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INTERVIEW WITH GRACE WELLMAN
by Carla Ehat & Genevieve Martinelli
February 19, 1982

INTERVIEWEE: Grace Wellman (GW)
INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE), Genevieve Martinelli, and (GM) and Emme Gilman (EG)
DATE OF INTERVIEW: February 19, 1982

CE: Today is Friday, February 19, 1982. Continuing the Oral History Program for the Anne Thompson Kent California Room, this is Carla Ehat. Joining me today is Mrs. Jordan Martinelli and Emme Gilman. We are here to talk with Mrs. Theodore Wellman, Grace Wellman, who resides at 1 Vista Drive, Kentfield, and she has been on the Marin Conservation League Board for some 23 years of her life here in Marin, and she is going to share with us today, hopefully, some reminiscences about the creation of the league and her involvement with it. The Marin Conservation League was created almost fifty years ago by a group of concerned citizens, and its purpose, as I understand it, is to place into public ownership those private lands irreplaceable in nature whose natural features are the very essence of Marin County's character. To them, we owe the preservation of Mount Tamalpais State Park, Stinson Beach Park, Samuel P. Taylor State Park, Tomales Bay State Park, Angel Island State Park, Richardson Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, Kent Island, and there are others, each of them living testimony of this extraordinary group's achievements in conservation. Well, Grace, it's a pleasure to meet you today and visit with you. I understand from Gen and Emme Gilman that you are a Marin native.

GW: Yes.

CE: Where were you born?

GW: I was born in Mill Valley in 1904.

CE: What's the birth date?

GW: July 20, 1904.

CE: What was your maiden name?

GW: Finn.

CE: What brought your family to Marin County?

GW: Well, years ago my grandfather was with the Judson Iron Works in Berkeley, Oakland, guess it was, and he asked Mother and Father to come out. So, they got on a train and came out to California, which must have been something to do in those days, because it was the end of the last century.

CE: From where?

GW: From New York State. And they had a year-old son. And when they came out -- What they did in those days in the old Judson Iron Works -- They had -- Father and Mother lived in San Quentin Prison in the little village, and the men that were employed there were men in the prison. In those days they tried to get jobs, I mean, had the prisoners doing things instead of just being incarcerated. And Mother had wonderful stories to tell about the old prison because she was little tiny bit of a thing and Father was a big tall Irishman and they had this year-old son, Charlie, and they had a Chinese man who came to help Mother in the house. Mother said she heard swearing one day and being a good Victorian she went in to see what she could do about that and she went in and here she was, confronting this big tall Chinese who loved to work around the house with Charles on his left hip and he had turned the rug back and found a white bean. They had been living on white beans at that beautiful place, San Quentin, all those years and he was telling it off. Mother said she quietly closed the door and left. She realized that he had a legitimate beef. So when they closed up our grandfather's, or Judson Iron Works, they decided to stop their project over there. Why, Father talked to the Warden and they were very -- They would let you have these men go out with them; you became responsible for them, of course, and this Chinese, who they were so very fond of and loved Charles, thought it all over and decided he had been at San Quentin so long that he didn't want to change his locale so he stayed. Well, actually, I don't think any of us felt too grim about Chinese murders in those days because they were the old Tong Wars and the idea seemed to be that the Chinese would take care of their own problems and so this is the way they did it. So Father and Mother moved over to Berkeley and eventually one of my brothers who was eighteen and had all of the swimming championships you could think of around the bay. He and another friend were caught in a rip tide and drowned. They were days finding the bodies. And Mother looked out on the bay for the last time; she decided she couldn't stand it, so when Father was up in Seattle at his shop up there, why, she came over to Marin County, horse and buggy, and Mother is scared to death of horses, and found the place in Mill Valley. It was the right size for a big family; there were five acres to run in.

CE: Whereabouts in Mill Valley?

GW: Well, it's Park Avenue now. On Miller Avenue. So Mother wrote Father a darling letter which all of us had passed around the family. It was just dear and then Father's letter back saying, "Eva, if it's fine for you it's all right with me." So we moved over. And I was the tenth of eleven in the family; I have a younger sister.

It was a great old place, of course because we could run in all directions: climb all the trees we wanted; climb all the mountains.

CE: Was any part of Blithedale still operating?

GW: Oh, yes. Well, there were lots of summer cottages in the old days. One thing that brought a great influx of people over, of course, was the 1906 earthquake.

CE: Did you ever know any of the Cushing family?

GW: Oh, yes. Well, Mill Valley wasn't very big in those days. You knew everybody.

CE: Did you know Eleanor Cushing Jenkins? Dolly?

GW: Oh, yes, Dolly, she just died. She was just great. She was a friend of my older sister's, Eve, because Dolly must have been about ten years older than I. They used to ride horseback and they used to race the trains down to what became the high school when it was finally built.

CE: Well, I'm sure you've done a tape, you must have, for the Marin County -- I mean the Mill Valley --

GW: Mill Valley, yes.

CE: Did you cover the subject we're going to today?

GW: No. What they really wanted down there mostly was any of the stories that just pertained to Mill Valley and my activities with the Conservation League.

CE: Well, let's get you grown up a bit. You went to the local school, or were you educated somewhere else?

GW: Well, we had school in the attic for a while and Nursie took care of us up there and then we went off to school and that was the old grammar school up there in Mill Valley. You walked home at lunchtime and then you rushed back and walked up again, and that was fun. Then I went to high school for a while until I was quite ill at one point, in bed for a long, long time. And Mother died later and Father decided that he didn't think girls should be educated anyway. He was panicky because I was an asthmatic child, and they're really wretched. Somebody should drown them. You know, we're always trying to die in the middle of the night when it gets cold. So Father said, "I'll buy you an automobile; why don't you stay home?" Well, we had a big argument about that and I said, "Buy the automobile anyway and I'll go to the convent." So I went up to Dominican, just drove up every day and studied music which was fun, and then came home because after my sister Grace was married I had to run the house. And the Chinese didn't think very much of women, period, and girls, you know, of that age, but somebody had to count the noses because big Dad was terrific about this. He'd come by in the afternoon and want to know how many extra were for dinner because he was never satisfied until the table was full. And the Chinese were good. So were the Japanese, a little more water in the soup and they'd handle anything.

CE: All right. After school, what? After Dominican?

GW: Well, after Dominican, I ran the house and went to Dominican and then I -- Before that I had gone over to girls' school, Miss Burke's in San Francisco, with my little sister and then she and I ran away so that she could get married because we felt that was a fine time. And then Lickey moved up to Fort Bragg. Elizabeth, but I've always called her Elickabeth because I couldn't say Elizabeth. Now, as

an old great-grandmother, she's still Lickey. But then she moved away and I ran the house and then Ted and I were married in 1925.

CE: Is he a Californian?

GW: No, Ted was born in Australia but his father was from India. Then, our Standard Oil Company kept moving us around.

CE: What, all over the world?

GW: No, just up and down the coast. It was just enough to completely disrupt you, but it didn't take you to any glamour spots, exactly. But we loved to play tennis and loved to do things together so that was fine. We finally got home and built this house, and then the darned war came along and we had to move anyway because Ted was a reserve officer in the Navy. The next thing I knew we were headed for Washington. It took Ted six months to get someone back there to agree to let a wife in; they loved to take the officers in but they didn't want them to bring their wives.

CE: Did you have a family?

GW: No, the two of us.

CE: Well, then finally you came back here and you get immersed in some community affairs.

GW: Well, I thought I was going to take it easy and not do anything and Glad White phoned one day and she said, "Now we've all worked very hard during the war while you've been in Washington." I thought I had been very busy in Washington, too. I'd started a library back there, though I don't know anything about libraries but they needed some help. And she said, "I want you to go to Hamilton Air Force Base to the Arts and Skills room up there and tell me what you think about it." So Mary Louise Peters and I went up there and we looked it all over and then I was foolish; I came home and I wrote a report. Then in a couple of days Marian Rattray phoned and she said, "Would you please turn up at the meeting?" And then I said, "Well wait a minute. I turned in a report." She said, "Well, Pat said you're running the Arts and Skills." "Well," I said, "it's darned interesting because I haven't had any arts and I haven't had any skills and what do you want me to do?" She said, "Just get up to the meeting." So I got up to the meeting in the Arts and Skills and the next think I knew I ran the volunteers. But the trick -- There's a real trick to this. I'll do it with Em. You have a lot of friends who are just very, very skillful and they come in and supply all the expertise you haven't got and the next thing you know the darned thing rolls.

CE: And you get the credit --

GW: And I get the credit.

CE: How did you get involved, though, with the Marin Conservation League or whatever name you give it?

GW: I was very interested in the Marin Conservation League because Mother and her friends down there had started the old Outdoor Art Club. And the Outdoor Art Club was for the preservation of outdoor art and they had done all kinds of things and so I've been very interested. And people would say, "Well, why don't you come and do this that or the other?" I'm one of those souls that gets up to my hubcaps in whatever I'm doing. And I realized that I would have to quit the Red Cross if I were going to do what I really wanted to do with the Conservation

League. Caroline Livermore, as you know, is one of the great souls in the Garden Club, and she kept asking me to do little jobs and she said to me one day, "I want you to go on the Conservation League Board." Well, I thought that would be kind of fun and then we took a launch, which was not a good idea as far as I was concerned because I get seasick in a bath tub, but we went over to Angel Island and we were sitting there having a meeting in that lovely flat area there, and Caroline said in that lovely high voice of hers, she said, "Well, you're going to run the membership." I said, "Caroline, wait a minute." She said, "Yes, we've got it all planned." So I came home and phoned Mrs. Dunshee, who had been running the membership, and she said, "I never let any of my records out. They're right beside my desk."

CE: Is that Verna Dunshee, Bert's wife?

GW: Yes, Bert's wife. And I said, "Well, I'm supposed to take on membership and I would love some of the background." Well, I phoned Caroline and she said, "Well, I guess you just have to find out what it's all about." So, damn it, that's what I did. So I ran it for ten years for the Conservation League.

CE: Digressing for a moment. Would you comment on Mrs. Norman Livermore?

GW: Oh, she was lovely.

CE: Tell us a little bit about her. I have had the pleasure of interviewing her son, one of her sons, and we spent the whole two hours, I think, talking about his mother, but it was subjective. She was his mother, after all. To what do you attribute her success?

GW: Conviction. Caroline used to say, you know, "If it's right, we'll do it." Sepha Evers, on the other hand, always wanted to know if we had the money in our purse because she was practical and Caroline -- I don't know whether you call it practical or not, because it produced the results, Caroline would say, "If it's something that has to be done, we'll do it." She used to drive the old board, before I got on there, because Paul Wilson, Dr. Paul Wilson, used to tell me about this. She'd go up to the Board of Supervisors, and she'd get up and she'd say, "If the Conservation League puts up \$5,000 dollars, will you match it?" Then she'd go back to the Board and say, "You'll have to go find \$5,000." Of course, the truth of the matter was until they did find the \$5,000, Caroline would put it up. But Charlotte Riznik told me once, the newspaper woman here in the County for years and very much involved with Caroline, and she said that Caroline used to drive down the hill and pick up the newspaper, the local newspaper, at night and delete anything that might upset Norman until they could get things straightened around. So I figure, she had a lot of skills and that was one of them. But Caroline figured if it was the right thing to do, you'd find a way to do it. And I said to her one day, "You know, the devil of your system is, even if it's raining like mad and you tell us to get going we'll probably follow you up the hill." But Caroline was - - She had a beautiful side. Caroline always said you had no right to complain unless you thanked people. And I remember when she was ill, just before she went to the city, she phoned me three times one day and she said, "Gracie, did you write a letter of thanks for the League?" and I said, "Yes, dear, I did." And she'd get up before the Board of Supervisors and tell them what she wanted them to do; sometimes they did and sometimes they didn't, because the *Independent*

Journal was never a conservation organization of any kind, and Caroline would, you know, have to fight them off. But she did. She backed up the things that we should do. One of her great -- Well, one of Mary Sommers' great beliefs, too, and Caroline backed this up, was don't improve it just get the land. I mean, don't spend the money, don't divert it, because there is going to come a time when we have got to have some of these beautiful areas or this whole Marin County would never be what it is, but aside from that, we know now, with later information, we actually need the open space to breathe. But those women were just adamant about that and in those days -- I know I ran our membership for ten years and we really didn't have too much trouble with money. Nowadays, I realize what a golden era that was. You'd get \$1,000 from this person. There was a woman doctor in San Francisco sent us \$600 every fall. The men would wait until they figured out the income tax and then they'd send us money. We could really -- The Conservation League could say to someone coming in for money, "Okay we'll give you \$3,000 or \$4,000." It could be done. It wasn't the full price of anything, but it was good start-up money for a lot of things.

CE: Well, I'm quite amazed because 47 or 8 years ago, conservation was a word that wasn't known by as many people as it is today.

GW: It was in Marin County.

CE: But it was in Marin. So, in your judgment, then, Marin has always been in the vanguard?

GW: We've always been leaders. Because years ago our County Counsel and Peter Arrigoni were going back east for some sort of meeting on conservation and I went to the *Independent Journal* and I got all these clippings and stuff and put it in a folder and gave it to Peter. I bet you thirty cents he never read it, but when they got back, I went to see those boys and I said, "Now what did you learn?" Doug Maloney just shrugged and said, "My God, Gracie, they asked us." Because the people in Marin County knew what these values were. They had put value on things that a lot of other people looked at and didn't see. A mountain and a stream, a tree, the beauty of things. They had given them value because they had recognized it.

CE: All right. Would you discuss briefly just the other women who were some of the founders? Mrs. Albert Evers?

GW: Well, she was just fine. I didn't know -- I knew Sepha Evers, of course, very, very well. I didn't know Helen Van Pelt as well, but Sepha I just loved. And years later the Conservation League did all the work that was necessary and got the money together so that we could dedicate a bench out at Taylor Park and there's a small cottage out there. I've got a picture of Sepha from one of the sons, and a man in Fairfax blew it up for us and it's a beauty. I used it at an exhibit out at the Civic Center one year. But that was a great person. I just loved her. Sepha and Caroline did not agree about things, so Mary Sommers felt that it was going to be difficult to write a history because Sepha felt that you should be more practical than Caroline was, and so on. Some basic things they were likely to collide, so in a way, it was pretty difficult while they were both here to write a history, but Mary Sommers did put one, as you know, this one, together. She and I went over to call on Sepha after Caroline died to get some of the information and I was sitting there

listening to Sepha I realized that if Caroline had stopped to listen every time Sepha said, "But we haven't got the money," a lot of things wouldn't have been done.

CE: Well, it seems it was a good balance. What are the other two cornerstones of the -- Mrs. Forbes and --

GW: Well, Portia Forbes I didn't know very well. My father did because her husband was a man who took care of finances for Father's shop; that was an old CPA outfit, I don't know.

CE: John F. Forbes, still going strong.

GW: Are they?

CE: Oh, sure.

GW: Oh, for heaven's sake. I didn't know that.

CE: How about Helen Van Pelt?

GW: Well, Helen Van Pelt -- I've read more about Helen than I knew.

CE: Were these women contemporaries, by the way, more or less the same age?

GW: I think so, weren't they Emmie?

EG: Yeah.

GW: One of the things, of course, that Helen Van Pelt did, thrilled me to death, but long before my time -- They were trying to get Taylor Park and the Board of Supervisors said, "Well, after all, it's not a very good, you know." So the old girls, not to be run around by anybody -- She set up this day camp out there and kept daily records, found out that it was a lovely area. And in their story, and I think that Mary Sommers has written it up -- It was a cliff-hanger, because this woman in San Francisco who owned the land was in arrears, I think it was \$30,000 on taxes and those women really had real genius with finance. They could have run the Bank of Italy any day. They parlayed stuff. Several went up time after time to Sacramento and said, "If Marin County excuses the tax and they use that for matching funds, will you put in -- " Before they got through, I don't know how they kept track of who did what to whom, but they finagled it. They finally got Taylor Park.

CE: Well, let's go back a moment. I'd like to do this in somewhat chronological order. Grace, when you started this, and I guess this was before you joined the staff, this name Hugh Pomeroy comes up all the time. What was the importance of hiring him, in your judgment?

GW: Because there wasn't any planning, no planning department --

CE: No Planning Department in Marin, no nothing?

GW: No. So what the darlings did, and it was during the Depression -- Albert Evers was an architect and there was a federal program that employed people, and so what he suggested was that they get these out-of-work architects, planners, not architects, planners to come and help. And what they did was to give the money, the \$2,500, to the Board of Supes, and they hired Hugh Pomeroy and Hugh Pomeroy made the first recreational plan. And when I took over the Conservation League, Mary Sommers -- We didn't have any office in those days. She brought down two carton boxes and they were down in the basement on the ping pong table and that was the Conservation League, and in it was this lovely album. And they planned, that Hugh Pomeroy had written out, and then some of Hugh

Pomeroy's own snapshots. So I got the Board's permission to take it up and give it to Paul Zukor who was the County Planner at that time, and Paul phoned back finally and said, "Gee, Gracie that plan is just as good, you know, as when it was made." And I said, "Well, I've got permission from the board to put it in the California Room." And he said, "Don't worry about coming up. I'll put it in there." Well, I had to be terribly sure that there hadn't been any slip-ups so I went up in a couple of days to be darn sure it was in the California Room, also that it was there on the basis that it could not be taken out, couldn't be removed. And so that was that wonderful plan.

CE: Is it a master plan for the future growth?

GW: Well, what they called it was a Recreational Plan, as I remember the title on that thing. And the idea there was, where were these lands that the Conservation League should be looking toward as possible things to acquire and as you know, they put up money -- Where was it they put up -- Oh, for Kent Island is typical, out of the 84,000 I think they paid the Kents, Conservation League put up twenty-five. It was on that basis that many things were done. And Hugh Pomeroy wanted to give them some plan for the future so they'd know where to go and, of course, they got Mary Sommers and as I remember they don't think Mary was a planner. She was a landscape architect, wasn't she?

GM: She wasn't a planner.

GW: She wasn't a planner. And Mary and Caroline, of course, just worked together like nothing. It was just great. And then the rest of us, of course -- Conservation League is concentrated always, I think, in trying to always be back of their planners. Em knows a lot about that because she's done so much work on the Countywide Plan and it's another way that Marin County people express the fact that they're darn interested in this county and you take care of it or they will be after you. And when we'd have to be after -- We've torn those boys up. We got up and -- To the Board of Supervisors and jam the room, because the telephone has been very valuable --

CE: That sends a signal. You arrive in a body and send them a signal.

GW: Well, I organized a group called the Noddors and Frowners at one point many long years ago because women would say to me, "I don't know how to say anything, Gracie," and I'd say, "You don't have to say a darn word but you listen and you nod at the right time and you frown at the wrong time," and it was marvelous.

CE: Isn't that wonderful?

GW: The Noddors and Frowners, they had a list of telephone numbers and the works and I could always bring them out. But this county, I think, whoever's been in the government has had to be aware of that because their lives, their political lives at least, were going to be very much shortened if they didn't. We spent years trying to get Bill Fusselman out; he didn't belong in there at all. But he didn't know it. And I love Zada, his wife, but Bill was no planner. And the distressing part of it was, of course, if you suggested building anything -- I suggested to Mary Donnelly one day we were up there, that we just get up and say that we were thinking about getting permission to build a post box in the middle of the highway. We didn't have a freeway in those days, and I said they'll nod their darn

- heads and say yes. It's building something, because that's the thesis of the *Independent Journal*, whatever it is, build it, don't save anything.
- CE: Do you think the general attitude of the Supervisors today as opposed to 1934 has improved considerably regarding this whole subject?
- GW: Oh, it's tremendous, the difference is; there's no doubt about it.
- CE: It's been a question of education, too, hasn't it for them?
- GW: Well, that's true. I think that they've been helped a lot by the fact that citizens are interested in Marin County. They're not just working in a vacuum. And a lot of us have followed the gospel of Caroline Livermore and we do let them know if we like things and we do try to work with them before they paint themselves in a corner so they'll be aware of what we think, and it does make a difference. Peter Behr, God bless him -- We always phoned Peter and we'd say, "We're going to go up there tomorrow, dear, and this is what we're going to do." And then lots of times Peter would have an opportunity, too, to offer a motion that was in much better shape and more concise just because he could --
- CE: Give you guidance --
- GW: Well, he had a chance, an impromptu speech that is made up the day before is better than one you create right now. But we did -- I don't think we fought them, but we had to fight some of them. But I think we've had very good people in and I think it's been easy to talk to them and they listen and if their viewpoint -- If this is something they feel strongly about then I don't think everybody goes home hating them, that's right, you did your best and they did.
- CE: Could you tell us a little bit about the five year struggle to -- You mentioned briefly, to turn that 2,000-plus Camp Taylor into the Samuel P. Taylor State Park. Were you involved in that in any way?
- GW: Well, the end of it I was involved in. So many things happened that time. I just couldn't believe that it was all luck; somebody must have wanted us to save it. Because, my Ted had been running the Boy Scouts and General Andrew Lolly had been one of the men on the board, then he was sent to Sacramento on a political job and -- What in the world was he in charge of? The lands, I think. And Andrew phoned one afternoon about four o'clock and he said, told Ted, he said, "I want to thank you for the fact you've been doing my job for me, for the Scouts," and talked and Andrew said, "By the way, there have been quite a few men coming up here for this last month and they seem to have a project that will be coming before my committee." And he said, "What they want to do is to get the money that had been allocated to get the Brazil-Souza Ranch," which was at the entrance to Muir Woods. To have that money changed around and they wanted to buy more land around Taylor Park. Well, the interesting part was that the real estate boys that were interested in this just happened to have land up there that they wanted to develop. So Teddy said, "Andrew, when is this coming up?" "Well," he said, "the time it will come before our committee is next Monday." So Teddy and I stopped everything and spent the whole weekend phoning. We got the Sierra Club; we got everybody and we got out and we got up there. And Andrew Lolly said that he was very sorry that this was a five man committee, after he had heard all of us speak, and he said in as much as only two of them were there he felt that he should not make the decision that day. So I got up and I

said, "Well, General Lolly, this is fine with us, and we're, you know, grateful that we have had this opportunity to tell you what we think, but I want to tell you something. We will be back next time and any other time that this comes up, so let us know and we'll be here." We had to go home and organize the whole group and get back up there, but we did. And Mary Donnelly went out in the hall and one of the men that had been trying to promote this said, "Well, I don't understand what's going on." He said, "My God, what happened?" Well, Mary said, "We're very interested in this, you know." And he said, "Well, we've been working on this and thought we had it all fixed." So then I came home and Harold Gregg was running the Conservation -- No, he was on the board of the Conservation League. And Harold said that there was a meeting out there, a picnic, and they had lovely, lush stuff and Harold was one of the souls that knew how to get from here to there even if he wasn't invited and he just wound up at this lovely banquet picnic that they were having and one of the women who was promoting it, Winifred something or other. You remember? That died? She got up and said, "I want to tell you something," she said -- Because I was president of the league that year, that's why I was there. And she got up and she said, "I want to tell you something," she said, "You know, Grace Wellman is a Souza," and she said, "that's why she wants to be sure that the money is spent down there." Well, the money had been collected the hard way years before through the legislature and never spent, you see. So, Harold came back and let the Conservation League know that I was Gracie Souza. So that was lovely for quite a while, lost my name, I just became Gracie Souza. But we did stop them and we did get the money spent for the project which had been allocated for in the first place to purchase the entrance to the lands that were the entrance there to Muir Woods. And the boys just went without their extra section. And, of course, the neat part of it is that they've gotten what they wanted. That whole road out there would have had to be widened to four lanes; they would have destroyed a lot along the creek. But that was just something. If Andrew Lolly hadn't phoned at four o'clock that afternoon, that wretched meeting would have been held Monday and we never would have heard a word about it. So, years before that I remember phoning Caroline one day and saying, "We cannot possibly close down for the summer."

End, Side A

CE: Grace, have the real estate boys, as you call them, been a problem to your group all over these years?

GW: Yes, because after all --

CE: It's a conflict, different directions?

GW: It's a conflict and some of them, for heavens sakes, I was born and brought up with, some are my best friends, and they always want to know what we're up to and I tell the boys that isn't important what they are up to; they have the money and the organization. And in the old days the women had to fight these fights, you see. The men were in the city, and so women had to find out how to do things. And our men were very good; they supported us but mostly at dinner parties because they weren't around here for the meetings.

CE: I remember talking to Norman Livermore. Talking about his mother, he said, "You know, my father was just wonderful. He was behind her. My mother couldn't have achieved what she did without his endorsement."

GW: Well, he was darling. Because I know one night, somebody or other, a whole bunch of us went down to the College of Marin and they were about to have the Treasure Island Exposition, and this was about a year before, and there were letters coming into the County saying, "Do you have a youth hostel?" So they had a meeting at the College of Marin and somebody phoned me from the Outdoor Art Club because I was on the board down there and said, "Will you go down and take in that meeting?" And Norman Livermore was sitting behind me and Caroline and they were such a kick. I was asking questions, which is something you never should do at a meeting, because I had to report to the Outdoor Art Club. So finally somebody said, "Well, that's fine, now will you take charge of that?" And I said, "That's perfectly silly. I didn't come here to take charge of something. I just have to write a report." And Norman tapped me like this and said, "You and Caroline will learn. Don't ask questions."

CE: Tell me a little bit. Did you have any involvement in the Tomales Bay State Park?

GW: No, I didn't.

CE: No, That was before your time.

GW: My big project was Kent Island.

CE: Okay, let's move on to Kent Island. This is the island that Anne Kent inherited from Tom Kent.

GW: Well, the interesting part of it is -- I almost got trapped at a public meeting one night. Some man got up, and I thought, well, that's the last time. I'll go home and find out, because he said, "After all, it's just some mud in that bay, you know." So I went home to find out how you can say, with accuracy, that something is an island and I found out what it was. If it's still visible at high tide, it's an island. So Kent Island wasn't saved by much because at very high tides there wasn't much of it showing. But, the harbor district had been created by McCarthy, who was one of our senators at that time, and others up there in the legislature, and it was a great thought. They were to develop the island. And they were going to eventually -- Of course, when they did develop they were going to have to have a bridge over from the Stinson side. They were going to have a hotel, a landing pad for helicopters, an office.

CE: And when they dredged the lagoon weren't they to have a marina?

GW: Well, they had to help the mud. And obviously they hadn't thought about the fact that at a high tide some of that mud was going to go right back again, it would probably fill up the entrance to the harbor. But it was wild because the meetings - - I know Rip Gabetaw and a bunch of us went over one time and the harbor district was completely sure of the fact that they had the legislature back of them and we could scream ourselves hoarse and it wouldn't do any good. So then the idea was, how do you solve this problem? Well, obviously you solve it by scuttling the harbor district. So then the thing to do is to get somebody on the harbor district. And there's a woman, Frances Stewart, Mrs. Preston Stewart, over in Bolinas, and she's about as big as two loaves of bread, and we decided that she lived over there and appeared interested and unfortunately a lot of the long-haired

kids that had come over there were very enthusiastic about Frances, and one of the old friends who had lived over there all of her life, she was infuriated because we backed her up, because she said, you know what kind of friends she has. Well, they went house to house and they got Frances on the harbor district; that was nice. Then Frances phoned. She's a southern gal, and she said, "Well, she's having her troubles," because they were going to have a meeting, the scuttlebutt told her about, only they forgot to let Frances know and Frances went to the County Counsel, not having been born yesterday, and found out that she should have had the minutes and when she got on the Board, of course, that was the camel with his head in the tent because she could tell all of us what was going on. And Harold Gregg had six ideas to do everything, anyway. And then we tried to stay in touch over there with what was really going on. And one of the suggestions was that they would build on piers, on sticks, out in the bay, close up to Audubon Canyon Ranch between Audubon and Stinson Beach. They were going to have a little housing development; that was one of the neat little deals. Well, the thing is that eventually, of course, we got the harbor district and destroyed it, which was the only way to manage that thing anyway, and then -- I was disillusioned because I thought that an appraiser. There was only one honest appraisal. Well I learned there isn't. Admiral Bramson Cook, who was on our Board -- I said, "Admiral, will you take them on? You're an engineer and you can go to these meetings and they can't talk you down because you're meeting with a lot of men trained in that field, working with them." And he was a man who stood very straight and wouldn't let anybody fool with him at all. Harold Bramson Cook would phone me in the morning, almost had stomach ulcers. He would say, "I am fuming," and I'd think we're at it again. I'd say, "What can I do to help?" Well, somebody had tried to talk him down or not get in time enough. But he was great. He went to all the meetings and he got speakers and he sent everybody out to get money. Audubon Canyon Ranch and the great old Nature Conservancy got in on this deal. And then we got an appraiser. The county had an appraiser and the Kents had an appraiser. So I went to the man on the Board and I said, "What's the matter? Why isn't an appraisal an appraisal?" They said, "Gracie, it depends on who pays for it." And I said, "Why bother? Why pay for it?" But you have to have a basis for negotiations. So here we were with three different appraisals. So, the end result of this was that Anne Kent wanted to have the island saved and they finally Nature Conservancy took it on and it seems to me it was \$84,000. And then, Em knows because she got in on this, the telephones began to ring because Nature Conservancy was going to present it to the county and several of the men on the Board of Supervisors were not going to accept it; they had a between plan. They were trying to -- They would have scuttled us if they could. So, we didn't want them to know that this was to be presented. So it was presented in the morning. Em said she had guests. Do you remember? You came in, of all the tense moments. You were sitting there dying. The two who were trying to stop us on the board said, "Well, we think this should be taken up after lunch," which would have given the harbor district time enough at that time to go ahead and legally to condemn it and we would have been finished. But Peter Behr and the others were able to hold this, and they accepted it. And the County, having

accepted it, the Harbor District could not condemn it and take it away from us. And then, of course, we had to get the money. So then we went out and got the money. In the meantime, the Nature Conservancy had held it, you see, and given it to the County and once it got into the County's hands then we got away from the harbor district. But you know, you watch those old gals work; they should have run the world. They knew exactly how to maneuver everything. They were marvelous. I learned an awful lot just tailing along behind them.

CE: When did these four founders die, maybe twenty years ago? In the '60s?

EG: Well, Sepha just died a couple years ago.

GW: Yes. Four, wasn't it?

EG: Caroline was the first.

CE: She was the first; I think she died in '64, didn't she?

EG: Helen Van Pelt had moved out of the county, she was a professional landscape architect.

CE: How many are on your board now?

GW: You ought to know, Em.

EG: About 35.

CE: And your membership is what, roughly?

EG: Two thousand.

CE: Very good. Well, that Kent Island is a fascinating story. I have Mrs. Kent's reminiscences of that whole thing, also. You see this is the wonderful thing about -- You get a variation of the stories. And I think there was a man, Barfield, who didn't speak to Mrs. Kent after that.

GW: That's right.

CE: And she said I could get no satisfaction from anybody, "What are you going to build there?" "Oh, don't ask. You'll just love it."

GW: Yes. You girls go home and cook doughnuts!

CE: Okay, tell us a little bit -- You were certainly in on the preservation of Angel Island, making that a state park.

GW: Well, I thought that was very interesting because they had an Angel Island Foundation when I was on that and I was on that one. And then the state, the governor, Governor Brown, appointed the State Advisory Committee and that was kind of fun and we worked with the planners who came down from up there. But, before that, the group that really held that vote, to begin with the two people that held it first, were Bruce Johnstone and Caroline Livermore. Because the federal government was going to turn it over to the state but the wheels go slowly and in the meantime someone had to put up the money for police protection and fire protection on that island, and Caroline and Bruce put up the money. And then Nella Carney, who was just a marvelous person for any project because everything is lined up ducks in a row -- And Mary Donnelly and -- Well, there was quite a little group, but those two gals -- Oh, Jean Homar, I think, was on that also. And Betty went into work to try and stop that first plan that came out. That first plan was a doozy; it was a sort of a second Coney Island on the island and you wondered why you spent the money to go to the island. You could do it in any city. So they worked on that to hold it off. Then eventually these two groups formed and the first group was formed by this wonderful Phyllis Elman over there

in Belvedere, and a group from over there. And then, I suppose, the reason I was on it was because I was reporting back to the Conservation League. But it was interesting to find that these two thoughts. Well, I saw it very clearly at a meeting at the Presidio one day, all day meeting, and some woman that sat in the section with me had four children and she kept saying, "We have to have baseball fields over there and we have to have this and this." When she got through her presentation I was flabbergasted and I said, "Do you know what you've done? You've just sunk the island." There wouldn't be a darn thing left. If you had to go that far to play baseball, forget it, go home. And my fight, always on both those committees for the state people, and they were just darling. They were the nicest young planners that came down and then we had our people here that were on the state, our state park people, and I kept saying, "Why don't you leave the kids alone? These plans came out with great big boards everywhere telling you to look here and look there." And I said, "I'd never let you have one of them up." When you get off the ferry boat you should have available in that little house or someplace any information you want and if you're a person that doesn't want information you don't have to have it and then go and find the island. Do what we kids did in Marin County, in Mill Valley. You could walk up on the hills, explore it for yourselves, lie down on the hill and look at the clouds. Don't be told all the time, "Look here and do this and do that." And they kept saying, "But you have to have information kiosks." And I said, "I'd burn them down." So this kept on all through it. Because too much park stuff is -- Planning to that extent that everybody is regimented -- I complained in Yosemite a few years ago because having this bad back, I found it wasn't like the old days in Yosemite. They'd put asphalt on the trail. So I chased up the park department up there and I asked them if there was a reason for it and they said yes, actually there is. There was a psychological reason, for people from the city had a tendency to stay on the asphalt and then they wouldn't get off and damage the tree roots. Well, I could understand that. But, for the most part, I really think that too many kids are told how to do it and when to do it and what to do it. And that mountain is so beautiful. You go up to the top of it -- And who was it? Putt told me that he and Mother were -- He said, "Mom and I were on the ferry boat one day and we looked up --" And he said something or other about the top and she said, "You know, Putt, this is the most beautiful view in the world because you can see the whole world." You see, it's a complete view, the whole -- So that's when we began to agitate for a bench up there that could be sunk so that you wouldn't spoil the outline of the mountain but people could go up on the top and just sit and look. Don't be told what they're looking at.

CE: Was that mountain named for Caroline Livermore after her demise?

GW: No. Before.

CE: During her life. What precipitated cutting the mountain off, why the Nike pad up there?

GW: Well, they just happened -- Well, the Nike pad was war, but that was different. But before that, the thing that stirred Mary Donnelly and Nella Carney and the group up was that there just happened to be on the State Park Commission two men who were sub-dividers and they had an elegant plan. They were going to put

a tramway up the mountain and cut the top off and have a restaurant up there and that's what brought Marin County to a boil because they were very sure that they were not going to do it and they were not going to have that state plan and they didn't need those two men on that commission. So they sort of telegraphed their thoughts about that and it didn't happen.

CE: I see many of these areas of open space that you've saved, your group, eventually wind up under state jurisdiction. Is that better for the county?

GW: Well, actually, reading Mary Sommers' history, I was aware of the fact, too, that that was part of the way those girls parlayed things. They would want to buy something and then they'd say to the state, if we give you Stinson Beach, will you then buy this thing? You see it would give the state --

CE: Maneuvering.

GW: It was a maneuvering deal; it was good old financial finagling, but it worked. And of course the state --

CE: The resources are greater than the County's.

GW: The resources are greater than the County and this was a way of acquiring things. Well, Stinson Beach was typical; that was one of their swaps.

EG: Maintaining things, too.

GW: Maintaining things. They just -- Well, you know, even when we had a bigger planning department we've never had -- Well when 13 came in, of course, it clobbered the funds, too.

CE: The repercussions are still echoing through all departments of county government. Look at the library, how it's suffered. All right, now we haven't touched on any tidelands, and that is a subject I'm sure is dear to your heart, too.

GW: Well, I'll tell you, the person to talk to about tidelands, this Emme Gilman over here, headed that group that got the money to buy the tidelands down here. And that was terribly funny, too, because my Ted and the Standard Oil Company --

CE: Corte Madera tidelands are we talking about?

GW: Corte Madera tidelands. Ted was sitting in a meeting one day with the vice president of the, oh, the big outfit that owned the tidelands -- And he said, "Say, what's going on in Marin County?" He said, "My gosh, there's an outfit over there called the Conservation League. Every time we try to do something we run into them." And Ted said, "Well, watch out." That particular year I was running the Conservation League, and he said, "Oh, that's it: your name was on the top of the petition." I said to Teddy, when I was running it -- I put my name on the top of the petition and if they wanted to blame somebody there we were. It wasn't a bad idea. Utah Construction was the outfit. But they suddenly became aware of the fact that there was a very vocal group over there.

CE: What about Hirt Marsh? Is that still in limbo?

GW: Well, the last I read about Hirt Marsh I think that they're going to be able to do things. I think the only argument, as far as I'm personally concerned, is the danger that there will be too much "look here and look there" on the Hirt Marsh.

CE: But have you stopped that shopping center?

GW: Oh, no, I think Hahn's going in but in a smaller way. But the marsh itself, there's going to be some money there for that.

CE: How about Richardson Bay and the wildlife sanctuary? Were you involved in that, Grace?

GW: That was when I first went on the board and that was just absolutely lovely.

CE: I'm confused about the autonomy of that. I thought that the Audubon Society -- How did the MCL get involved?

GW: Well, actually, the Utah Construction Company was going to take down the little hill and throw it in the bay and build some houses which involved Caroline.

CE: Which little hill?

GW: Well, you know, in back of Rose Verell's house was that little hill.

CE: Oh, sure.

GW: And of course, hills shouldn't stand. I mean, that's what the boys think that want to fill up the bay. You slither those off. So she went to work on that one and I was scared to death because Rose Verell lived there and when I went on the board they already -- Tom Nelson, I think, was the lawyer who wrote up the agreement between the Conservation League and Rose and it was pretty -- It was terrifying to me because I had known Rose all my life. We kids used to go over there in a horse and buggy. Weekends we'd beg Dad and try and swim in the mud. We called it the BBB Beach and it was one of our little pets. And they promised to take care of -- Caroline said that it was the agreement: they would take care of Rose for life. And she had a brother and sister and I think they were each to get fifty dollars a month. And I said when I first went on the board, "Are we morally obligated? Supposing Rose has a stroke and has to go to the hospital. It might cost four or five hundred dollars a month." Imagine what it cost now. And nobody seemed to want to worry about that too much. Bruce Johnstone was on the board and he said, "But Gracie, we're not obligated." And I said, "I'll tell you something." I'd been on the board about six months, I guess, then. "I am morally obligated. I've known Rose all my life and if she's in trouble -- So I'm going to resign from the board." Well this went on. They wouldn't accept the resignation. Caroline went east and I got two or three letters back from her saying, "I'm sitting on the front steps of the Audubon." Baker was the President of the National Audubon then and apparently he could just charm a bird out of a tree and Caroline was a great match for that. She and Mr. Baker worked beautifully together. And they finally got the Audubon people interested in taking it over but they were afraid to take it over until the debts against it were paid. And I think there was an outstanding debt. I'm not sure about the figure. I think it was 25,000. I think Palm Stout put it up, because she was always quietly coming in to the rescue and then you never knew she'd been there. But finally the condition satisfied them and they came in and made it their Northern California Headquarters. And then, as you know, Caroline and the group got interested in getting the old Lyford house and floating it across, and I was busy that day doing something or other and I couldn't get there and I finally got a call from one of the girls and they said, "Oh, the tide went out." Well, I thought everybody knew when the tide went out, but it took longer to get it over from the Strawberry Spit and there it sat in the mud and we waited until the tide came in the next day and rescued them and then they brought it in on rollers. And then Mrs. Dickey, whose husband had been a professor at the

University of California and died, and she put up the money to restore it because the foundations had to be put back in and --

CE: That's right. It's known as the Dickey house rather than the Lyford.

GW: In fact the Audubon people blow up every time I say Dickey House. They say, "Gracie cut it out. It's the old Lyford House." So I'm trying to reform. But that --

CE: I think Jan Armstrong redecorated that.

GW: She did, from Belvedere. She was the one that did the downstairs section. And Caroline phoned me one day and she said she'd been in the city and they were taking down an old house and it had a wonderful wrought iron railing outside. And she said, "I went in, and they're not going to do a thing with it, so I got it." I said, "What are you going to do with it?" "I'm going to have it put up on the porch. Now all you volunteers can take the rust off." I said, "I'll tell you something. That's the end. I'm not taking the rust off. I'm not getting another volunteer to do it; the men can do it. That's a stinky job." "Well, I think we can just take it off and then you girls can paint it." I said, "No, we can't." So they finally had to get somebody to put it on the porch, and it is likely you can fall off and break your neck, but Caroline, always the brain working, this house was being taken down and the man, I guess, had no particular use for it, so -- She probably bought it, but whatever. She had it sent over to the Dickey House and there it was, so we put it up.

CE: Tell us a little bit about Rose Verell.

GW: Well, Rosie was Portuguese and I guess she had a farmer's attitude about animals but never having been on a farm, I didn't have the same attitude about animals that she did. She was very cruel with animals. She had a number of dogs that were tied up on a short leash and they had great big running sores, you know. They would spring forward and the leash would catch there.

CE: Was she a widow?

GW: Yes. Then she would -- I remember one day somebody called me and said you have to do something because they'd been over there and there was a box -- You used to get wooden boxes instead of carton boxes; you know, the other stuff. And there was a cat in the box. Rosie had put in -- Well, the cat had her kittens, and I guess the only one that survived -- Only one survived. And the kitten couldn't develop normal legs, so it was a cat with little tiny back legs and long forward legs and whoever it was was going to turn it in to the Humane Society and I knew that she had been turned in to the Humane Society before. So I telephoned over to Dick Simms, who was a judge, and Dick had known Rosie for years, and I said, "Dick, do something, will you? I'm sick. I don't want Rosie to catch it, but on the other hand, damn it, we can't --" They just -- At that point the Conservation League had the place before Audubon took it, so they thought we were responsible. But Rosie -- Well, that was Rosie's attitude.

CE: Well, she was an eccentric.

GW: Yes, she really was. She was an odd soul. As I say, we used to see her -- Dad would go up to Dowd's Stable and get one of those old horse and buggies, you know, those buggies that had a long seat on both sides. Pile all the children, all the neighbors' children. Father was never satisfied until you had the place

bulging, you know, like a streetcar in Mexico, and then we'd go over for a picnic and Rosie would be there and we'd see her. We never felt very close to Rosie.

CE: What did she live in? Was it ultimately just a kind of a shack like place that was torn down?

GW: Yes, it was torn down. You know there's a little -- That was a garage that they have now for a workshop?

CE: Yes.

GW: In back of it was Rosie's little house. But Rosie used to walk over to Mill Valley to the Eastland Bakery; that's a long time ago.

CE: That's a long way.

GW: Yeah, she'd walk over and then she'd count on people picking her up. But a lot of people didn't want to pick Rosie up because Rosie was -- She was a little hard to be with. Rosie didn't have all the same ideas about the value of --

CE: Well, tell me, is the Marin Conservation League pleased about how this whole area has developed? Don't they have an annual bird count there that's supposed to be --

GW: Well, those are the Auduboners, and that's one of the great outfits.

CE: I know; the Audubon took it over.

GW: The Audubon they've done the national --

CE: But your organization did the ground work to it, didn't you?

GW: Not for Audubon.

CE: No, but you did it.

GW: Well, we got some land. And I think one thing that the Conservation League, I feel, is the greatest contribution they've made, is their sustained interest in good planning. Because what's wrong with the Conservation League all the time is the *Independent Journal* likes to do, that is, we'd like to lock the bridge and keep people out, and that's the opposite of what's true. The Conservation League didn't try to keep people out; they tried to plan for them so that when they came in there'd be some normal, fine way to plan for these people, not to throw them out. But it's made an awful lot of difference in the county. You can start the bad way and you can never undo it; you build a bad road and you're through. But you can't put the earth together again, as this flood's proved. You can restore a building or rebuild it or whatever you want but when the good Lord's earth goes to pieces, you can't put Humpty Dumpty back up on that old wall.

CE: Well, I know I haven't traveled extensively in my life, but I don't know of any major city in the United States that has close to it a county like Marin with all of its open space and beauty. Do you know of any city that quite has this?

GW: Well, I haven't gone a lot of places but I followed my Ted around on his national tennis matches in towns and spots and they always want to know what we're doing. I've sent lots of literature back to other towns to try and inspire them of the fact that one or two people could raise hell in any town; just get the facts and then go to work, and be absolutely sure their viewpoint can count. I think we've got everything now because how many areas have got the creeks and the rivers and the mountains and the bay and the beaches and the dairy lands.

CE: It's extraordinary, when you think for the size of this county, the acreage, and you've got 60,000 in Point Reyes National Seashore, 60,000, 30,000-plus acres in

the Golden Gate National Recreational Area and look at the acreage in the Marin Municipal Water District, look at Tamalpais State Park, look at Muir Woods, Camp Taylor. Look at all these enclaves of beauty.

GW: You know, we've had luck. Because Mary Sommers and Bobbie Schultz went down to the airport and picked up the man who was at that time in charge -- The job that this -- has now, in charge of the interior now, and picked him up and took him out to the Point Reyes National, what we hoped would be the Point Reyes National Seashore, and it was thick fog. And either Mary or Bobbie phoned when they got home, and they said, "You wouldn't believe it. About one o'clock suddenly the sky cleared and there was a bobcat." And they brought back the pictures, jumping in the dry grass so they could see where he was going and this poor man nearly died. He almost fell out of the plane. And the whole afternoon was elegant.

CE: It was blessed.

GW: And then they got a senator who came out. In fact there were two of them at one time, and the dairy people had taken them out. These were some of the dairy men who didn't want any land, you know, taken for a park. And they said it was one of the days that left you absolutely gasping. And then, of course, Mrs. Lyndon Johnson came out to dedicate the park and it was high tide and it was elegant, and it was so blue and so beautiful. We had to park our cars up on the hill and Ted and I were walking down with Doug Maloney and some of the group from Civic Center and we got down and we said, "It's corny. Look at it." It was one of those days somebody must have polished it from early morning on. And Mrs. Johnson came and there were two helicopters, I remember, that came in and landed, where you have a parking lot now, but that's why we couldn't park there. And she got out, and of course, she was a great conservationist. I remember writing her once about the signs and, boy, did I get help; you got help from her. And she stood there, and she just looked at it, and I said to Teddy, "Honestly, it's mean. The things that created this were just -- Maybe the good Lord is a conservationist. How do you know?" Maybe He did stop and say, "I'll tear the clouds apart. Maybe they'll see a bobcat go 'boom' over the dry grass."

CE: I don't think we need to add anything more to that. Thank you so much for your sharing your wonderful reminiscences.

GW: Well, I love this darn county.