Joan graduated from Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo.

CE: That's an agricultural school.

ED: Yes, but she was a graphics major. And she married a gentleman who is in that field also, and they live in San Luis Obispo. They have a business there.

CE: Good.

ED: And then Peggy graduated from U.C. Irvine.

CE: Boy, they went to different schools, you're right, all over the state.

GM: How can you keep track of them?

ED: And she majored in psychology and she got a masters at San Diego State and now she's working for her doctorate at U.C. in San Francisco, toward her doctorate.

CE: Does she live in the city, or --

ED: She lives in San Francisco.

CE: Comes home weekends I imagine.

ED: Yes.

CE: Now your boys --

ED: Tim was the next one and Tim chose not to go to school. And he stayed and worked on the dairy with us and, wouldn't you know, last January he says -- he's twenty five now -- he says, "I think I'd like to go back to school."

CE: Well, he wants to do it when he has the feeling for it.

ED: Yes, that's right, when you're ready. Philip was the next one. Philip graduated from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, and he's working with us on the dairy. Mimi is the next one and she chose not to go to college; she's going to travel agency school right now, so we'll see what happens with that. And then the other two, one is in high school, Sam, and Becky is ten; she's still in grade school.

C.E: And what's your wife's name again?

E.D: Mary Margaret.

C.E: I'm sorry we don't have the pleasure of meeting her today. Does this home reflect her?

E.D: I would say yes.

C.E: It's just beautiful, everything. Does she like ranch life too?

E.D: Probably has had a hard time to adapt to it. Her father was a dentist and had a very structured life. You know, you worked these days; you did not work those days; your patients were all scheduled. And we have a very non-scheduled type of business.

C.E: What are her interests outside of family? Does she -- Is she musical? I see this beautiful piano.

E.D: I love to hear a piano. We've been trying and trying and trying to get some of the children to get really proficient at it.

CE: What's the story of that beautiful grand?

ED: That came out of a bar in San Francisco and I wish you could have seen it. It had cigarette burns all over it.

CE: A bar?

ED: Yes, a bar. It was just a mess.

CE: It's a great thing. I thought it might have come around the Horn or something.

ED: No.

CE: Well, in closing, we've taken up quite a bit of your morning here. In closing, Earl, what would you like to see evolve or be accomplished during your lifetime and through your children? You don't want any more ranches, do you?

ED: Well, it just depends on how many children you have interested in ranching and if it's economically feasible. It doesn't appear to be right now. It is a life that I have enjoyed so much that I would like to be able to let my children have that opportunity if they want it, only if they want it. They don't have to do it. If they want to do something else that's perfectly all right. But the opportunity was given to me and I have really enjoyed it and so, I, in turn, would like to see if I can't pass that on.

CE: And this is your home and this is your life and this is where you want to be.

ED: Right.

CE: Well, it is certainly reflected in you. You're a very happy man. Thank you for letting us come in briefly.

ED: You're welcome.