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**INTERVIEW WITH KATHERINE SOLOMONS LILIENTHAL**

by Carla Ehat, Anne Kent, and Lucille Ehat (LE)

August 9, 1980

INTERVIEWEE: Katherine Solomons Lilienthal (KL)

INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE), Anne Kent (AK), and Lucille Ehat (LE)

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TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: Today is Saturday, August 9, 1980. Continuing the Oral History Project of the Moya Library for the California History Room at Civic Center Library, today finds us at the residence of Mrs. Ray Hamilton, at 557 South Eliseo Drive in Greenbrae. Joining me today is Mrs. Thomas Kent. We are going to have the pleasure this afternoon of chatting with Katherine Solomons Lilienthal, who resides at 2201 Pacific Avenue in San Francisco. Katherine is the daughter of Lucius Solomons, well-known San Francisco attorney, and the wife of Arthur Gerstle Lilienthal. Her husband was the son of Bertha Gerstle and John Leo Lilienthal. The Solomons, the Gerstle Lilienthal families, are well-known early-San Francisco families, and all share the love of Marin County. The Solomons and Lilienthals have built their summer homes in Larkspur in the early years of this century. Katherine Solomons Lilienthal spent many summers of her childhood in Larkspur and Marin, and hopefully will share with us today some of her reminiscences of the genial, gentle ambience of summertime 70 years ago. But first, let's start at the beginning, Kay. Tell us about your family, your mother and your father, and where they were born and what brought your forbearers to California.

KL: Well, both my mother and father were born in San Francisco. My father's family, his father, was born in Albany, and his mother was born in Germany, but brought to the United States as a child by her father. She spent her early years in Philadelphia and then moved, I don't know exactly when, to California where she met Sashious Gerschum Solomons, my grandfather, the one who was born in Albany. I never met my grandfather. He died long before I was married. My Grandmother Solomons lived in San

San Francisco where she was a schoolteacher. In fact, I believe she was Principal of one of the early San Francisco grammar schools. She then moved to Berkeley to live with my Aunt Adele, who was Mrs. Meyer Jaffa. Professor Jaffa was connected with the University of California in the Agricultural Department. My mother's father was born in New York, as was her mother. My grandfather, whose name was Jacob Frank, ran away from home at the age of sixteen and joined the Union Army. We have, although now it is in the Library of Congress, his original diary, which he kept during the Civil War, which was very pathetic. It was mostly about what he didn't get to eat. I don't actually know when he came to San Francisco, but he went into the paper business, I believe. My grandmother, whose name was Henrietta Numere, came around the Horn with her family. I don't know the date off hand. I could probably find it. Her mother died here in San Francisco. I never knew her, but I knew slightly my great-grandfather, Henry Numere. I remember that my grandmother insisted that I learn some German so I could talk with him. He died here in San Francisco.

CE: Did you ever learn what part of Germany they came from, Kay?

KL: I'm almost sure Bavaria. My Grandmother Solomons, I know, came – Most of the German Jews who came to America in the early days were from Bavaria. For instance, Grandma Gerstle's whole family came from Ichenhausen; that you know already, and her sister, Mrs. Sloss.

CE: That I know, yes.

KL: Most of them came from Bavaria, the southern part of Germany. What else would you like to know about our family?

CE: All right. Your mother, then, was born in San Francisco?

KL: Yes. She had one sister and a brother. My father had rather a larger family, of whom you have heard, about of one of whom you have heard, my Aunt Salina, who was a friend of the Kents, who lived to be 79 and who lived on – What's the name of the little street in Kentfield where her little houses were?

CE: Was that McAllister Park?

KL: Yes, McAllister Drive. She died at the age of 79. But, my mother's sister, whose name was Josephine Sultan, and her husband and her daughter, Erna, came to Larkspur and for one summer and stayed at a boarding house run by a Mrs. Martin in the Larkspur Canyon.

CE: And they liked it.

KL: They liked it. And my parents brought me, then four or five years old, over to that boarding house. We didn't stay there. And my father decided Larkspur was the place where he would like to spend the summer. He contacted C. W. Wright, whom you know, and we were taken up the hill above the canyon and my father bought a lot for \$800 and started to build. The house, which I tell you is still standing today, was built in six weeks, cost \$1,200. Then my father bought a lot on either side to protect his interest. I was the only child at that time. So the house was built with one little bathroom, two bedrooms, and the big porch, kitchen and the back porch. But they put up a platform in the front part of the lot and after the other children were born, all the children and my father slept in the tent, and the rest of us on the porch. Bedrooms were only used to dress and undress. Eventually a second bathroom was built on part of the porch, when the other children came along. And with the exception of a new back porch, which my husband

and I eventually put on, the house is the same as it was in 1902. But being made of redwood, never had any termites nor dry rot.

CE: Would your father, when you went over in the summer, would he commute to the city?

KL: Oh, my, yes, he would commute to the city.

CE: And he was practicing law at that time?

KL: He practiced law. And would you like me to jump to the earthquake?

CE: Well, that's not too far to jump. You were eight, nine?

KL: I was nine years old. We all loved Larkspur so much that every time we had a week's vacation we went to Larkspur. In the meantime, my father had built three other houses, which were then rented to friends of ours.

CE: You were sort of the pioneers on that whole hill.

KL: The pioneers of that hill. Only the Kraners were there before us, and they lived back where, I think, one of the Burgeon family still lives; that was the original Kraner house. So, the week of the 18th of April 1906 being Easter vacation, we were in Larkspur. So, my sister, Edith Green, was then two years old. Oh, I forgot to mention that in our house in Larkspur was a very steep staircase that went to the attic, where, when we were lucky enough to have help, the maid slept. So, at 5:15 on the morning of the 18th of April, our house began to sway. My mother, who as I told you was a very large woman, came out of the bedroom – she didn't care to sleep on the porch – came through the living room where I was sleeping on a couch. I woke up and I said, "Momma, there's an awful windstorm," because the house used to sway in the wind. She said, "No, it's an earthquake." I said, "What's an earthquake?" She said, "An earthquake is an earthquake." It lasted long enough for her to go up those steep steps, bring the two-year-old who was sleeping up with the maid, I guess, down the steps and it was still shaking. The only thing that happened in that house – We had – Remember the old kitchen safes? Before coolers? Well, the door of that slid open and something slid out on the kitchen floor. Period, the end.

CE: In other words it just took it, swaying –

KL: It swayed. The redwood adjusts very beautifully.

CE: As a child, were you frightened, Kay?

KL: No, we were excited. I was excited. And my cousin –

CE: Was your father at home?

KL: No, because it was a Wednesday.

CE: It was a Wednesday. He was at work.

KL: He was at work. And, of course, his office was demolished. I don't remember how he got home. Anyhow, the neighbors woke up, of course. Everybody went out on their porches, and at that time we could see the red glow of the fire. Well, we stayed in Larkspur until December of that year. My father was eventually able to get over – There are quite a few things that are hazy during that time.

CE: Well, there were a lot of enterprising things going on. Men would hire skiffs. They would get boats. They'd do anything.

KL: My father eventually hired a launch, and got Aunt Salina and his mother and brought them over to Marin, and I guess my Grandmother Solomons – we didn't have room – went up and stayed with Aunt Salina in her camp for awhile. I am hazy in some

of those things, being spring. But I remember, then, staying there until December. My father – Eventually, commuting was allowed again, the trains and the boats.

CE: Well, Kay, back up a moment. Where was the family home then? On Laguna Street?

KL: My grandfather and my grandmother and my aunt and uncle and my cousin Erna were living on Laguna Street. 1807 it was in those days, and then when they began changing numbers, it became 1819, which it is today.

CE: And that was the family home?

KL: Their family home. We had rented. My father had rented a house across the street on Laguna – I don't remember the number – which we were living in for a year or two. We had been living before that on Scott Street, in flats that belonged to my Grandmother Solomons, and that's where my next sister was born, in that place in 1904.

CE: Did you go back to that house?

KL: Back to those flats? No. We moved out of those flats into this other one on Laguna Street, which we rented, temporarily. My grandfather and grandmother – Nothing was harmed. You see, anything west of Van Ness Avenue, of course, was spared in the fire and all that happened in that Laguna Street house was that bricks of the chimney fell down and you couldn't cook. And my grandfather, who was a fiery fellow and a wonderful cook, rigged up a stove in the street, and it seems that that became against the law, and the policeman – This is what my grandfather told us.

CE: Which grandfather is this?

KL: Grandfather Frank. He's the only one I knew. I never knew Jacob J. Frank, the one who had been in the Union Army. So he was cooking a stew, and the policeman came, and he said, "You can't cook on the streets. It's against the –" They made these fire rules, you know. And my grandfather started to fight with him and the policeman kicked over his Mulligan Stew and my grandfather was furious. He had an awful temper. And he was almost put in jail, but he wasn't. He died that fall. My father eventually used the house across the street for his office, the one we had rented, until he could find another place. Well, we lived high on the hog, as the saying goes, in Larkspur, because we had many friends in surrounding counties that thought we were starving over there, so food was sent.

CE: They sent over care packages.

KL: And my uncle – Then he and my aunt and my cousin eventually got over to Larkspur and stayed with us, and he hired a horse and wagon and drove around picking up these things. But we had a wonderful time.

CE: Why did you stay until December? Your father thought it best to keep you out of the city while they were –

KL: Well, he was using that place as his office. My grandfather had died and my aunt then became desperately sick with cancer. She died at 37 in 1907, and – I was only nine, ten that summer, and Erna, my cousin, was fourteen. When commuting was feasible, Girls' High School re-opened, and she commuted to high school, I think, and I must have started commuting with the San Rafael gang to old Pacific Heights, because at that time I was ten and I don't think I went – I may have gone for a few weeks to the Larkspur School at that time.

CE: When you refer to the San Rafael gang, what do you mean?

KL: This was Louie Sloss, Jack Lilienthal, and Leon Sloss, who was a year younger than I, and he was my pet, and he eventually married Eleanor Fleishhacker, my husband's first cousin, and –

CE: Is their son Mortimer?

KL: No, Eleanor's brother was Mortimer. And Leon Sloss married Eleanor Fleishhacker, and my sister's daughter, Virginia Green, is married to Leon the Third. So, all our grandchildren are triply, quadruply, related. That's why we've kept up these –

CE: Very good. Now, let's get you back to Larkspur now. I'd like you to tell us if you would, as a young girl of eight or nine, ten, how did you amuse yourself in the summer here?

KL: Well, we did lots of hiking. It was hot; swimming, mostly, and hiking.

CE: Down in the slough?

KL: In the slough.

CE: Your parents let you swim in the slough?

KL: My father, everybody. It was clean then. So what did we care about the houseboats floating all over? Nobody ever thought about those things in those days.

CE: No.

KL: Before Bon Aire was built. And what does it say? I just came across that picture. When was that built? Was their swimming pool –

CE: You mean the Bon Aire itself?

KL: The Bon Aire pool.

AK: Nobody told us about the pool.

KL: Oh, I've got the pictures of it in the Larkspur – I could get some of those.

CE: Great. Well, tell us about – You mentioned earlier you use to go down and swim at Hill's Boathouse. Would you tell us where that is?

KL: Well, that was the end, apparently, of the second boardwalk.

CE: Opposite Escalle's.

KL: Opposite Escalle's.

CE: Sort of pointing toward where Marin General is today? Hospital?

KL: Where Bon Aire was. So, we would think nothing of hiking down and swimming in the slough. My mother was a magnificent swimmer. She used to take us, I guess, as little kids, to Capitola. She once told me that she nearly lost me in the surf at the age of two, but I survived and liked it. So my father use to take us, and we would go out in the rowboat and Hill must have had a little dock there that we could – We didn't dive –

CE: Hill's Boat House was on the –

KL: Was on the west side of the slough. S-l-o-u-g-h.

CE: Now, what did it mean? They'd rent skiffs to you?

KL: Rowboats.

CE: Do you remember what they charged?

AK: Excuse me, that's Number 1 Boardwalk right there.

CE: Well, it's Number 2, the one nearest Safeway today. Do you have any idea what they charged then to rent a boat, a skiff?

KL: No.

CE: What, would you go down, dressed? With your bathing suit and change down there?

KL: He had dressing rooms. Hill's Boathouse had dressing rooms, so we'd bring our bathing suits down – We didn't – There's such cute picture of me in overalls and things.

CE: Okay, we'll get them.

KL: So, whatever we had on at the time. We didn't have shorts, you know, so I guess we had dresses, but we'd dress and undress in Hill's Boathouse. And my father taught me and my cousin, Erna, to swim.

CE: Down there?

KL: Down there in that slough. Right, breaststroke. And we used to go down there. And all through the years – Then when they built – I wish we could find out when that Bon Aire was built. By that time I was pretty well grown. We'd come back from Europe and I have pictures of lots of my friends over there, but Hill's Boathouse was long gone, and we would hike over. By that time they had built – I guess the road that comes here now.

AK: What I want to know – What was the bridge like? What kind of bridge was it? We have not been able to find out.

KL: I think it was just a footbridge.

AK: I think so, too.

CE: Well, I know it was built – It was going in 1900. And here's a little advertisement for the hotel, Kay.

KL: Yes, but the swimming pool was not built then, because we would have swam in that pool rather than the slough after so many houseboats came.

CE: Well, you know why the houseboats came, Kay? Could you corroborate this for us? We understand that when Belvedere became very posh. And Mrs. Kent and I interviewed Winifred Bridge Allen. And a lot of those houseboats were floating in Belvedere Cove where the San Francisco Yacht Club – And then when Belvedere got very posh they wanted those out. So they were towed and pulled around and a lot of them wound up in the Corte Madera slough.

KL: That's right. Well, there were not many of them that I remember, you know, in the real early days. Then after the pool was built – Then when my friends, when the teenagers and the Larkspur dancers, you know, used to come, we would hike over there; and I have pictures of that pool.

AK: Excuse me. May I interrupt? This is much earlier, much earlier, a generation before you, but, you see, there were no houseboats in those days, and here are bath houses that belonged to everybody.

CE: Yes, Camp Ho Ho.

KL: Oh, yes, well, they were gone.

AK: The old McAllister and the Ho Ho and the Dibblees and the Kents all had bath houses on that same slough.

KL: On that same slough! Well, they were gone, you see, before I was nine.

CE: We have an 1890 photo, for example, Kay, of Camp Ho Ho: ladies doing their thing. Isn't that charming?

KL: Oh, that's wonderful. Well, that's the kind of –

CE: Life that you had.

KL: Yes, rowboats. You know what that looks like?

CE: What?

KL: No, I'm wrong. I was going to say like parts of Palm Hill before it had any palms or anything. No, this is around Greenbrae.

CE: That's Greenbrae area.

KL: That's right.

AK: And this is from the other side. This is from Ho Ho looking out toward the hotel.

CE: Toward the north.

KL: Sure, then there is a bridge there.

AK: But not much of one.

CE: Kay, I must ask you, now, you mentioned in the book *Larkspur Past and Present*, that you used to go down to Escalle's and have a Queen Charlotte.

KL: That's right.

CE: Now, tell us about Escalle's.

KL: The Escalle family pre-dated our time, I'm sure, and they had a lovely vineyard. I think they made their own wine. I'm not sure about it.

CE: Oh, sure they did. They used to deliver it.

KL: John Escalle – And, of course, we were very friendly with all of them.

CE: Did you meet him?

KL: Oh, yes, I knew him very well. Eventually, they built the little brick building and they had a bar.

CE: Wasn't that the Limerick Inn? Didn't they call it that?

KL: That I have no –

CE: Well, we have heard that name bandied around.

KL: That may be. As far as we were concerned, it was Escalle's, that's all. And we used to go there and Queen Charlotte was a raspberry soda that came in bottles. And even when my teenager friends used to come, none of us drank liquor, but we would hike to the swimming pool and then hike over to Escalle, and have a cold drink of some kind, and hike all the way back to Larkspur and up our hill. We didn't have any cars. I think that's one reason we were so healthy.

CE: Was a Queen Charlotte sort of like a Shirley Temple today?

KL: No, it came in a bottle. It was strawberry or raspberry soda; that's what it was.

That's it. That's the way it was. Now, this is no longer there, nor that.

CE: We're looking at a photograph of Escalle's. And the vineyard – There was a vineyard disease that killed all the vines and they got out of it.

KL: Yes, I imagine so, and they got out of it. But you can see it here, and here, on the hill.

CE: How far did you roam as a youngster?

LE: Wasn't Escalle a winery?

CE: Escalle was a winery, yes. She mentioned that. And before that, initially, it was a brickyard and many of the buildings in San Francisco were built from bricks taken right out of that hill.

KL: Yes.

CE: Where else would you wander as youngsters?

KL: Well, we couldn't wander far.

CE: Did you get to Kentfield?

KL: I remember dancing around the May Pole. The grammar school which was named for your grandmother-in-law –

AK: Great-Grandma Adeline.

KL: Wouldn't she be your grandmother-in-law?

CE: Yes, that's right.

KL: I can remember that the different schools – I must have been still going to the Larkspur School, maybe in the fourth grade, for a few months until the commuting started; that's a little hazy. But I remember the only time in my life I ever danced around a May Pole. They must have taken us in Charlie Rice's wagon, from the school. That's the only way we could – Because when we had company, my mother would phone Charlie Rice, and say, "Get the surrey down to the train," and he would bring them up to the house, and that was before anybody built on that lot, back of us, which wasn't built until we were in Europe in 1912, and built by friends of my parents. And my father was furious they built that big three-story house.

CE: Yes, it wasn't in keeping with anything.

KL: Right against our fence.

AK: Here's – dancing, but that's later.

KL: But that's what I remember. I was ten years old.

CE: Ten years old when you did that.

KL: My birthday is in July. Earthquake was in April, so I became ten years old.

CE: Mrs. Kent, when did that May Pole Dance start?

AK: In 1907, I guess, and went on all the time –

CE: And all the schools would participate.

AK: Every school in Marin; they practiced all the year.

KL: Well, it must have been before 1907 if I went up there in 19 –

CE: Maybe.

KL: I didn't go to the Larkspur School after the earthquake. You know, when we –

AK: Maybe you were the very first one.

CE: Maybe she was the first year.

KL: It might have been. But, you see, by December we moved back to the city and then by the time the next summer came along, I was almost eleven, and I was at Pacific Heights School. And I remember the teachers and we were all commuting. But I could have gone to the Larkspur School for those months, in 1906. I have a vague memory of the fourth or fifth grade teacher.

CE: You do?

KL: Mrs. Smith was the first grade teacher. But I remember George Hall.

CE: Do you?

KL: The principal. And Mary Hall was a good friend of mine. Happy memories. It was a wonderful time. So, we didn't get very far because nobody had a car. We went on a train.

CE: All right, now you had these other relationships: the Slosses and the Gerstles. Did you go over to San Rafael and visit them at that time in your life?

KL: No. I knew them.

CE: Were they, too, distantly related, to a degree?

KL: No, but the only ones I knew were the younger members of the family, you see. Now, my mother knew some of the Gerstle women, especially Mrs. Mack, the mother of Gerstle; and I never knew her, but my mother knew her. You see, the Jewish community in San Francisco was fairly small, and they knew each other from the synagogues and

that kind of thing, but I didn't really know any of the older members of the family until I knew Arthur.

CE: All right, then, when you knew Arthur, and I'm jumping ahead a little, then did you visit Violet Terrace?

KL: Sure, of course. I had told you that my father had built three other houses, and after we were married we had the use of one of them, and we used to spend our summers. And every Friday night we went by train to San Rafael. and dear old Gould, Grandma's chauffeur, would meet us at the train, and we would gorge ourselves on Friday night on old family dinners.

CE: At Violet Terrace?

KL: At Violet Terrace, and then Gould would take us back to the train, and we would go home and hike up from Baltimore Park. This was when I was first married and pregnant. But that walk, that went on for several years.

CE: I see. Well, getting back to Larkspur and its environs, did you get to Kentfield? Is that about as far as –

KL: Yes, we got to Kentfield.

CE: Did you ever see Hall McAllister's old house?

KL: Well, yes, because as Mrs. Kent reminded me that my Aunt Salinea built that house and built a second one. But this was not till after – I'm pretty sure I was married by that time.

CE: All right, let's get you back to school and in the city. Where did you go to school?

KL: To Pacific Heights School. And – Which is right around the corner from where I live now. But we used to commute by boat; we did our homework on the boat. And the Sacramento Cable Car ran to the ferry in those days. And Leon Sloss, Jacqueline and Louie and various other ones in my group, don't remember, we would all get on the cable car and we would get off at Webster Street and we would walk the three blocks.

End, Side A

CE: Okay, then what would you do?

KL: Well, then after school we would get on the cable car again, go back to the ferry, and go home. This went on, I think, well into September.

CE: Great times.

KL: Then after I graduated from Pacific Heights Grammar School, eighth grade, I started in at Girls' High School in September of 1911, that would be.

CE: Do you remember who the head of the school was?

KL: Yes, Dr. A. W. Scott was the principal. We had the most wonderful teachers.

Girls' High in those days was absolutely tops, tops school. We had Mary Craig who was the mother of our Congresswoman Florence Kahn was the grand dame and the martinet; everybody was scared to death of her, history teacher.

CE: Where was Girls' High located then?

KL: Girls' High was located – The building is still there, on Geary and Scott. It is now, I think, a middle, what they call a middle school. We had Evelyn Armour as English teacher, and anybody who ever studied English with Evelyn Armour spoke English, not American.

CE: And they could write an essay that with expertise.

KL: Oh, could they. Now, I was only in that school from September until March of 1912, when my father decided to take us all to Europe if my Mother promised to stay long enough to get some languages.

CE: Now, you told us over luncheon of that experience, but could you recap that briefly for us?

KL: Well, very briefly.

CE: You were there in Europe for a year and a half?

KL: Yes. My father, who was an attorney, said he would come and go. In those days we didn't have travelers' checks and letters of credit, so we departed for Europe on the train on the 10th of March, 1912; took four days to get to the east. We stayed a week in New York, and we were very fortunate because we had friends who owned the big theater in San Francisco, and we got passes to all the shows in New York. And every time I read about Ina Claire in a paper, I think of her as the Quaker girl we saw in her original success in New York in 1912. Well, we left on the *George Washington*, which was – I forget what steamship line that was, the old *George Washington*. And it took us eight days to get to Plymouth. And we traveled in England, and then we went all through Germany.

CE: How old were you then?

KL: Fourteen, I was fourteen. While my father was still with us, we traveled all through Germany, and then – Oh, we had been in Holland, also, and from Germany we went to Paris, and we stayed in Paris for a few weeks. My father returned to America and my mother and my sisters and my cousin and I went to Lausanne where we lived in the pension. And this might be interesting: we paid five Swiss francs, which at that time was one dollar per person a day, which included three very good meals and tea and a French lesson every day. And there was a young German woman and those who wanted, also, got a German lesson.

CE: So you had a French and German lessons, as well as your lodging, and the pension and everything?

KL: One dollar per day, otherwise we couldn't have stayed there because we didn't have that money.

CE: Was that your first exposure to the French language?

KL: Yes, definitely. This must have been in the month of May by this time. Then we went to Lucerne for a month, and one of the teachers from the school went along with us. And we returned to Lausanne, I believe, in September, and by that time I knew enough French to be taken into the – which is still in existence in Lausanne, where I spent a scholastic year, nine months. At Christmastime, my father came over again and we did Italy. I went back to – and stayed there until June of 1913.

CE: You mentioned earlier, at luncheon, your exposure in Italy through your father.

KL: Oh, yes, that was wonderful. We spent a month in Rome, and by that time I was fifteen.

CE: And your father is very interested in –

KL: My father was an orator.

CE: Was a scholar, too, and he was interested in the history and the culture of Italy.

KL: Right, so he would take us to the Coliseum, take us to the Forum, and expound Cicero's speeches, and we really had a wonderful experience in Europe seeing all those different countries. Then, my mother finally took an apartment in Nice and my two sisters

went to a French day convent so that they got the real French accent, and my next sister who was then nine or ten –

CE: What is her name?

KL: To this day Edith Greene speaks perfect French. She kept it up all through high school.

CE: Now, you mentioned earlier, at luncheon, about your father's connection with B'nai Brith. Was it during this period that he was at Berlin, representing –

KL: Yes. He was International Vice President of B'nai Brith. That was how we got to Europe. The convention was in Berlin, of all places.

CE: And you were there a year and a half?

KL: A year and a half, and then we came back. And I took myself to Girls' High School – I was then sixteen – and they said, "We're very sorry, Katherine, but we cannot take you back because you are ahead in languages. You're completely behind in mathematics, and you don't know any American history." Therefore, I went to Miss Mureson's, a private school in San Francisco for two years.

CE: Now where was Miss Mureson's located?

KL: Miss Mureson rented a house. She didn't own it. It's still standing opposite Lafayette Square. No, pardon me. This is my instant forgettery. The Alta Plaza.

CE: Alta Plaza.

KL: Its on Pierce and Clay Street. And Miss Mureson herself was a brilliant woman, and she had some very good teachers.

CE: There were quite a few Marin families who sent their children there. Doris Schmiedell went there.

KL: And I was able to keep up my French and resume my Latin, which I had started at Girls' High. And I stayed there for two years, and I think by that time the money had run out, and I was eighteen, and I thought I was ready to stop school.

CE: Is it this point in your life that you met Arthur?

KL: At this point in my life – Now, this would be in 1915.

CE: 1915, the time of the Exposition.

KL: The time of the Exposition. I was about seventeen when it started, and I think I met Arthur when I was about eighteen. As a matter of fact, he had met my parents through mutual friends, and had become very much attached to my family. We lived a rather Bohemian life, and he was very much taken with my two little sisters. And he used to come and take them to the movies. I didn't want to have anything to do with such an old man, he being ten years older than I. Well, eventually we got together and then I was nineteen, and in March 1917, we were married.

AK: And where did you live then?

KL: Well, we lived in a flat on Jackson Street, and our first daughter was born in 1918, but we still were spending the summers in Larkspur in one of the houses my father had built up on the hill.

CE: Well, by then had the Lilienthals entered the picture in Larkspur with their – Did not the Lilienthals have a summer home? No.

KL: No. But, Arthur and I spent our summers there until about, somewhere in the 1920s. Our youngest daughter wasn't well, and we decided we did not want to live in the city anymore. We wanted to live in the suburbs all year round, and we moved to San

Mateo because the Larkspur houses was not really good for winter living; they were summer homes.

CE: Well, was it after your marriage to Arthur that you became acquainted with the Lilienthal family, and the Gerstles, and all, and –

KL: Well, as soon as we were married, of course, I was taken right in to the bosom of the family, especially with little Grandma.

CE: Well, tell us a little bit of the experience of your visits to Violet Terrace, then.

KL: Well –

CE: What is your first remembrances of going to San Rafael?

KL: Well, my first remembrance was of those Friday night dinners.

CE: Was that sort of a command performance, or what?

KL: No, no, they were when we were living in Larkspur, after we were married. But then also as our children grew up – Because we actually lived in Larkspur until – Let me see. Edie was about – Until 1925, when they were three, or four, or five, we used to go up there all the time. Our eldest daughter adored animals and flowers, and she was Bettini's pet.

CE: Now who was Bettini? Paul Bettini's father?

KL: Paul Bettini's father, Cesare Bettini. They had come from Switzerland when he was about seventeen, and he used to take care of the livestock. Some of the kids had ponies and cows, chickens, pigeons. And all the children in the various families – There were three houses. The main house at Violet Terrace was Grandma's house.

CE: Grandma Gerstle.

KL: Grandma Gerstle. There are pictures in there. Then there was what was called Aunt Sophie's house, but other members of the family would come from time to time and share the houses. And then there was the Levison house, which was up near the tennis courts. And as they had four children; they had the house for most of the summer. Then all the kids –

CE: Then there was the Slosses, weren't there?

KL: Well, they were on their own property.

CE: On their own property. That was next door, wasn't it?

KL: Next door, yes. But they didn't come over – By this time there were loads and loads of grandchildren, of Grandma Gerstle with her five daughters and two sons, and all of the children used to spend their time with Bettini. He would let them help with the cows, and gather the eggs, and – My oldest daughter always said that that's where she got her love of farming, so-called farming, livestock.

AK: He was a born teacher, that man.

KL: He was a darling.

CE: Did she go into this –

KL: And she always said when she grew up, she was going to marry a farmer. Well, she always loved flowers, and in Burlingame we had a garden, and we did not have any – We had a dog or something. But when she grew to college age, she went to Pomona College in Southern California, and took all the botanical sciences that she could get, and one day she said to us, "I'm not getting what I want here. I want to go up to Davis. They have a landscape gardening course." We said, "Fine." We said to both of our daughters, "We don't care where you go to college, or what you take up, but we want you to be fitted to learn something that you can use if you have to earn your living."

CE: So she went to Davis?

KL: She went to Davis and that's where she met her husband. They have now been married almost forty years. He was taking care of the sheep. He worked his way through college by taking care of the sheep, and they became sheep farmers, sheep breeders, eventually.

CE: And they still live in Davis?

KL: They still live in Davis, yes. Our youngest daughter chose Mills College, and she went to Mills for two years and was very happy there. Enjoyed it, but she said, "I'm not learning anything useful here," and she said, "I would like to go to Lux," which is really a high school, but which will take graduates, "and learn to be a medical secretary."

CE: And did she?

KL: She did. She became a medical or dental secretary. And while her husband, whom she married in 1944, was in the Navy, and while he was overseas, she went to work in a doctor's office. So, both the girls really fitted themselves, which they fortunately since their marriage did not have to use. I felt it was necessary. I never went to college. I never learned anything useful except I tutored in French a little bit after I came out of – But, we both felt that it was very necessary for girls as well as boys to know something practical.

CE: Tell me for a moment, would you describe Mrs. Gerstle?

KL: Grandma?

CE: Grandma Gerstle for us.

KL: I can only say that she was one of the most wonderful people I have ever known. She was very little, and she was supposed to have a double stomach. And some of the letters in Gerstle's book quoted – Grandpa Gerstle apparently always treated her sort of like a doll; she looked like a doll. But, she had a mind of her own and a sense of humor. I remember one day taking a ride with her. She must have been 90 at that time, and we went for a ride up towards Petaluma. And there was a big combine working in one of the fields, and she said to me, "I don't like to see all this mechanization. I'm worried about the men who work in the fields. What's going to happen to them?" Now that was way back. She never, never, became senile at all, and she was always thinking of other people, and a wonderful sense of humor. I had a birthday the last year of her life, and we were over in San Rafael. My mother-in-law was there, and Arthur and I, and the children went over for a week or two. So, Pastori's was still in Fairfax. So, Grandma, who, as I say had difficulty with her stomach, but who loved to eat, "We're going to Pastori's for your lunch, and I'm going to order gnocchi." You know the Italian pasta, don't you?

CE: Oh, yes.

KL: I said, "Grandma, you shouldn't." She said, "What's the difference? When I come back I'll get rid of it." Ninety, ninety-one at that time. We went to Pastori's. Everybody who was over there, we all had gnocchi, including Grandma's nurse she had at that time. She came home and got rid of it, and had no ill effects, but she had the joy of eating it. She was a very remarkable person.

CE: Well, I understand they use to come over there in May and stay through October. And the husbands would commute. And they would come with all their help, and everything, and they would be in the house, and very generous about entertaining, and –

KL: Just wonderful.

CE: It was open to everyone, all the family.

KL: Eventually, you see – By the time Grandma died, many of her daughters had moved, had their own homes, and had most of the Peninsula, the Fleishhackers and the Levisons, and nobody wanted to really take over. The houses were old. So, I don't know whether you know anything about Gerstle Company.

CE: I know about the Alaska Commercial Company.

KL: Well, the Alaska Commercial Company, yes. But the Gerstle Company was formed by all, by Grandma's sons, I guess, and – If you're interested the book, I – You read about that, because you may want to incorporate that into it. You see, two of the Gerstle daughters were left widows very young: my mother-in-law was thirty, and Aunt Sophia, who was also married to a Lilienthal, was left with two small children in her thirties. So, the Gerstle Company was formed, as well as there was a Lilienthal Company, so those widows were taken care of and all the money went into the Gerstle Company and was apportioned. Of course, some had more than others. I really am not too familiar with the details. But I do remember after Grandma died there was a meeting of the Gerstle Company and, of course, Arthur represented his mother's interest and Max represented his mother's and Will and Mark, the son's, are still alive; they decided that they would give the whole property to the City of San Rafael and it should be known as the Gerstle Park. One proviso was that the lower houses, as we always called it, which was – Bettini was living in it at that time – would, as long as he lived, that house would be his home.

CE: Well, we interviewed Paul Bettini, the son who was the mayor, and he told us about that wonderful relationship between the Gerstles and his Italian father. He said, "They were so wonderful to my family."

KL: We used to tease Grandma that he was her favorite son.

CE: Oh, really.

KL: He was a wonderful man, a darling man. The last time that we had a family picnic in San Rafael, it was for both Slosses and Gerstles, and Aunt – No, Aunt Allison and Bella were dead then; we had one before they died. But this was the last one, and Paul got up and made a speech, and he was talking about the ones of the family that he had been friendly with, and he said, "Where is Katie May Lilienthal?" Who was my – The way my daughter was named – Because they were the same age, and my daughter had not come, they had been away – And so I had to stand up, and said, "Paul, I'm terribly sorry but Katie May, as you call her, is not around." They were away, and they couldn't come here. "They couldn't get here." I felt very badly about it. But it was really cute because they had been chums as kids.

CE: Well, you know, he told an interesting story about his father who heard about the San Francisco earthquake and decided as a young man he would come to San Francisco. He was a stone mason, and that they would be re-building the city in stone, but he said nobody told his father that there not going to re-build the city in stone.

KL: They didn't have any stone around here.

CE: They had a few bricks. Then he came to Marin and then started building stone walls on a lot of old estates around here.

KL: And his brother went into the business.

CE: And his brother. But Bettini has warm affection for the Gerstle family, I can assure you.

KL: And, of course, all the kids, Alice and the older boy who was a tree surgeon, and the youngest one, my kids grew up with all of them.

CE: Now somewhere, I want to discuss briefly this Alaska Commercial Company.

KL: I have a book.

CE: Well, I want to confirm a few things, if you will, with me. It is my understanding that the Alaska Commercial Company was founded to get – They got permission from the United States government to hunt furs in the Pribilof Islands in the Bearing Sea.

KL: But I think it was – My recollection that it was founded primarily to furnish goods and things for the miners.

CE: Not initially. As I understand it – Now, you may know more about it than I do, but the company, when they were chartered by the United States Government, were given authority to kill 75,000 fur seals a year on St. Paul Island, and 25,000 a year on St. George, and they could only kill seals. Now, the fascinating thing to me, and most historians – When you think of the fact that, at that time, the Gerstle, Sloss influence in this enterprise and the building that they built, Alaska Commercial Company building – They paid the United States government, it is my understanding, in tariffs, if you will, for the privilege of hunting furs in the Pribilof Islands. Over these years that they did this, \$9,000,000 in just tariffs, for the right to hunt seals. Now, when you think of Seward's folly some years later, where we paid \$7,000,000 only for the State of Alaska, can you think of the business acumen of these people at that time?

KL: Well, you know that they started in Sacramento?

CE: Yes, I know that.

KL: You know all that. Well, I have a book written by Lewis Green, who was one of the nephews, and he was a secretary of the Alaska Commercial. And this is a private – It's not really a bound book, but it –

CE: Is it a transcript?

KL: I think it's a transcript, and I'm going to see that you get that, because that would really give the whole story.

CE: You know, so much of our history, Anne, as you know, like the Big Four, started in Sacramento. You take Hopkins and you take –

KL: Yes, because of the start of the gold mining.

AK: That's right.

KL: And the floods came.

CE: And the Crocker's and the Floods. And then get on to the Comstock Lode in the '60s, and then you have another Big Four. You have O'Brien, Flood –

KL: You see, when I said floods, I meant the actually floods that came in Sacramento and drove them out; when the river flooded before the controls. But I will see that you get that book, Lewis Green's book. Gerstle tells a lot about it in his book.

CE: What do you think, in retrospect, about your heritage, is that intangible something, drive, in the makeup of your forbearers, that has brought about such success in their lives? You have verbalized a few things in regard to your own parents and your grandparents. There is certainly a strong sense of family. What other attributes do you, would you care to mention that make these people such an important member of the community, and be so successful, not only monetarily but giving to the community and to become patrons of the arts and do the things that they have done. San Francisco without

the Jewish Community would be a pretty bereft community, and I'm saying this with utmost sincerity.

KL: Well, this is what I was going to say, that I think because most of the original Jews were so kept-down in the countries from which they came, and their only outlet was the synagogue and the Torah, these are the old orthodox Jews, and they were so immersed in their religion because other things were not allowed them, that I think when they got to a country where there was freedom, that they really appreciated it and wanted to share it. And many of them were well-educated, as far as their education could go. But, of course, in Poland and in Russia – It wasn't so bad in Germany in the old days, from what I've learned, and I'm not speaking as an authority.

CE: No, but that happened later in Germany.

KL: Yes, but they were able to get good education in Germany. But I think the ones that came from the little shtetls, as they called them, in middle Europe, were so – They had the intellect, but they had no way of showing it.

CE: And they had an opportunity to flower in this country.

KL: That was the thing. The schools were free. The high schools were free and even the ones that went to college, and no business was shut to them. The first ones, of course, in New York, became peddlers and eventually they began to own their own business. And they became tailors and bringing the younger people out. But the opportunity was there. They were not shut out from anything, and I think that is the real reason that they felt that they had so much in this country that they wanted to share.

CE: Well, do you think it's a question of a simple "thank you" that these Jewish families have been so beneficent to become the patron of so many things that are worthwhile? Endow colleges, to give to the symphony, to give to the arts?

KL: I do think that it's because they have been given the opportunity, and that's the way to show their gratitude. But, you see, in the Jewish tradition, too, the Jews have always taken care of their own; no matter what they had, it was shared. Not only with family, but – That's why they started these benevolence societies, to the poor Jews that were no relation to them whatsoever, and I guess they felt that sharing was the only way.

CE: They were way ahead of themselves. When you think now, because now the attitude is, "We're all brothers. Let's help each other." But they were doing this a hundred years ago, even in this country.

KL: I can remember my father saying to us, "Where are you buying your drugs?" I don't think – He had a friend, it was Herbert DuGann, who had a big – and who was one of my father's clients. But he said, "You have to go to Pinkovitz," and we said, "Who is Pinkovitz?" "Well, that's part of the Romanian family that I just got out here, just brought out here, so support them." And this was the thing. There were very many committees formed. I don't remember the name of this Romanian committee my father had. There were other people involved, of course, and Romania was one of the worst. As a matter of fact, one of the girls I roomed with in the pension was a Jewish girl who was born in Bulgaria. Her family was kicked out of Bulgaria and was living in Romania and she said it was even worse. This was back in 1912. Terrific.

CE: Well, I tell you, Kay, we have to talk further sometime about this whole situation, but I want you to know how appreciative we are today to have you share with us, however briefly, your reminiscences of Marin County, and sharing with us the rich heritage of your family. It has been indeed a pleasure to meet and talk with you today.

KL: Thank you very much, I've enjoyed it.