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INTERVIEW WITH FRANK PEPPER

by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent
May 12, 1981

INTERVIEWEE: Frank Pepper (FP)

INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE) and Anne Kent (AK)

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TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: Today is Tuesday, May the 12th, 1981. Continuing our Oral History Project, once again we are at Mrs. Thomas Kent's residence in Kentfield and are going to be talking shortly this afternoon with Frank Pepper who resides at number 19 Wharf Road in Bolinas, California. The Pepper family has been in Bolinas for several generations, and Frank is going to share his story of his family today. Good afternoon, Frank.

FP: Good afternoon.

CE: Now, your maternal grandmother, Nellie Esten Waterhouse, and your Grandfather Frank, what brought them to California?

FP: Well, my Grandmother's Waterhouse family came here when she was seventeen years old; that was in 1867. They took a ship down to Panama and across the Isthmus and up the coast and they lived in Monterey a number of years and then moved to Sacramento. And that was where she met Frank Waterhouse, my grandfather.

CE: Well he was a New Yorker, you told me earlier.

FP: Yes, he was born in New York in 1850, and in 1852 his parents came west and he arrived in Sacramento in 1852 and was raised there.

CE: He was an early arrival in that area, certainly. What was your grandfather's business?

FP: My Grandfather Waterhouse?

CE: Yes, when he was in Sacramento.

FP: Well, he did various things. He, at one time, he and his older brother Addison were in the electric field in the start. That is, they put the first street lights in Hartford, Connecticut and then they sold their patents to George Westinghouse and came back to California. And then my grandfather was with PG&E and in his later years he was with Nevada Telephone and Telegraph Company and that was what he was engaged in when he passed away in 1921.

CE: Nevada, the State of Nevada?

FP: Yes, State of Nevada. He lived in Tonopah at that time; he used to commute from there to Bolinas.

CE: When you say lights, you mean arc lights that are used, that were used in street lights?

FP: Yes, right. They replaced the gas light system with the electric arc lights.

CE: Wonderful. Well, Frank, let's get your family to, out of Sacramento Valley into Marin. What attracted your grandparents to Marin and specifically Bolinas?

FP: Well, my grandmother's family were doctors. I mean, John Esten was a doctor and the reason that the Estens came to California was he had tuberculosis and they thought that the climate would be better for him and that is why they came by ship around to California. But my Grandfather Waterhouse's parents were also doctors. His mother was a doctor. After Grandma and Grandpa were married, their first two babies died shortly after birth and Grandpa thought that this was because of the methods that -- His mother was the attending physician and he thought that she was somewhat responsible for this. And so when they knew that they were going to have a third baby, he quietly bought a piece of property in Bolinas and built a house and moved his wife up there so his mother wouldn't know where she was, and so, so my mother survived. But -- And --

CE: So she knew of Bolinas and she probably told your Grandfather Frank, "This is a good place to come for the summer, get away from the heat, possibly, from the valley."

FP: Possibly. He did a lot of traveling; he spent time in San Francisco, and I believe even back in those days they would come up there and go hunting and fishing in the Bolinas area. And so he was aware of Bolinas and this hundred and sixty acres was available and so he bought it from the Briones Family.

CE: Now, he really made that into really a sub-division of sorts, didn't he?

FP: Well, while Grandma was waiting for my mother to arrive as a hobby she was the one who did the subdividing. It was her dream, her Grande Vista Tract and that is why Brighton Avenue, you know, and all of those street names that she gave them.

CE: And those were -- She named, of course?

FP: Yes, yes.

CE: I can see some of the New England influence. You said earlier that your grandmother had been born in Providence, Rhode Island.

FP: Yes.

CE: So, once again, the Atlantic touches the Pacific.

FP: And they brought Monterey Cypress up and planted that in Bolinas.

CE: That's what I understand, that that was, that your mother is credited with doing that.

FP: Her mother.

CE: Her mother, your grandmother, excuse me. And there must have been hundreds of them. They just transplanted them from Monterey County up here?

FP: Yes.

CE: Was that for beauty, an aesthetic reason?

FP: They liked trees and there were absolutely no trees in Bolinas as some of the old photos show, not even bushes. It's all rye grass.

CE: I wonder why nobody prior to your grandmother ever thought of planting a tree?

FP: Well, the earlier settlers had religiously cut down all the trees and used them for firewood and by that time it was a large dairy operation, and so they didn't even let weeds grow; it was all just beautiful pasture; not very pretty, but it was practical.

CE: I understand also your father cut a sixty-foot-wide roadway right through, down to the beach and that was Brighton?

FP: Yes, Brighton, right.

CE: Well, tell us a little bit about your grandmother and her interest in art. I understand your grandfather built her a studio.

FP: Yes, she liked to paint both watercolor and oil and did some fairly nice things. She was never, I guess trained, but she did some nice sketches. And she and her mother had a hobby of collecting seaweeds and pressing them of which, she left my mother a trunk full of these and I believe that some of them are still in the De Young Museum a number of years ago, were on display there. And they're probably stored away somewhere now but at that time they were considered quite unique.

CE: Gee, Mrs. Kent, I wonder if they should be in the herbarium. Could they qualify for that?

AK: You ought to get them out. I don't know. If DeYoung has them they ought to show them.

CE: Well this studio that your grandfather built is still standing, is it not?

FP: Yes, it is. It's still there.

CE: Is that your residence by any chance?

FP: No, no, no. We disposed of it a number of years ago. It got to be quite a problem keeping a piling under it. About every other year we'd have to replace three or four or five and finally my father sold it about fifteen years ago and the person he sold it to didn't keep it repaired and it fell into the lagoon just as it did in the earthquake and they had it jacked up and it's still sort of --

CE: Sagged.

FP: Dubious. It's sagging, yes.

CE: Well, we've all seen pictures of your mother's studio and --

FP: But Grandpa felt bad. It had a practical aspect too. Upstairs he had nice big windows on the north side where my grandmother got the light for her paintings but the downstairs was one big room which he used as a warehouse and some old picture showed he had a long wharf alongside that for the little schooners that would bring produce from San Francisco used to tie up.

CE: Well I understand your grandmother also spent a week on the Farallon Islands camping and sketching. Do you have any memories of that or knowledge that you would like to share with us?

FP: Oh yes. She had -- Just except what she and my mother told me that she had, I believe -- If there are any of the sketches left, my sister Hazel probably would have them. But she had quite a collection of birds' eggs, you know. They would take and poke pin holes in them and the blow the insides out.

CE: Are any of those birds' eggs extant in your family?

FP: The remaining ones my sister Hazel gave to the Bird Observatory on the Point Reyes National Seashore some years ago and they have them on their exhibits of different kinds of seabirds.

CE: Is there anything else? You knew your grandparents, of course.

FP: Oh yes, yes.

CE: Would you describe your grandmother to us a little bit? She was an artistic woman, obviously.

FP: Yes. And she --

CE: Did she feel remote in Bolinas?

FP: No, apparently not. She -- It was her home and she talked about other places she had lived, but I guess, as she called her place in Bolinas, Esten Terrace, was hers and she was very happy there.

CE: Did she like to walk on the beach?

FP: Oh yes. She'd walk on the beach and she never got over the habit of gathering seashells. And years ago, why, you'd find many sand dollars on Bolinas Beach and I think they get occasional ones at Stinson now but they're sort of scarce. And she would collect the little shells up on the reef when the tides were low and she was quite knowledgeable about -- At least, she had the names of all of them right. She would have them catalogued and years later when I checked some of these out in catalogues and she had the names right, so she knew what she was talking about.

CE: And your grandfather -- What are your memories of him? Was he a forceful man?

FP: Quite. He was -- I never saw too much of him. But he was always very nice to his grandchildren and we adored him.

CE: Where was the family home? Where did they live?

FP: We lived in the same house my mother was born in.

CE: Was that "the" family home of the Frank Waterhouse? Are we talking about that family home?

FP: Yes.

CE: And where is that situated?

FP: That is on Brighton Avenue on the hillside, on the west side.

CE: West side, near the park?

FP: Before the park. It's --

CE: Nearer the sea than the park?

FP: No. It's roughly bounded by Olema Road and Brighton Avenue and Park Avenue.

CE: I see. Is that house still standing?

FP: Oh yes.

CE: Well now, let's move on a moment to your mother. Mrs. Kent had the pleasure of knowing her and some months ago she lent me this book that your mother had published,

called, entitled *Bolinas, A Narrative of the Days of the Dons*. It was published in 1965, something like that? Found it fascinating. Now, your mother was also born in that house?

FP: Yes.

CE: And I understand she attended some local school but then went to Anna Head's.

FP: Yes, she went to the local school in Bolinas for a while, then the rest was in boarding schools.

CE: I think this might have been the influence of the fact your grandmother was an easterner. It was probably felt that that sort of education was necessary, than the local schools perhaps. And then she went to the University of California and was a member of the class of 1906.

FP: Yes.

CE: And you brought with you today a photo album showing much of the Berkeley experience. She, too -- Well, describe your mother as distinct from your grandmother. She was born in Bolinas so she was even more imbued with the sea and the environment. And she loved it, I presume.

FP: She did. But she had, before she was married, why, she had traveled quite a bit with her family. They -- Oh, before she was in college and when Grandpa and his brother were engaged in this electrical business, they lived in several places on the east coast and then she had cousins who were in the lumber business, the Goodyear Family, and she would visit up in Wisconsin, and --

CE: So she was well-traveled as a young woman?

FP: Oh, yes. And she made many trips across the country by, of course, train was the way to go, the only way to go in those days. And she made trips to Mexico by train. And --

CE: Were there any other members of the family or was she the only child?

FP: She was the only child that survived.

CE: There was another sister who died?

FP: There were two before Mother who died very young. And she was the only survivor there.

CE: Well then, if I understand correctly, your grandparents, they did get around. They weren't always in Bolinas.

FP: No.

CE: I understand after your mother graduated, her father, Frank Waterhouse, built your mother a tea room at her request. Tell us about that. It was supposed to have been built in 1908, before she was married. What precipitated that?

FP: Yes. That probably was, from what I gather, it was something for her to do. She was interested in this and so Grandpa built this. It was a place where there were cabanas, you know, bathing booths, because at that time, why, people never went swimming, they went bathing. They would put on these bathing costumes which were more voluminous than the clothes we wear today. But I can remember some of the old suits when I was a youngster -- amazing.

CE: So she had those available?

FP: Yes.

CE: Did she feel that she had gone to the university and she wanted to do something? What was her major? Did you ever know? What interested her in the university?

FP: I don't really know. She just went because, I guess, I guess, well, she mainly went for the, I guess, because she liked the social life, just as they do today. She belonged to a good sorority and she had good friends and they would, by the droves, come up and spend holidays in Bolinas at her home and consequently she would go elsewhere other times, so they just had a grand time.

CE: Now this tea house had a name. Do you remember?

FP: She called it The Little House by the Water, La Cassita de la Playa.

CE: Now, it wasn't long after that she was married. Had she always known your father, Lewis Pepper?

FP: Probably, because --

CE: He was a Bolinas Boy.

FP: Yes, he was born there in 1890 so they probably were aware of each other since they were youngsters. I believe they were married in 1911.

CE: And the Peppers had been there a long time, had they not, the family, several generations?

FP: No, actually, my Grandpa Pepper must have moved there in the late 1880s because --

CE: But since then there are many generations?

FP: Oh, yes. But my father was born in Bolinas in 1890 and his next oldest brother, Harry, was born up in North San Juan, up in the Sierras, about four years before that. And so they must have moved to Bolinas around 1888.

CE: Where did the Peppers come from?

FP: They came from New York and -- I have a schedule here that -- Dutchess County, New York. This was my great-grandfather, who I vaguely remember, who came to Bolinas with my grandfather.

CE: You have a family tree here that somebody has put in a great deal of effort into and that's wonderful.

FP: My brother Miles did this, researched that.

CE: I understand that your father built beautiful houses, well-built homes. And many of them in Bolinas are Pepper-built homes.

FP: Yes. My grandfather built many before my dad was old enough to build houses. In fact, when they moved down from the Sierras, that's what Grandpa mainly did. First thing, he built the home that my dad was born in and then he built other places in the area.

CE: Did he build that little church, by any chance, that little Presbyterian Church that's there?

FP: No, but he moved it, moved it from the flat up across from where the schoolhouse is, over the hill and down to its present location.

CE: Really? That's a long way.

FP: And then he built a steeple on it. He moved it down there and built the steeple on it. And just after World War II my brothers and I put a foundation under it. It never had a foundation.

CE: Did you follow in your grandfather and father's footsteps? Are you also a builder?

FP: I was. I was a general contractor, but I spend most of my time sailing around in ships. That was easier.

CE: Seafaring man. We'll talk about that in a little minute. Tell me, I'm curious where Gospel Flats is. Where is this cemetery they talk about? Is there one actually in Bolinas?

FP: A cemetery at Bolinas? Oh yes.

CE: Don't they call it Gospel Flats?

FP: Well, I guess the flat up where the school is, is what they call Gospel Flat and I think there used to be several churches there. In fact, the Catholic church is still on the upper end of it, you know, and the church that was down, right on the flat, that was the one that my grandfather moved over the hill and so the old-timers called it Gospel Flat because there were two churches. Then there was this fraternal organization; the Druids had their hall there, and so --

CE: Well, aren't some members of your family buried there?

FP: My family? Oh yes, five generations of them. My granddaughter is the sixth generation.

CE: You've seen a lot of changes, Frank. You've seen a lot of changes, some good and some not so good.

FP: Oh, yes. Well --

CE: Tell us a little bit about your life. You were born December 13, 1913, in the same house your mother was born in.

FP: That's right.

CE: Is that house still in the family?

FP: No, we sold it after Mother passed away.

CE: All right. Now, you were the next to eldest. There were nine children to your parents. You were one of nine.

FP: Yes.

CE: Would you tell me their names?

FP: Well, there was Evelyn, and me, Frank, and then Charles, and then Hazel; or Hazel was older than Charles; and then Charles, and then Jack, and then Miles, and Doris, and Marin, and Donald.

CE: Oh, you have another member of the family named for your mother, Marin?

FP: Yes.

CE: Now, do any of these Peppers live still in Bolinas, as you do?

FP: No, they all moved several years ago. My brother Charles just moved last August and they moved back up to the -- They moved to the foothills up in the Sierras, within a few miles of where Great grandpa Garret Pepper settled in 1850.

CE: So it's kind of going full circle back.

FP: Full circle back, right.

CE: Do you know the name of the place? Was it near Grass Valley, or --

FP: Where they're living the nearest place is a little village called Applegate and they're all sort of around that; it's in the Auburn area. And they're wondering when Louise and I are going to move up there and I told them probably never; we'll go up and visit, but --

CE: You like Bolinas.

FP: Well, someone has to stay in Bolinas and I like it as well as anywhere.

CE: Well, where did you go to school?

FP: In Bolinas.

CE: Is that the one that's down on the Olema Road?

FP: Yes, the one that burnt down last year, or two years, last year I guess it was, was the one I went to school in. And since they've just completed their new school, or they made an exact replica of the old school, and it looks quite nice; it's a nice campus.

CE: Great. Well, what was Brighton Avenue like when it turns into Wharf? We see here, you know, a collection of old photographs. Now, tell us the story a little bit about your Grandfather Waterhouse and the Gibsons. What's the connection there and the store? Where they related?

FP: No, the Gibsons were related to the to the Peppers.

CE: To the Peppers, excuse me. And they had the store first, the Gibsons? What was it, a general store?

FP: And how did the Peppers get it?

FP: And Tom Gibson, the owner of the store, was an uncle of my father's father. And when my Grandpa Pepper was a young boy, he used to come down from the Sierras and visit his cousins. And along in the 1880s the old Pepper farm in the Sierras was in fairly sad shape. They'd gotten a little greedy and hydraulic mined all the orchard away and there wasn't much left except the farmhouse, and so they came down to Bolinas. But the old home, the old Pepper home is still up there. I think it has an historical monument thing attached to it and some nice people own it and take care of it. And my mother and father used to go up there occasionally and visit them, but --

CE: Well, Bolinas, for a native son, was quite a community.

FP: Oh, yes.

CE: That burgeoned on weekends, maybe?

FP: Not really. The weekends were a little different. Usually on a Friday afternoon the schooner Owl would come up from San Francisco and whoever was going to spend the weekend would usually be on the Owl, and so --

CE: Tell us about the Owl. Have you sailed aboard it?

FP: Oh yes.

CE: It was a gasoline schooner, wasn't it?

FP: Yes, right. It was built by Richard Gibson, my Grandfather Pepper's cousin. And Dick Gibson was also born in Bolinas in the place that is known as the Gibson House, which is a restaurant and inn. But Dick built the Owl in 1911 in Coos Bay, Oregon and then he operated it for half a dozen years and then sold it to Louis Peetar who is the brother of Joe Peetar, the man that bought the general store from my grandfather. And Louis operated -- Well, the last trip the Owl made was in 1932, I believe. And then it --

CE: Tell us a little bit about that trip. You must have made it many times. It was to haul produce, hogs, any kind of --

FP: Yes. Anything that left Bolinas would go down to San Francisco on the Owl.

CE: Well, would you get aboard it at the wharf or did you have to go out in a lighter?

FP: No, no, we'd get aboard at the wharf; it always came in there.

CE: And there was depth enough water to get over the bar?

FP: Always; never had any problem.

CE: How long a trip would that be, Frank?

FP: It took about two and a half hours. It wasn't very fast, but --

CE: Did you kind of skirt around the Potato Patch when you got out in the headlands there, or did you --

FP: No, it would follow right along the coast, down by Rocky Point and right in what was known as the North Channel and it just -- Between Point Bonita and the Potato Patch was the route it made. And then --

CE: Did she ever run at night?

FP: Not that I know of. They -- The only time it did was if it would make a long trip. It used to make quite a few trips down to Mexico when it was a fairly new boat, down to Mazatlan and Oaxaca and places like that.

CE: Did it run daily to San Francisco?

FP: It made about two or three trips a week.

CE: Two or three trips a week.

FP: Yes.

CE: What would they charge, a fare?

FP: I forget. It probably wasn't very much, probably fifty cents per person or something like that.

CE: Was it usually full of produce and stock?

FP: Usually, because at that time all of the dairy farms in the Bolinas area had -- Of course, there was no way of shipping whole milk so they would separate the milk and make butter, and there was a cheese factory in Bolinas where it made --

End, Side A

CE: Well, I can see they really needed the Owl very much. Now, you're not old enough, are you, Frank, to remember the Jenny Griffin?

FP: No, no I don't.

CE: But you've heard of her?

FP: Yes.

CE: We have some lovely photographs of that lovely schooner. Any other vessels that would ply between Bolinas and the city, or was that it?

FP: That was it. Before the Jenny there were others but I didn't know them. I heard my parents talk of the Ada A which was about the size of the Jenny and then of course the Owl. They were just nice little schooners of the era that were useable for the Bolinas trade but the Owl was built especially for it. It had much more beam than the Jenny and the Ada A and for its size it drew very little water. I think it had about a twenty-four foot beam and it was ninety-eight-foot long and it drew about five feet of water at the most. And --

CE: You mean even when it was laden?

FP: Yes.

CE: Where would it berth in San Francisco? This is something I don't think we know.

FP: Right down by the ferry building, where the pilot station is, at Pier 3, I think it is. It tied up there right where by the pilot boats did. And Gibson was -- I think that the boats were sort of his hobby. But anyway, he -- At that time he was a master mariner and he had also gone to school; he was also a physician. And I remember when I went to sea in 1930, Doctor Gibson was ship's surgeon with the Dollar Steamship Company and the first ship I sailed on as a cadet was one that Doctor Gibson was on. And the thing that impressed me was that when the ship was ready to sail, the -- My first duty was, I was on the bridge and the captain told me to go down and call the doctor, so I went down and the doctor came up to the bridge and the doctor took the, piloted the ship out past the light

ship and the captain thanked him. And the next time we saw the doctor on the bridge is when we came back to San Francisco three months later and the captain said, "Go down and call the doctor." So I did, and he brought the ship in and docked it. And that was it, you know. This way, Captain Robert Dollar's organization saved paying a pilotage fee because Doctor Gibson did this just for fun.

CE: Well, we're going to get you to sea, but chronologically. Growing up in Bolinas, I suppose you did what all boys did: you went fishing, you went hiking, roam around?

FP: Oh, yes. We used to. But at that time everyone had a "skiffer," you know, a little rowboat, and we would practically live on the lagoon, which is so full of sand now there's no place to go except on a high tide. But we had little circular nets; we would trap crabs and we'd catch smelt or perch, you know, and in the season there would be bass in there. But there were always lots of crabs and for a number of years there just haven't been. I mean, there's just no sea life at all left in the lagoon except ghost shrimp which the egrets feed on.

CE: Well, this is a result of the gradual silting in of the lagoon?

FP: Oh yes. I've seen, when I was in oceanography up in the Oregon Coast, why, I've seen the lagoons up there. Some of them are in much worse shape than the Bolinas Lagoon and they keep filling in until gradually they become a hay field and it's just -- Well, when a lagoon is born it starts dying immediately, is the way that they put it. It starts silting in and eventually it will fill in. And the Bolinas Lagoon is -- Well, when I was a boy at the mouth of Pine Gulch Creek, I believe there was one little willow tree and now there is a forest of them down there. In fact, there is about twenty acres of them. And the little delta formed by the stream reaches almost halfway across the bay and it grows every year, you know. It just keeps building up, this nice green grass out there where we used to have our duck blinds when I was a boy.

CE: This is an important part of the Audubon and its ecological balance as far as the bird life there. Do you envision that this could change to the point where that is some other place is sought out by them?

FP: Oh, I'm certain that in a few years they won't have egrets there anymore, or herons; they'll find some other area.

CE: Well, what can you do to turn this around? Is dredging a destructive force? Would that be considered wrong?

FP: Well, to some people, why, it seems to be, so I don't really know. About the only part of the lagoon that was ever used for boats, commercial or otherwise, was the entrance portion right where the village is. And what was done there had really no bearing on what happened to the upper lagoon. I mean, that is just silting in just because it is. For instance, what comes out of Pine Gulch Creek would do that whether anyone lived in the area or not. The same with the other little streams on the various little canyons. But the area that used to be able to handle fair-sized boats is just in trouble because it's filled in and it's, you know, nothing to keep it clean. Other areas at least do a little dredging in the main ship channel and it's to the point where it's even kind of an adventure to go out in a small boat from Bolinas anymore.

CE: Would you comment on Aubrey Neasham's thesis that perhaps Drake had careened the Golden Hinde in Bolinas Lagoon? Do you think that could have been probable four hundred years ago?

FP: Oh yes, very possible, because back when -- In my great-grandfather's time, which was in the 1880s, the channel that goes up the west side of the lagoon, the one that the boats used to come in, was fairly deep water the whole way up to the head of the lagoon. And I remember as a boy there were some pilings up there that used to be a lighter wharf up there at the head of the lagoon, and in the lumber days, I guess it was, in the 1850s and '60s, they used to load lighters up there and then with the tide, drift them down to where they could, to the mouth of the lagoon and then tow them to San Francisco.

CE: There must have been hundreds of thousands of board feet cut out of Bolinas.

FP: Well, I think that someone estimated, oh, that in ten or twelve years, something like ten or twelve million board feet of redwood were taken out of the those gullies along the mountain. And some of the old stumps that are, oh, fifteen or twenty feet across, they were big trees. And then of course, the way they logged them didn't help the erosion situation because they would skid them down with ox teams and it was just like plowing furrows. And then the rains would come and all this earth would wash down into the lagoon and the upper lagoon is all a mixture of muck and soil from the mountain and so poor Bolinas Lagoon didn't have a chance to die naturally; it was aided and abetted by civilization.

CE: A very interesting observation. Well, tell me Frank, did you have to help your father in any way with this building while you were a young boy?

FP: No, no. I didn't do much of anything useful until I went to sea at the age of sixteen, and then --

CE: Well, did you finish your education then, at sixteen?

FP: Yes, I finished school then.

CE: Where had you gone, to San Rafael?

FP: Tamalpais High School. Why, at that time we had a --

CE: Who were some of your classmates? Anybody we might have talked with? Would you be at Tam when Mr. Stewart, Mr. Boyd Stewart was there? No, he's a little older.

FP: No, Boyd is a little older, yes. Jim Bourne from Bolinas went to school when I did and Sherman Smith was in about the same class as Boyd Stewart and -- And there just aren't many more that went there when I did.

CE: Well, tell me, what made you decide to go to sea? Was the depression upon us then?

FP: It was, I wasn't aware of it.

CE: You just wanted the adventure of that?

FP: No, well, I had had an illness; I had rheumatic fever.

CE: Oh dear.

FP: I was out of school for almost a year. Then my family physician told my parents that a change of climate would be good for me, and a sea voyage would be nice.

CE: Who was your family physician, can I ask?

FP: That was Doctor Gibson. And so, he volunteered with this trip to the Philippines and to Malaya would be a nice one and it was only a sixty-day round trip, and so --

CE: He was the ship's doctor?

FP: Yes.

CE: What did you sail aboard? What was the name of the ship you signed aboard?

FP: The President Monroe. And it carried passengers and cargo. At that time all the Dollar steamships, the larger ones, were combination passenger and cargo.

CE: Was that the company that the Dollar Steamship became, the President Lines?

FP: The American President Lines, yes.

CE: So, were you thrilled by this? I imagine you were --

FP: I enjoyed it, but at sixteen I guess it just comes naturally, I guess.

CE: Did you have to study for a particular rate or anything? You were in the Merchant Marines?

FP: Yes.

CE: Did you go as a cabin boy, or --

FP: No, I went as a cadet. And all ships at that time, or all American flat ships that carried United States mail had to carry cadets out of which the postal service paid thirty dollars a month and then the company paid the rest. So we sailed on the Dollar boats for thirty dollars a month. I mean, we were all the same as free deck hands, but it was fun and we enjoyed it.

CE: Were your duties anything quite general? Did you have to stand watches?

FP: Oh yes, we -- And --

CE: You weren't clerking for the PO, post office, aboard ship?

FP: No. Before we would get to a port we would stow the mail sacks that came aboard and then get the ones ready to deliver. But other than that, why, we did just what the regular seamen did. We usually stood watches on the bridge so we learned to steer and we -- That's where I learned navigation, and --

CE: Did you learn, study, navigation?

FP: Yes. By the time World War II came around, why, --

CE: You were qualified for --

FP: I was a chief ????, so I was sailing on government ships at that time and --

CE: Well, let's talk about this a minute. You said you were sixteen when you went to sea?

FP: Yes.

CE: I'm trying to think what year that would be.

FP: 1930.

CE: 1930, ok. So you went to sea at 1930. And did you study -- I mean, you -- You stayed with the sea.

FP: Off and on.

CE: Off and on. Did you study for your papers to get these various rates?

FP: Yes.

CE: Where did you do that? Did you have to go to the city, San Francisco?

FP: No, I never -- Everybody used the Maritime School, but we didn't; we just studied on the ship, you know.

CE: And they'd give you tests aboard?

FP: And we would take the tests with the Bureau of Marine Inspection in San Francisco would give us the exams. The Coast Guard took all us over in World War II but until then it was the Department of -- The Bureau of Marine Inspection that did this and the people that gave exams for deck licenses were men who had been Ship's Masters, you know, so it was a much better system than the existing one.

CE: Now, did you stay with the American President Lines until the war?

FP: No, no. I left them about 1935 and got into work off and on on Army transport ships and between that I was either helping my dad build houses or we also had a ranch up in Napa County which is under two hundred and fifty feet of Lake Berryessa now.

CE: So, I mean, you could be available to go to sea and get a berth when you wanted to, or you could stay at home?

FP: Oh, yes. So, the depression didn't affect me too much because there was always something to do.

CE: Places to go and there were --

FP: A ship to sail or a house to build or farming to do.

CE: Well, what happened when the war broke out? How were you utilized? By the Navy? Army Transport?

FP: Army Transport Service.

CE: Army Transport Service. Did you go just in the Pacific, Frank?

FP: No, I went -- mostly. But I was a year on a army hospital ship in the Mediterranean and at the end of the war -- Well, I didn't get home until 1947. I was out of the far east, moving -- We were mainly hauling relief supplies from the Philippines up to China and Japan and then hauling left-over equipment out of New Guinea and so it was sort of interesting.

CE: Well, you were a long way from Bolinas. But let's get you back to Bolinas for a moment. Now, your wife, Louise, when did you meet her and when were you married? Was she a Bolinas girl?

FP: No, she was -- I tell her she's a foreigner. She was born in Santa Rosa. And her father --

CE: What was her maiden name?

FP: Locknane. And her father was a mechanic and he worked for Oliver Longley. Oliver was the Bolinas blacksmith and when automobiles became popular, why, he acquired a Buick agency. And he was great with horseshoes and making things out of wrought iron but he, Oliver, wasn't much of a mechanic, so Louise's father came along and so Bill Locknane was a mechanic at the Bolinas Garage for many years and Louise -- He worked between there and Point Reyes and so Louise did her grammar schooling in Bolinas and in Point Reyes. When she was going to high school they were living in Bolinas, but I knew her when she was a baby.

CE: What year were you married, then?

FP: We were married in 1954.

CE: 1954. And you have children?

FP: Yes, two.

CE: And what are their names?

FP: Cheryl is the oldest and she is the mother of Jessica, my granddaughter; and Constance, Connie.

CE: They're both in Bolinas?

FP: Cheryl lives in Bolinas and Connie is living in San Rafael.

CE: Very good, very good.

FP: Right. Well, Jessica was born in Maui, but she's --

CE: Really?

FP: She came to Bolinas when she was just a little over a year old, so --

CE: Well then, she's, she's almost a Bolinas girl. She came here very, very young. Well, did you stay with the Maritime Service for quite a bit of time?

FP: Yes.

CE: How long did you stay at sea, then, Frank? Until just before you got married, maybe?

FP: No, I -- Well, I was working ashore when I got married but then I went back to sea off and on. I mean, I guess I've been at sea half of my married life. That's probably why, after twenty-six years, we still get along fine.

CE: Oh, I see. You're still going. Not any more though; you're retired.

FP: I haven't made a sea voyage for four years, so I think I'm about officially retired.

CE: What was your last voyage on?

FP: It was on a tow up to Prudhoe Bay.

CE: Prudhoe Bay, Alaska.

FP: I used to get broke-in on those arctic tows because I was supposed to know what I was doing up there and I never got a boat stuck in ice and so it sort of --

CE: There's his success, experience.

FP: Actually, it was a very monotonous cruise to take. There is no scenery and when you get up there --

CE: Just day after day after day.

FP: Day after day after day, not even icebergs, just flat ice, and there's no mountains or hills or anything, you know, just out in the middle of nowhere.

CE: I don't suppose you whittled or did anything constructive or did any scrimshaw or did any little --

FP: No.

CE: Do you read? Do you enjoy reading?

FP: Yes, we do a lot of reading. And usually we would have to wait at Prudhoe Bay almost a month for them to unload our barges because we had to take our barges back with us and so we would go ashore and walk around on the tundras, swatting mosquitoes and such.

CE: Well, I think that part of your life is a story unto itself. But I think we should get back to Bolinas. You've seen a lot of changes. Now, tell us about some that you wish you could correct. There was a great influx of hippies there at one time. Is that picture changing?

FP: Somewhat. My wife and I talk about this and we think it is, but then we don't know whether it really is or we're just becoming used to it. But the young people that were sort of obnoxious about ten years ago, the ones that are left have turned into responsible citizens. And it seems as soon as they acquire a little property and start raising a family, why, their mental attitude would change somewhat and the ones that didn't change, why, they just moved on elsewhere. So we have a nice group of young people.

CE: Good.

FP: And the thing that surprised me about them was that, the way that they had the school rebuilt. For many years it kept growing. I think population-wise we were, but we had a whole collection of portable buildings here, just little plywood boxes, and then finally a year ago somehow or other the old schoolhouse, the old white schoolhouse, burnt down and so when the whole thing was rebuilt they built an exact duplicate of the

old one and some of the other buildings that had been destroyed over the years were duplicated exactly. So, it looks like probably the way buildings did around, oh, 1908 or 1909 when the school was originally built.

CE: Well, there's a lot of people in this young group who are craftsmen, too, who seem to want to do the authentic thing in restoration or whatever.

FP: And they're very good at it.

CE: Tell us a little bit about the two mesas. Now, the Little Mesa is the one south of Brighton, is that correct? Where the Dominicans have a retreat?

CP: Yes.

CE: And I presume as a boy you used to go up there. Was that Coast Guard Tower built when you were a boy?

FP: It was there when I was a boy and when we were, oh, -- In the summertime it was one of our great pleasures to go up on the Coast Guard tower and stand lookout for the Coast Guardsman and they would go down on the beach. But --

CE: Now, today, everybody would be hung.

FP: Yes.

CE: The wonderful things we used to be able to do.

FP: Yes.

CE: That was -- You showed me a photograph earlier from your mother's album. When taken from the beach looking east on Brighton, there's no trees or anything there.

FP: No, no trees at all.

CE: And no buildings, either. Is it true your family did most of the building, the homes there?

FP: I think my Grandfather Pepper did quite a few and then a man who later owned and operated the Owl, Louis Peetar, built quite a few houses and --

CE: Are there any members of the Peetar family around that we might talk to sometime?

FP: No, there are none of them left in Bolinas. The one, Violet Peetar, who is the daughter of Louis, and whom I grew up with and went to school with, died several years ago and her husband Bill Miller just recently bought a vacation cottage in Bolinas again and his two daughters come to Bolinas quite often but other than that there's no one around.

CE: We have gone over and visited some friends, the Harrison Dibblee's house there, and you've probably grown up with all of these families.

FP: He'd probably get a kick out of this old picture where his house is the only one on the top of the hill there.

CE: Yes. Well, maybe we can take a picture of that. Well now, when you were a little tad there weren't many houses on that Big Mesa, were there?

FP: There were none.

CE: None when you were a boy?

FP: There was the Garzoli Ranch and the Genazzi Ranch and that was it. And then it was all just pasture. We used to -- Oh, my two sisters, Evelyn and Hazel, and my brother Charlie, the four of us, we would walk out across the mesa to what is called Agate Beach now and we'd go out and catch, oh, a few eel and bring them home and that's something that we, or that I and some of my nephews and their children do occasionally at a low tide. But not many people do it. They don't know how to catch eel that way.

CE: Well, what are they going to do about that Big Mesa and all those small lots? And how did that come about? Or were you around when that took place, or were you at sea?

FP: Oh yes, I was at sea a good part of the time but that happened, I think, in 1932 or somewhere around there. I think it started in 1929. I think the subdivision started in 1929 and that was -- They made these lots twenty-foot wide and a hundred-foot long which was kind of ridiculous but for sixty-nine dollars --

CE: You could buy one. And you had to subscribe to the *San Francisco Bulletin* or something?

FP: That's right.

CE: Well I understand a couple from Manhattan did this terrible thing, the Smedbacks?

FP: Yes.

CE: Did you ever know them, ever see them?

FP: No, but my parents did. I never paid much attention.

CE: Well, what will eventually happen to that if you can't build it? They're too small, aren't they, to build on?

FP: Yes. Well, it's been -- I believe the County Planning Commission has it to where you need to have at least four of those lots to build on; in other words it has to be --.

CE: Oh, I see. You have to buy four.

FP: Yes, eighty by a hundred.

AK: But they're all different people?

FP: Yes. And there are many single lots that no one can use. But someone who owns say three lots in order to build, pays a very dear price for the one next to them just so they can come up with the big site. But it works, though.

CE: Your family also gave a park in Bolinas, did they not?

FP: Yes, where the tennis court is, that little end down there. My mother donated that as a park. It started out as a, as the Bolinas Tennis Club and I think it was an idea of Almer Newhall and William Chapin. And they -- I remember when the tennis court was built; my dad built the court and Mr. Newhall and Mr. Chapin and, oh, several other dozen people put up the finances for this project, so that's how our tennis court started. But then --

CE: Is it true it opened with a match between Helen Wells and Winifred Suhr?

FP: Very likely.

CE: Who was Almer Newhall? I keep hearing that name all the time and Dolly Cushing Jenkins talks about him and -- Do you know him, Mrs. Kent?

AK: He was a ? fellow.

FP: Yes, he was.

CE: Well, he was always having those parades. Tell us about those parades. Didn't you have one every Fourth of July?

FP: They still do. But they're kind of fun. They usually start down where the Coast Guard Station is and go around through the village and down Brighton Avenue to the beach and then they have games on the beach and that's it. About the only parade that's just for fun, you know, and just an old fashioned --

CE: Tell me, where you live now, number 19 Wharf, does that face the lagoon or is it on the side of the road that your grandmother's studio was on?

FP: No, no. It is, yes, but it's right in the middle of the village. It faces the Gibson

house.

CE: Oh it does? Where does Wharf Road begin, near Smiley's Bar?

FP: At the corner of Brighton. Olema Road comes in and then Brighton turns, and then Wharf Road continues on out and --

CE: When you were a boy, those two hotels, the Flagstaff Inn and the other hotel which went into the lagoon, they were never rebuilt, were they?

FP: No.

CE: So you never saw those, of course?

FP: No, I never saw them, no.

CE: Did you see the little houseboat down there? Wasn't there a houseboat that belonged to the Parkins?

FP: Yes, Parkins. When the Flagstaff Inn collapsed, why, he floated a houseboat in and put it on some pilings and up until a few years ago -- I think Kathleen Parkins just sold it not too long ago. And I used to keep it in usable repair for her.

CE: Yes. You know what, Frank? We have to conclude this --