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INTERVIEW WITH HELEN CALETTI
by Carla Ehat & Genevieve Martinelli
January 14, 1983

INTERVIEWEE: Helen Caletti (HC)
INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE) and Genevieve Martinelli (GM)
DATE OF INTERVIEW: January 14, 1983

CE: Today is Friday, January 14, 1983. Continuing the Oral History Project of the Moya Library, this is Carla Ehat, and joining me today is Mrs. Jordan Martinelli. We are going to have the pleasure this afternoon of talking with Mrs. Carlo Caletti, Helen Miller Caletti, who resides at number 30 Moncada Way in San Rafael. It's going to be a double pleasure today because Mrs. Caletti, Helen, which we will call from now on, is currently, and has been for two years, our President of the Moya Library Guild in the Marin Art and Garden Center. But for many years, three decades or more, she's been closely associated with the Bargain Box which is the fund raiser for Sunny Hills, which is the Children's Service and Residential and Treatment Center in San Anselmo. She is going to share with us today some of her vast experience with this organization and let's start. Helen, it's a pleasure to have you here today and good afternoon. Let's start with a little brief history. As I understand it, Sunny Hills goes way back before the turn of the century, and it was started as an orphanage.

HC: It was started in 1895 in San Rafael by a group of women, Mrs. A. W. Foster and Mrs. Dollar and Mrs. Brown. They were -- It was instigated to start because a widow who had three children died.

CE: In San Rafael?

HC: In San Rafael. They rented a house for the children and had someone take care of them and it wasn't long before they had a young man to live with them and it just grew very quickly. By 1901 they were looking for property to build a home for orphans.

CE: And there were 20 acres, I understand, that was made available. Who acquired that? Was it Captain Dollar?

HC: Yes, Captain Dollar and Mrs. Rideout put up the money to pay for the property. And it's very interesting. I think that Mrs. Hearst, Mrs. George Hearst, had wanted this group of people in San Rafael, in which they named their San Francisco orphanage and farm and their organization, and then she had wanted them to take a piece of property in Fairfax.

CE: That's Phoebe Apperson Hearst, right?

HC: Yes. And they weren't interested in that particular piece of property, so she gave them in exchange \$1,000 to help pay for the property they bought, which they bought, I believe, for \$2,000.

CE: That's an interesting vignette. Do you know the St. Vincent's School for Boys started as an orphanage, too? There were orphanages and a need for orphanages just prior to the turn of the century. That's diminished, hasn't it?

HC: Yes. At that time there were 135 children at Sunny Hills, at the turn of the century.

CE: Now, were they from just Marin?

HC: They were from the whole Bay Area. And this has changed over the years, especially after the war. During the war it changed somewhat because we had a great many service people's children and even some women at Sunny Hills.

CE: World War --

HC: World War II. And after the war it was rather difficult because people -- Foster homes had come, were becoming very popular.

CE: That's right. Jackie Program.

HC: The Jackie Program had been created and all the various adoptions that were being made that the orphans really were not available; they were being taken care of.

CE: Would you locate the site of this property, this 20 acres? It's out near Red Hill, is it not?

HC: Yes, it is. It's right next to Red Hill and originally it was the old Short property. And it was from Mr. Short that they made -- They purchased the first acreage. And he, he owned -- He had had a large Spanish grant. Mr. Sais, wasn't it?

CE: Mrs. Sais, yes. S-A-I-S. And you know Elsie Mazzini is related to him.

HC: Oh, she is!

CE: The Marin County Historical Society. It was a farm, I understand?

HC: Yes.

CE: Were they sort of self-sufficient then? Were the children there? Other than grocery items, could they have their milk and --

HC: Yes, they had a dairy and they had lamb and chickens and ducks. They were quite self-sufficient. And the women at that time thought it was excellent training for these children to have something definite to do, that they could work for, and so they had a great deal of training in the farm, on farming.

CE: Well, then, it was soon after it was established that it had to be funded, of course.

HC: Yes.

CE: And that's when the volunteer women of Marin came to the front. How did that come about?

HC: Well, for quite some time, the Presbyterian Theological Seminary helped fund it and took care of it and it was done by donations and by interested people in the county and the Bay Area that funded it, but that sort of grew to be quite a burden and after the war, prices had jumped so that there had to be a way found to support Sunny Hills. And that's one reason that the Guilds came into being.

CE: Now there are many Guilds, as I understand it.

HC: Yes.

CE: There's more Guilds to Sunny Hills than any other charity in northern California, I understand.

HC: Well, that is true but we don't have as many today as we had in the '40s and '50s and '60s. We had 35 Guilds at one time.

CE: And what would the membership be in these various Guilds?

HC: About 25 people. And then they had a Junior Auxiliary which was made up of very young –

CE: In Ross Valley, in my home, there's a guild here, is there not?

HC: Yes, the Ross Valley Guild.

CE: Now, before we get on to the Bargain Box, do each of these individual Guilds have an annual project of their own to help support Sunny Hills?

HC: Yes, they do. They primarily were formed to support Grape Festival.

CE: Oh, we forgot to mention Grape Festival.

HC: And Grape Festival began in 1901, the first Grape Festival. The first party was held for the orphanage at the A. W. Foster Estate.

CE: Martha Foster Abbott told me that, too, and her family will – And she said shortly after that it moved to Mrs. Albert Kent's property.

HC: The Kents. And it was there until, I think it was 1945, it was held on the Kent property every year. Then it was held for two years at the Marin Art and Garden, and then it moved to Sunny Hills property.

CE: So then these various guilds would have their booths at the Grape Festival.

HC: Yes, right. They'd have their booths and they would sell their wares and many of the community organizations also took part in the Grape Festival. We had –

CE: I remember when my sister was teaching at Miss Hamlin's School, they came over and had a booth.

HC: Yes, Hamlins often came over. And the Katherine Branson's took part, and the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

CE: It was a community effort then.

HC: It was a community effort and many of the churches had booths.

CE: Well, in this newsprint that you found and brought over today from the *IJ* in September, 1962, when Laura Thayer was treasurer and had been treasurer from 1912 through 1940, she makes the statement that they raised \$31,000 in that year. Now, in looking over your achievements, your financial report that you showed me a while ago, they don't raise much more for Sunny Hills today, \$38,000. So, your effort that we will get to shortly, the Bargain Box, is the big fund raiser?

HC: Yes, it is the biggest fund raiser we have.

CE: Well, let's talk about it, then. Let's get on to the Bargain Box. Was it initially started on the 20-acre property, Helen?

HC: No, the Bargain Box initially was started in San Rafael on Fourth Street. We had a small little building down near H Street and Fourth and we took donated goods as well as consignment. We were very ambitious thinking we could handle consignment articles, but that soon wore us out. Our rent was raised pretty high there so we moved to D Street, and on D Street one morning we had a fire. The furnace blew up. So that really closed our operations in San Rafael and we moved out on the grounds at Sunny Hills. We moved into the old building that Mr. Dollar had given to Sunny Hills to be used as a school building, and we operated there for about a year and a half until we were able to build a small little cottage store of our own on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and our own property.

CE: Is that sort of where the Redhill Shopping Center is today?

HC: Yes, that is where the Redhill Shopping Center is today.

CE: Now, what year did you actually start with them, about 1950?

HC: I was asked to come on the Board at Sunny Hills in 1951 and that is the year that the Bargain Box was also started. I was on the first committee but I didn't take too active a part. I was rather new in the organization, but I soon became very active.

CE: You are entirely – The majority of your help is volunteer with the exception now of having some paid personnel and your paid personnel are who?

HC: Well, we have a manager, Mrs. Knight, and we have an assistant manager on Saturday and we have a receiving clerk and an assistant receiving clerk on Saturday and two men on the truck; they consist of our salaried people. The rest are volunteers.

CE: Well, you very kindly brought over some, a financial statement from just one month in last year and I am just dumbfounded at your resourcefulness in the way this organization has grown. You took in \$33,682 in the month of October. That relates, now, to how much a year?

HC: \$200,000 a year.

CE: Extraordinary accomplishment!

HC: Well, it's because we have a lot of volunteers, about 70 volunteers, and these women come in every week, sometimes two and three times a week, and they take care of the pricing and the staffing and each guild staffs at least once a month.

CE: In other words, when you sign up to volunteer for this organization you are committed to fulfill so many hours and do certain jobs as assigned?

HC: Right.

CE: And if they don't fulfill them, you don't care for their services. But I think you're being much too modest, it's my understanding that you really molded this volunteer fundraiser into the thriving business it is today, Helen. It's known to shoppers all over the Bay Area, people come to the Bargain Box. How – Of course, you're a dedicated woman.

HC: It is something that takes a lot of people to really –

CE: I think you have a good business sense.

HC: Well, you have to be able to get along with people.

CE: You've held up your family business, too, and I think it reflects and carries over into this effort.

HC: We have a very fine rapport with the people that work for us and also with our customers and with people who donate to us. We try to keep a –

CE: All right, let's get down to how you gather your material and what you do with it. I see your truck around all the time. Now, people call in and say, "I have some things I'd like to donate to the Bargain Box and I can't bring them in." They call you and you take the data. Is that what it is?

HC: Yes we take the order, name, address, telephone number and what the articles are and where they live. We have certain days that we pick up in certain areas.

CE: Do you have more than one truck?

HC: No, just one truck. And two men on the truck. They go out in the morning at 8:30 and get in at 5:00. Then sometimes we do get an estate; we're always happy to get an order like that because we have women that can go in and make an appraisal and they will give us their things from the whole estate. Of course that kind of windfall happens only once in a while.

CE: Did you go around to Grace Easton's place?

HC: Yes, yes. She gave us so many things, thanks to you. It's really wonderful, especially if they have no place to go. We have a good clientele; they are people who really need it.

CE: Now, I notice part of your expenses is for garbage. Sometimes you get things that you really can't salvage.

HC: Well, we try to keep an operation that looks neat and clean so people can buy their clothes and wear them out if necessary.

CE: Let's talk about the clothes for a minute. Do you require that everything contributed to you must be dry cleaned first?

HC: No, we don't, it's not necessary.

CE: Then do you have to –

HC: No, in very good condition, if they're not in good condition we don't put them out. We also have a church group. If we have a surplus of clothes, there is an organization, the world wide group of people that work for a church.

CE: There's a need, then, for the materials that you can't use.

HC: Yes, and they will come and take sacks of clothing that they then send around the world.

CE: I have been in the Bargain Box and bought things there, of course, and I am amazed at the diversity of goods you have, from stoves, lamps, you name it, you take anything.

HC: I take anything that has ever been manufactured that comes in to Bargain Box.

CE: Over these last thirty years have there been some things that have been given that you'd care to share with us that are kind of extraordinary or unusual?

HC: Well, yes if I can think what they are, they're things like kitchen, old kitchen utensils that you have never seen and –

CE: Maybe some of them are antiques, literally?

HC: Oh, yes, they really are and we save those things for our antiques. We have an antique show several times a year. We have a silent auction now out for – Which will be on January 22nd. They will bid on it, so that we have some nice things.

CE: Did you ever get – Were you ever given anything that was quite valuable, more than they possibly realized when they gave it to you?

HC: Well, I think one of the interesting pieces of furniture that we had was an old organ. It was a piano and it was a barrel organ is what it was and we sold that for \$3,000 and it was an antique.

CE: When you're in doubt do you call in a special appraiser on that?

HC: Yes, we had an appraiser come in and the gentleman that had given it to us – We give credit to people for their income tax. So, this gentleman who gave us the barrel organ, he gave it to Sunny Hills and we could not sell it for three years. We had to wait so he could take his income tax deduction.

CE: Three years?

HC: Yes, we had to hold it, which we did. Then we sold it for \$3,000.

CE: That's interesting. So it all panned out in his judgment. You get a lot of books, I presume?

HC: Yes, we get beautiful books. And we try to save the better ones, and then we have a book sale all at one time. People seem to give away books if they're breaking up housekeeping or there's been a death in the family and they'll send us any number of books; we get nice books. We have an art show once a year and we save our things for these various occasions.

CE: Where would you hold an art show, not at the Bargain Box?

HC: Oh, yes.

CE: Do you?

HC: We're really regular – We have the best stage hands that can turn the shop from a dry goods store into an antique store and we have beautiful things. We get nice jewelry and furniture, and –

CE: Shoes?

HC: Oh, yes, all kinds of clothing and artifacts, dishes and vases, vases, I should say; some of them, really beautiful.

GM: Tell about the fashion shows that you've had.

CE: You have fashion shows?

HC: Yes. Well, sometimes we have a fashion show.

GM: With their clothes –

HC: We usually have some theme. We have in the past. We had famous movie actresses and we have portrayed them with the clothes, the women wearing the clothes that might fit them. And sometimes a song; we've used that theme, and we've had lots of fun with that. We take the back room and turn it into an auditorium and our women model the clothes.

CE: How long have you been at this present site?

HC: Since 1965.

CE: Are you happy with the site or could you use more room?

HC: Well, I don't think we could take care of any more room. It's about all the working space. We have 10,000 square feet there.

CE: What's the big problem, space to park? Is that a problem?

HC: Yes, it is somewhat of a problem, but there is space on the street, and stores near us, but it works out pretty well. I don't think we could find any place where the rent would be –

CE: The rent sounds very reasonable when you think of the square footage.

HC: It is reasonable and I'm afraid we aren't going to have that when our lease is up. I'm sure we're going to have a higher rent. I know we are. But, still because people know where we are located, we think it's quite valuable to stay where we are.

CE: Yes. What are your hours?

HC: From 10:00 to 4:00 every day but Sunday.

CE: When you open the door I'll bet there's always somebody there.

HC: Especially on Saturday morning.

CE: Why?

HC: We put out toys and we must have at least sometimes fifty people waiting outside to get in in the morning.

CE: Toys. You have certain days?

HC: Well, we put toys out only on Saturday because that's the day parents come with their children and this way we keep the toys from getting scattered and broken by having it just one day a week.

CE: You never have any expense to have anything fixed or any thing like that? Do you get involved in that or clothes being cleaned?

HC: No. We used to have cleaners that would clean so many clothes a month for us, but they have tired of that, too, and so if the clothes are not able to be put out we give them away.

CE: Who determines, a member of your staff, when somebody contributes something, its value?

HC: We have a pricing committee. We have a "New to You" committee. We have a children's committee, and we have –

CE: "New to You," what does that mean?

HC: "New to You" are the better clothes.

CE: I'd better go over there. I'm having trouble finding things to wear.

HC: And these women price once a week, and these are our high priced clothes. They have to be ticketed differently and they have to be – They're marked all most \$2.00 and up.

CE: Do you have any sizes for larger women?

HC: Yes, sold some this week that looked beautiful.

CE: That's what I need. Well, I was just saying, you said that they could take it off their income tax. When do you provide them with – Say, if somebody brings in a whole whatever, do you give them a chit then for the amount?

HC: If they ask for it, otherwise we keep a file the whole year through and we are sending out income tax deductions now. They're going into the mail. We send them out in January.

CE: Do you have customers who regularly contribute to your –

HC: Yes.

CE: I remember one day Doris Schmeidel sent me over there with something, and I had the feeling that maybe she had done that in the past, sent contributions.

HC: Oh, yes, she sends quite regularly. We just keep a running account for people and then we send them an income tax credit.

CE: Who is your competition, might I ask? Is there anybody that you compete against?

HC: Oh, yes. We have St. Vincent de Paul and we have the Marin General Thrift Shop. We have KB's –

CE: KB's Catch All. And now the Cancer Society has a thrift shop.

HC: It doesn't seem to hurt. Maybe it's an era of thrift shop shoppers today.

CE: Well, they're into recycling everything Helen, why not?

HC: Why not clothing? And we have people – We always feel very happy when people come in and say, "I don't know how I would have raised my children without the clothes from Bargain Box." And they're very discriminating but people buy and mend and really just buy piles of clothing for their children.

CE: I think it's great. Everybody is happy when they get a bargain, too. And the prices today are so prohibitive on everything.

HC: And we have lots of linens and draperies and –

CE: Rugs?

HC: Rugs, and also pictures and picture frames.

CE: Equipment?

HC: Yes.

CE: Do you have things that men would be interested in for a shop, like a lathe or tools?

HC: Oh, yes. We have a counter for men and we have – We do take in some electrical appliances, if they work.

CE: Like a vacuum cleaner?

HC: Like a vacuum cleaner or a General Electric washing machine, if they work. Many people change their color scheme or move or have duplicates, then they will send them to us. We have a big business in beds, especially mattresses and springs, and all of those things have to be sent to a sterilizer.

CE: Yes, I see that's one of your operating expenses. And the truck, of course, has to be repaired and maintained.

HC: We're so pleased right now, because we're getting a new truck. One of the foundations is going to provide us with a truck, and so we will have that by March. We wear them out, a truck out, in about three to four years. They get over a 100,000 miles traveling around the county.

CE: Would you take chairs, like wing chairs that need re-upholstering?

HC: Yes.

CE: You mean somebody would buy them and then have them re-upholstered?

HC: Yes, if they're good pieces of furniture to begin with.

CE: Well, then, somebody comes out and makes a judgment whether they – On something like that, would someone from Bargain Box come out?

HC: Yes. Well, our truck drivers become very knowledgeable. If there's something that's been torn up and has broken legs, we can't use it.

CE: Call the Salvation Army.

HC: Though people do think sometimes that we're a good place to get rid of junk. But Salvation Army and Goodwill do employ people and they do a wonderful job.

CE: That's right, so they can use it.

HC: They can use these things. Also they have a call-in now. I've heard them on radio, asking for any type of furniture so that they can keep their men busy in their shops.

CE: Well, now you have an office, I presume, in the Bargain Box, don't you, Helen?

HC: Yes, we have an office there. We spend most of our time on the floor so there's not much time to sit. We have a Council. Maybe you'd like to know how it is run?

CE: Yes.

HC: There are 15 people on the Council and they really are the ones who are responsible to the Bargain Box, for Bargain Box.

CE: Are these people elected?

HC: Yes, they are elected to the Board.

CE: And they kind of serve their apprenticeship and you see if they are worthy of it. Is that how you determine that?

HC: Yes, it's like a board of directors. And the manager is responsible to the Board, and then of course the manager then –

CE: And the manager is the person who is paid?

HC: Yes, she's paid and she takes care of –

End, Side A

CE: What does the Council do then? You have the managers on it, and –

HC: Well, we have people, for instance – We have this special event chairman who takes care of all the antique shows or the art fair, special –

CE: And you get publicity for all these affairs, I presume, in the press?

HC: Yes. And then we have the secretary, and the treasurer makes up the budget for the Bargain Box budget to present to Sunny Hills. We have to work very closely with Sunny Hills; everything has to be okayed by them, okayed by the Finance Committee.

CE: Any expenditures and/or whatever?

HC: Yes. And anything that was too great an expenditure.

CE: You are a member of the Board of Sunny Hills as well as very active with Bargain Box?

HC: Yes.

CE: So you kind of wear two hats?

HC: Yes, it's kind of being a liaison officer between the two. You know what's going on at Sunny Hills that you can interpret for our people at Bargain Box.

CE: Who's on the present Board? Who's the head of the present Board?

HC: The President is Barbara Yetter and Carmen Ferguson is Vice President and right on down.

CE: Do you have any men on your Board?

HC: No, we don't. We would very well like to have some, but they don't seem to have the time to --

CE: Were there men on the Board in the olden days?

HC: Yes, originally there was a Board of Directors of women and there was an Advisory Committee and the Advisory Committee was made up of men, and the Board was made up of women. I thought that was interesting. We've often thought that was a good idea, to use the talent of business people in our community, but we have not gone back to that.

CE: Do you meet at Sunny Hills when you have your Board meetings?

HC: No, we meet right at Bargain Box. We change our work room into a Board of Directors room.

CE: That's a versatile place.

HC: Oh, you don't know how versatile.

CE: I'd like to read here from an article that appeared in *Bay Views* magazine in July of 1981 when they talked about Helen as an energizer. They're quoting Helen, who says, "Volunteer work like this gets into your blood," smiles Helen as she sits in her cubbyhole office at the Bargain Box. Outside her door, Greek music is twanging away while customers browse through the seven shopping areas of the shop." This is an interesting little article. And I am amazed; you do have a lot of energy, Helen.

HC: Oh, I'm not so sure, I give out pretty well. But if you're busy you forget about being tired and –

CE: Well, you're dedicated them, you're very loyal, for thirty years involvement in something like this is extraordinary.

HC: Well, we need the money so badly at Sunny Hills for the work that we do.

CE: Let's talk about it. Let's talk about how this orphanage has evolved to what it is today, Helen. Most people think of it, who don't know, that, "Oh that's that orphanage out there. You know, Captain Dollar had something to do with it." Now, that's the first thing people think. Now there are no more orphans, very few, so to speak, so you have a milestone list in your Board of Directors book that lists some events. To review it, you started in San Rafael and then you moved to the 20-acre farm, and then the farm in 1930 became known as Sunny Hills. And then it was during World War II that the picture sort of changed about the children, or was it a little later?

HC: No, it really was during. Well, broken homes, and families of service men and –

CE: Well, fathers killed in the war and the mothers didn't know how to cope in the world.

HC: Yes. So really it was after the war that – When these children had gone back to their homes and had found places to live that we had to start in with a survey to find out what type of children we should handle.

CE: How did you conduct that survey?

HC: Well, for one thing there is a national organization known as The Child Welfare League of America and their executor came out and talked to us, and told us the needs and what the picture was in the future for agencies like ourselves. So, they really recommended that we cut our school to at least 45 people and have more intensive training and take children that were emotional and had behavioral problems. So, that really meant a whole new picture for us, and that's been the nice thing about Sunny Hills; they never have stood still, they have always advanced to whatever the times need.

CE: Well, you've had a healthy organization, too.

HC: Yes.

CE: If there's a certain parallel here to the March of Dimes. Certainly they had a very effective organization and when they found, through the Salk vaccine, the cure for polio. There was no point in disbanding, per se, and lose all of that wonderful ability to raise money and they went to other needs. Were there, in your

judgment, looking back over thirty years, as many children then who were emotionally troubled as there are today, or did we just not know about them, Helen?

HC: No, there were children that were emotionally handicapped, but not the severe children we have today.

CE: Why is that, in your judgment?

HC: Well, because the world has changed, the people, the fast moving world. And we have the drug problems today.

CE: Oh, I imagine during those '60s it was terrible.

HC: Yes. And the divorce problems, people beat children, children being left with one parent and the parent not being home and the children getting into trouble.

CE: Or having two sets of divorced parents.

HC: What we're doing now is we work with the children as well as with parents, so that we try to get them home as quickly as we can, within a year, if possible.

CE: Oh, a year?

HC: We try. Sometimes it's a year and a half, but the average is about a year.

CE: You must have quite a staff of professional people, or do people get psychiatric help as an outpatient?

HC: Yes, psychologists and psychiatrists will come and visit at Sunny Hills and work with the nurse, a full time employee, and she is there all of the time. And she talks over the cases with the psychologist and psychiatrist.

CE: Do you, as a member of the Board, and those whose heart is in Bargain Box, have to physically frequent Sunny Hills itself?

HC: Well, I'm on the Board of Directors and the Board of Directors all have committees which they serve on and I serve on several committees, like the Finance Committee and –

CE: I mean, are you at the property often?

HC: Yes, once or twice a week. We don't work with the children.

CE: Don't work with the children.

HC: No.

CE: Is there ever a time when the property and the organization is open to the public, like an open house?

HC: Yes. We have, for instance, a graduation day and that's always very nice. Our school is really, is run by the Marin County Superintendent of Schools. They furnish the teachers and we're under their auspices for teaching. We have a graduation once a year that everyone is invited, families and the public are welcome. And there is always a representative from the Superintendent of Schools that gives out the diplomas. It's really a very nice occasion.

GM: How many children in the school?

HC: Well, there are forty children and we have a number of day students, they also attend that school.

CE: Well, it's a million dollar operation a year.

HC: Yes, it is.

CE: In the beginning they were housed in more dormitory style, I understand, but as the years have gone by, do they have little separate tri-plexes or how – Describe the units that the children are in.

HC: We have four cottages and each cottage –

CE: Well, that's sort of like St. Vincent's School for Boys. They have those cottages.

HC: Yes. And we have ten children to a cottage. We can handle ten children to a cottage, and they have their own kitchen and recreation room. So they live as a family in that unit.

CE: Do they have sort of like a senior, I won't say housemother, but somebody who –

HC: Counselors. And they have a counselor around the clock. Someone has to be there at night also. It's an open setting; we don't have a closed setting. But we do have, can have problems, losing our children, going AWOL, and –

CE: Would you say, in retrospect, that the majority of the children have responded to their residence there?

HC: Yes. We're not a hundred percent, but we think that we are 80 percent and we have helped all the children. If we find that they are too hard to handle or maybe they have deeper problems than we realized they might have to go into the Probation Department or some other space.

CE: But you're helping, concerned hands.

CE: Yes, we'll keep them until – If we can help them, we'll keep them.

GM: Boys and girls?

HC: Boys and girls.

GM: And I imagine there have been literally now hundreds of youngsters that have used, taken advantage of that.

HC: Well, yes, because even though we say we have forty children at a time, we are going to have children for lesser times. We do really service a lot of children in a year.

CE: Would there ever be an instance for say a short period of time? Say a mother alone is raising the youngster and she has to go to the hospital for an extensive stay, would you ever take the youngster say for three months until the mother was on her feet again?

HC: No. They don't fit into our setting. They belong in a –

CE: It has to be a longer term?

HC: They would not fit in with our children. They do not belong. Our children are really very disturbed children and they need a lot of help to get them back on their feet again.

CE: Are they mentally other than average?

HC: Well, mental – They're not so mentally deficient.

CE: No, but I mean mentally they're emotionally –

HC: Yes, emotionally they have lots of problems. Terrible things happen in families – murders, beatings – that these children have to overcome. They just need a new start.

CE: I suppose you're always interested when some of your children graduate and move on and succeed in life.

HC: Yes.

CE: Do they come back and – Sort of their home away from home?

HC: Yes, they do come back. Some of them have gone on to college. Of course, that's rather a small group, but they are able to cope with the world. That is our

big aim, is that they are able to go back and fit into society and earn their own living.

CE: When you think how difficult it is for just a so-called well-balanced woman who is widowed and can't cope, sometimes it takes more than months; it takes a couple or three years. She's either been overprotected or for whatever reasons, just think what it must be for a youngster without the strength and the experiences of life and support.

HC: Yes, they're just lost. They become depressed or quiet or they react in a destructive manner. It's really a lot to ask of children.

CE: Breaks your heart, doesn't it?

HC: Yes.

CE: That's what keeps you going, I guess.

HC: Yes.

CE: You think you're tired and you think, "Well, I'm tired and I'm dirty and I don't want to handle one more old book," or, "I don't want to handle another penny," but it certainly costs a lot, doesn't it?

HC: Yes. It's expensive.

CE: When I think of this cost, it's, it's –

HC: You realize what this cost is, though, if these children are allowed to go on for years and years and maybe spending years in prisons or reform schools.

CE: And what that costs us.

HC: And what that costs.

CE: Just think, they're going to put a thousand tents in San Quentin. They don't have enough space, in the baseball field. And this is a preventive, curative means to get youngsters to become healthy human beings.

HC: Yes.

CE: And we can't look at the dollar value. For those who are older and who have gone through the depression, you see these figures, it just blows your mind.

HC: Well, it does. People are very shocked at what it costs until they can understand how many people it takes to run an agency like ours. We get children from all over. We get children from –

CE: How do you get the word? Do people make application to the Social Service Agency?

HC: Yes, we get a great many children through the Social Welfare, through probation departments, the courts –

CE: When Jim Adams was the referee for the Juvenile Court for so long, would he be involved in anything like this?

HC: Yes, if he felt as if a child could – you could do something for a child at Sunny Hills, he would have referred the child to Sunny Hills. And then we have the military organization, CHAMPAS, and –

CE: Yes, I see that. CHAMPAS, I'm familiar with, having worked with the Navy. It's Office of Civilian Help and Medical Program of the Armed Services and it's a medical coverage provided by the government for armed service personnel and their dependents. So, in this case, if there's a dependent youngster who needs help, CHAMPAS money is --

HC: Yes, CHAMPAS money is available. That is really why we have to be accredited by the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Hospitals as a psychiatric facility for the CHAMPAS children.

CE: Well, do you have a hospital or dispensary on this property?

HC: No, we have a dispensary with the nurse but –

CE: Infirmary, a small infirmary?

HC: Yes. Well, we have to show that we have the proper doctors and the proper psychiatrists and the proper setting for these children.

CE: In other words, you have doctors associated in the county who are on call?

HC: Yes.

CE: That will come?

HC: Yes, will come or we take our children to them.

CE: Do you have a group of volunteers who provide a motor pool and that sort of thing?

HC: Yes, we have the – The Junior Auxiliary girls are our young group of girls and they often drive for the doctor's appointments or various appointments.

CE: Do you ever get any employment for your residents or are they able to do things?

HC: Well, we have various phases.

CE: What do young people do today, other than work at McDonalds or babysit? What do they do?

HC: Well, we have different phases. When they first come is number one. They just have to get adjusted. And the second phase – By the time they reach the third phase, they're able to go out into the community. We have children who have worked for the Whistlestop, helped delivering meals, and we have children who have done some babysitting for nurseries that are taking care of children, working mothers' children.

CE: Do they get a small allowance for this?

HC: Yes, they get paid.

CE: So, they have their little spending money.

HC: We have a therapist, a vocational therapist, and this is her job, to see that the children get this kind of therapy. It's important because –

CE: They have to get out in the real world.

HC: They have to get out and find out how to live, otherwise you become just an institution, and have to go out and work. And oftentimes, people in business will hire our children. And after the flood in San Anselmo our therapist, our vocational therapist, had the children all down in San Anselmo helping clean up.

CE: Great.

GM: Wonderful.

CE: There's no greater unifying force when there's a disaster that touches everybody: rich, poor, have, have not, and they're all working together. That's the most marvelous thing anywhere. We all feel better, don't we, when we get in?

HC: We all work together and it's a lot of self-satisfaction.

CE: Do they have, as well as schooling, do they have sort of a recreational hour and sports if they care to?

HC: Yes. We have a – We built Evans Center. It was built in the '60s, early '70s. I believe it is after the on-ground school was built, and then the Evans Center was

built, and that was money that was donated to us from a family to build a building in Mr. Evans' name.

GM: What Evans?

HC: I don't recall. It was not our local Evans.

CE: No.

HC: They were from Oakland, I believe.

CE: Do you get many bequests, Helen, by the way? Have you had many endowments or bequests?

HC: Yes, we get some, not as many as we'd like for an endowment fund, but we do get quite a few.

CE: Has the San Francisco Foundation been of any support to you?

HC: Well, they have done some work for us over the years, especially the San Francisco Foundation, moreso than the Buck Foundation. But, at present we are having a little trouble trying to understand each other because the Buck Foundation has an idea that organizations from the various group homes and various children organizations that have been created should all work together and ask for the same thing. We're a different type of an agency.

CE: Mrs. Martinelli and I went to a seminar and they had a lot of historical societies you know, get all together. Well, you can't do that. They all have different missions. What is your greatest need, funding?

HC: Funding.

CE: To support this mission of Sunny Hills?

HC: Right. That's our big interest, is to try to support ourselves as much as we can without federal aid because it looks as if we will get federal aid less and less.

CE: That seems to be true of everything.

HC: Yes, of all of our social programs today.

CE: And as long as the current administration is in office, you know, they seem to want everybody to bite the bullet in the private sector to get more involved. But when you think of the age of this organization, gosh, it's almost 95 years old, isn't it?

HC: 89 now.

CE: Near the century mark.

HC: We have a new program which I think I should tell you about; it's called the SOS program.

CE: SOS, Schools on Sites, support service.

HC: Yes, and we're very excited about this, and this is what we would like the Buck Foundation to help us fund.

CE: What does it do?

HC: It furnishes two social workers to a grammar school in San Rafael, Davidson, and these two – In this case, it's a girl and a boy with both an education and a social welfare degree and so that they really are well qualified to help these children. And they help as many as 50 children a month. They work with these children if they're having trouble academically or they're having trouble staying in school, or –

CE: Oh, to preclude the next step of possibly having to come to Sunny Hills?

HC: That's right, to keep them out of institutions, or agencies. And we –

CE: That seems like a healthy direction for your organization.

HC: We think – You have two people working, and they’re working with, say, 50 children a month and they’re working with their parents also. You’re covering lots more ground than what we can do at Sunny Hills with the type of children we have.

GM: Does that school take care of the children from the Canal area?

HC: Well, no. Davidson – I don’t know whether they do go – Most of them, I think, do go to Davidson from the Canal area. So this young boy and girl have done very well. They’re very fine people, and this is what we’d like, to put two people in all the schools in Marin County, particularly San Rafael High because these children from Davidson will go to San Rafael High and we could follow through on them.

CE: I’m interested in your financial report of 1981 and ‘2. United Way does give you a little.

HC: Yes, we do get a little money from the United Way.

CE: And these government agencies – When you say “government agencies,” do you mean like this CHAMPAS and –

HC: Yes, And welfare, state welfare.

CE: You did get \$21,000 in a grant? Was that from the San Francisco Foundation, or individuals?

HC: What year is that, Carla?

CE: 1981 and ‘2, total revenue.

HC: Yes, we got a grant for the vocational therapist. You know what most of the foundations – You have a pilot program and they finance that and then you take it over from there.

CE: It sounds like a tremendous operation. You must have an office staff of good size up there at the –

HC: We do, we have bookkeepers and we have a –

CE: In-residence vocational people?

HC: Vocational people. That’s just for day-residents.

CE: Day-residents.

HC: For the administration building, yes.

CE: How many buildings are there now? You have the cottages and you have the administration building.

HC: Yes. And the administration building has the gymnasium in it and a Board of Directors Room. And we have the school building which is set up for school and workshops.

CE: You have workshops?

HC: Yes, wood workshop and –

CE: Oh, you do. You do provide vocational training, then, for the boys who want it?

HC: Yes, yes. Then we have the Evans Building, which is really a big building, big play area, as well. We have a photography room. We have ceramics and music, practice for music; they give them lessons if they have talent.

CE: These residential youngsters, that’s like going off to college. They’re there, a boarding school; they are there.

HC: Yes, they are there.

CE: You have to take care of all their needs. Do you have a tremendous cafeteria?
HC: No, they cook in their own cottage. We have a cook and she plans the meals and takes the food or sometimes cooks certain things but they eat in their own dining room.

CE: Do they have entrée to television?
HC: Yes, all the buildings, all the cottages, have a television room and they have a library and they have games. The boys most all have a pool table, even. That's been given to us, or something.

CE: And I suppose they're trained by somebody how to make beds and be self-sufficient. I don't know what you'd call that, housemother or –
HC: Well, they have chores. They have chores in their own cottages. We have a swimming pool there for the summer time, and the children are taken on camping trips all the time, too.

CE: Do they have any appreciation, really, of what they have, Helen?
HC: Well, I think before – Not when they come in, but by the time they leave, many of them, many of them have probably wanted to run away or tried to run away, but by the time they're ready to leave, they'll leave very reluctantly. They're afraid, almost, to go back, afraid they won't. So we're trying to develop more and more aftercare so that they can come back for support.

CE: Well, that's a good – You have a program on that, aftercare?
HC: Yes we have an aftercare program now.

CE: Do they ever go down to work at Bargain Box? You could use some down there.
HC: We can but sometimes they take an awful lot of directing, and we don't really have the time to do it.

CE: Well, I suppose they have a short attention span that's magnified.
HC: Yes, especially in the beginning, until they learn how to work and concentrate.

CE: How is their hunger for affection satisfied? Is there just the understanding, loving staff?
HC: Yes, living in a group home and they have all kinds of talk sessions.

CE: They rap.
HC: Rap sessions, they even have a rap room. But the counselors are the ones that give them that attention and love, that live with them all the time.

GM: What about taxes? Do you have –
HC: No, because we are a charitable organization, we are tax free.

CE: Well, Helen, I think it's an extraordinary thing you have been involved in, and I understand that your children have benefited from Bargain Box, and you have grandchildren who have picked out their first furniture there and I think it's the highest tribute to you and your dedicated years of service.

HC: Well, I think mostly we're pleased to think that we can serve the public and that we can help the people that need it in the community.

CE: Our tape is coming to an end, and I want to thank you again, Helen Caletti, for sharing with us this most fascinating story of Bargain Box. Thank you so much.