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INTERVIEW WITH LUCIA SHERMAN GROMME

by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent
September 13, 1976

INTERVIEWEE: Lucia Sherman Gromme (LG)
INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE) and Anne Kent (AK)
DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 13, 1976
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CE: Today is Monday, September 13, 1976. Continuing the Oral History program of the California Room at the Marin County Library at Civic Center, this is Carla Ehat, and joining me today is Mrs. Thomas Kent. We have the pleasure of being at the residence of Lucia Sherman Gromme at number 32 Toussin Avenue, Kentfield, California.

LG: Now you want me to say something?

CE: Now you were born in San Francisco?

LG: I was born in San Francisco in 1901.

CE: Yes.

LG: At my parent's house.

CE: June the 19th.

LG: Yes at 125 Jackson Street. And my mother's mother lived at that time in Ross.

CE: Your mother's mother. What was your mother's name?

LG: My mother's mother was Mrs. Jonathan Osmond Kittle.

CE: I see. And your father's name?

LG: And my father was Doctor Harry Mitchell Sherman.

CE: So your grandparents have the residence in Marin. Would you locate that for us?

LG: In Marin the house of my mother's mother, Mrs. Kittle, was in Ross on what was then called the County Road, right near the station, and it was called Sunnyside. I don't know any other way of –

CE: Well is this the same property where the Marin Art and Garden Center is located today, Lucia?

LG: Yes it is.

CE: Yes.

LG: And there was a little church also there on the County Road. And where the church used to be is now a little park. That was Saint John's Episcopal Church and it was a very small church and not in its present location.

CE: Do you know –

LG: Do you want to know how my grandparents got to Ross? Well I think it was something here.

CE: Well this –

LG: My grandfather –

CE: What did you say? Your grandparents were living in San Francisco.

LG: Right, because Jonathan Kittle, who was my grandfather, had come out from New York to join a firm of Dewitt and something like Harrison.

CE: Dewitt and Harrison.

LG: Was that it? As simple as that?

CE: Yes.

LG: Commission merchants. Then Harrison withdrew or died and his place was taken by Johnathan Kittle. So it became Dewitt, Kittle and Company. And Mr. Kittle represented the firm for some years in New York, and while there he married his partner's cousin, Harriet DeWitt Allen, whose father Lucius H. Allen also came to San Francisco arriving in 1853 and joining another firm of commissions merchants. I'd like to put in a parenthesis here.

CE: Please do.

LG: And say that, of course the commission merchants were very important in a town that was just starting to grow. So they all expected or hoped to make a pile, you know. At least that's the way I look at it.

CE: Well there were many, many commission merchants in San Francisco, as you know. Continue. That's interesting.

LG: Now in the 1860s, Jonathan Kittle brought his young wife and their infant daughter, Lucia, to San Francisco and established a home for them on Rincon Hill.

CE: That would be your mother, Lucia?

LG: That was my mother. And they went by boat to Panama and crossed the Isthmus, and my mother, who was a tiny baby, almost died of Chagres Fever, but she didn't, and we were always so grateful for that. So the Kittles were living on Rincon Hill in San Francisco, and at some time or other Johnathan Kittle discovered the attractions of Ross, which already had some inhabitants. And he bought the house from the Worns.

CE: The George Austin Worns. He bought the entire estate, didn't he, Lucia?

LG: Well it was a lot of property. I don't know if that all belonged to the Worns, or if he added to it.

CE: That was about – That was about 1882, wasn't it?

LG: Don't ask me dates.

CE: I think that's the figure we –

LG: I would say in the 80s.

CE: In the 80s. And then was this a summer residence, or a year round residence?

LG: Well it was a summer residence and then they made it, I think, a year-round residence. I'll tell you what he did. He would drive down to Ross Landing, which is the name that Kentfield used to have, and take a boat there to San Francisco. And I suppose that would be on weekday mornings, and then he would spend the week in San Francisco and then come back for the next weekend.

CE: Did you know your grandfather?

LG: No. My grandfather died in New York City of pneumonia, in about 1880. I don't know when. But I know it was a great shock to everybody, and the family had gone, went east every year and stayed in a hotel there, and –

CE: What is your earliest recollections of Sunnyside?

LG: Oh that is an entirely different subject.

CE: Well, we'd like to have you describe it.

LG: Well I can sure tell you, but –

CE: All right, continue with your story.

LG: I want to ask you, Carla, how much I should tell you, and where I should start, and if you want to know about the earthquake.

CE: Well let's keep with Sunnyside for a bit. He would then –

LG: You want me to stay with Sunnyside.

CE: Just for a bit.

LG: So they lived at Sunnyside, and there were – I don't remember where the various children were born. I know that my mother, Lucia, had been born in Elizabeth, New Jersey. And it was always a shame to her. She thought Elizabeth, New Jersey was really the bottom of the barrel.

CE: She would have preferred to have been born in San Francisco, I presume.

LG: Or New York City.

CE: Or New York.

LG: Or anyplace. Irvington was the place that they lived in New York on the Hudson River and that was a small town named for Washington Irving. Then in due course of time when she was, I think 12 years old, another child came along and that was the first boy.

CE: And what was his name?

LG: And his name was Allen. He was called Allen Irving Kittle. And I suppose he was born in San Francisco, but I don't know.

CE: Were there other children?

LG: Yes. Then there was Isabel, and she later became Mrs. Benjamin H. Dibblee of Ross, and then later there was John who was Jonathan, John Casper, for some reason his name was changed, and that family lived at that place at Sunnyside for many years.

CE: I understand it was used as a residence by the Kittle family for almost fifty years, could that be correct?

LG: Oh I think so.

CE: Did your grandmother live many years after your grandfather's death?

LG: Yes.

CE: She lived to a good age Lucia?

LG: Well I would say so. Let me think. Let me see, I wonder how old she was. She died in San Francisco.

CE: Well we have seen pictures of the original home at Sunnyside that was built by the Worns. Now I understand there was a remodeling and changes made by your family.

LG: This is the remodeled house.

CE: That's the remodeled house. Do you remember –

LG: But the side that was added was all on this side that you don't see in this picture.

CE: That's the curved area; the porch is –

LG: I think the Worn house was very much nicer looking.

CE: Do you?

LG: Yes. And this was painted all a very, sort of a dull gray.

CE: Dull gray.

LG: I never admired it. But it was a large house. It was very large and it had to be painted all one color, I suppose. The Worn House had been painted two colors and it was prettier.

CE: When you went there as a youngster, would it be initially in the summer?

LG: Well we went there every summer, yes, and spent the summer, and also we would go there often on weekends. Of course we took the streetcars and the ferry and the train and then walked up from the station.

CE: Did you have horses in the barn? Did you ride?

LG: Well that was later as I grew older.

CE: Grew older.

LG: My uncles, Uncle Allen and Uncle Jack liked to ride, and they kept riding horses. Of course there had to be horses to pull the carriages anyway. So the vehicle that my grandmother used was a phaeton.

CE: I bet that was a handsome rig.

LG: It was a very comfortable and a very nice looking vehicle. It was black with some sort of shiny things to go over, mud guards, and the steps going up into the main seat were easy to manage, you know. She could get in and out without help. The coachman did not have to get off the seat to –

CE: Do you remember the coachman's name?

LG: Oh there were a great many.

CE: Great many, turnover. Do you remember –

LG: I remember one especially, if you want to –

CE: Yes, what was his name?

LG: One that was there at the time of the earthquake, and he was a colored man. And then when the earthquake came, you see, he was in the stable, up in his room in the loft, and of course he was scared to death, so he jumped out the window and broke his ankle. And that was such an annoyance to my grandmother. She said, "How stupid of him to jump out the window and break his ankle." I just remember hearing of that afterwards. Well later he became the doorman at Shreve's.

CE: Charles Foreman?

LG: Yes, Foreman.

CE: This is the same gentleman?

LG: Same one.
CE: Oh he was a wonderful man.
LG: He was a wonderful fellow.
CE: Oh, that is – I know his daughter. His daughter went to the University with Lucille, my sister, at Berkeley.
LG: Oh really?
CE: Very, very nice family.
LG: Well they're a fine family, and poor fellow, then I think he died of a brain tumor.
CE: Would there be two horses pulling the phaeton? Do you recall that?
LG: Yes and I can tell you their names.
CE: Yes.
LG: One was Flicker and the other was Honey Boy.
CE: Flicker and Honey Boy.
LG: Honey Boy was a bay, and Flicker was a sort of grayish color, dark gray, like gun powder.
CE: Gun metal .
LG: Gun metal color.
CE: Tell us Lucia, when you came in to the Marin Art and Garden Center today at the foot of Lagunitas Road where the main entrance is, was that comparable to where the entrance was to your family home there?
GL: Right.
CE: And was there a circular drive that more or less encompasses –
LG: Well we always called it The Circle.
CE: Oh you did.
LG: And of course it's triangular; it isn't a circle at all.
CE: No, that's true.
LG: And I can tell you that it's one tenth of a mile.
CE: From the entrance?
LG: No, around the circle.
CE: Around the circle.
LG: Because when I had a bicycle I would go around there and I was given a little measuring thing to put on the front of the bike and that measured a tenth of a mile, so if I went around ten times I'd biked a mile. Well I'll tell you one of my early, earliest memories of the place, and one of the things I liked was to be sitting on the front porch and hear a carriage come, and you'd just hear them on the gravel.
CE: Approaching.
LG: Coming in through the gate, you know. And if I was quick, really quick, I could get in to the front door before they arrived. And then I would be private. Nobody would know where I was.
CE: You sound rather shy.
LG: Well I didn't want to be bothered with grownups. I was interested reading a book and I wanted to be, lead my own life.
CE: Weren't there some wonderful secret little places on the property you could seek out and get lost?

LG: Oh yes, absolutely, in the house. That was why I loved that place, because it was big enough to hold me and all the other people, too. But the sound of the wheels and the horses' hoofs on the gravel, and then they'd cross the bridge, you see, and that would be trap, trap, trap and they I'd know that I'd have to be really quick and I'd just get into the front door in time. There was a screen door on the front and then we were in the vestibule and then in the main hall.

CE: Describe the house inside for us, would you? The vestibule, what would be off here on your right as you came in? Would that be a study?

LG: On the right there was a great big bay window and it had a window seat around it which was upholstered in blue velvet.

CE: Blue velvet! What were the walls paneled? Lucia, were the walls paneled?

LG: I'm not sure.

CE: You're not too sure?

LG: I think they were part-way-like.

CE: Yes.

LG: And my mother told me later that was just golden oak. It was such a come down, as I thought it was beautiful.

CE: There's shutters I notice in that photograph. Do you –

LG: Well the shutters were black. They were on the outside and they were to keep the rooms cool.

CE: Because it had that western exposure, didn't it? The sun in the afternoon –

LG: Well it was a lot of sun.

CE: Then when you entered the vestibule and went straight ahead, would you – Did that lead to the dining room and kitchen area?

LG: If you go straight ahead you go into the hall. There was a main hall which had this bay window –

CE: Yes.

LG: And on the floor of the bay window there was a white bear rug, you know, with the head and everything.

CE: I imagine the floors were dark.

LG: No they were –

CE: They were light.

LG: Just regular color, hardwood, and oriental rugs everywhere. But on hot days I would like to lie on that polar bear and it felt so cool and nice, and look into his face because he had his teeth bent, really scary. You can't really –

CE: No. Did your grandmother have a staff to help run this big home? What did it consist of?

LG: Well I suppose that's what you'd call it.

CE: Do you remember any of those people?

LG: Oh yes, lots of them. But, you know, they weren't always the same.

CE: No. You had a cook?

LG: Well there was a Chinese cook.

CE: Chinese cook. Do you remember his name, or any of them?

LG: Ju. His name was Ju.

CE: Ju.

LG: Ju, that's all I know. I remember asking her, I said, "How do you spell his name when you write him a check?" and she said, "I just write Ju."

CE: Did you have a downstairs maid or serving girl?

LG: There was a downstairs maid, a waitress, and then there was a chambermaid and my grandmother's personal maid, and I guess that was all except there was a laundryman who was also Chinese and he – There was quite a big laundry room beyond the kitchen.

CE: Beyond the kitchen.

LG: And all the laundry was done right there and the Chinese laundryman worker there and also I suppose he washed windows and did other things. I don't know.

CE: Did the staff live there?

LG: Yes. The Chinese, of course, were put in the worst place. It's just shameful when I think of it now. But there was a little room off the back porch where Ju slept and then the laundryman slept up in the stable with the coachman, in the same, I mean, in the same place. And then there was a separate dining room for the other help because the help didn't want to sit with the Chinese, you see. And then Ju, or whatever the Chinaman's name was, would usually have a son turn up every now and then from China. You know, they go home and –

CE: Bring number one son back.

LG: In due course of time, a son is born and comes over, so there usually was a little boy to help in the kitchen, a kitchen boy. And he went to the local public school and I remember my grandmother worrying because the other children weren't too nice to him.

CE: The dining room, I imagine, was –

LG: That was really the biggest room.

CE: A huge room, and what would your – When you sat down to a meal, would there be at least a dozen of you?

LG: There weren't very many of us. Well, let's see, there was my grandmother, my two uncles – You mean a dinner, or a luncheon?

CE: Say when you were in the summer, you certainly had visitors, I presume, and guests.

LG: Well it would be mainly my grandmother, let's say my mother, and if it were luncheon, my sister and I would be at the table. If it was dinner we would have been fed earlier by our nurse. And there was a little also big bay window off the dining room which had a table, and that was like a, I suppose you'd call it breakfast room. Now Uncle Allen liked to have everything outdoors; that was possible and so he had his breakfast outdoors.

CE: On the veranda? On the porch?

LG: And this was on the very sunny part of the veranda, and the maid had to bring the food from the kitchen. There was a little – what do you call that – hole between the kitchen and the back hall and it had a little –

CE: Dumbwaiter?

LG: Yes. What do you call these things? It's not a guard. It's a little sliding panel, and you slide it and the food would be on the other side and you'd rap it and she would take it.

CE: A little pass-through there.

LG: And cross the dining room and then she would have to hop over the window sill and take it out to Uncle Allen who was sitting on the porch in the sun. And one day he got stung by a wasp on his lower lip and it was very disfiguring and we thought it was terribly funny because he ate a big mouthful and the wasp was in it. Anyway, we did like to eat out there but there were no screens, nothing like that.

CE: Did your grandmother have some little parties when you were growing up, or did your mother arrange them there at Sunnyside?

LG: Oh yes. I mean the main party for me was my birthday, and that was made a regular thing and a real event.

CE: Right in the middle of, beginning of, summer?

LG: Yes. You see I was the only grandchild for a long time, and anyway, I was the first, and I was fussed over a great deal, I suppose. Anyway, I felt that I was really a queen.

CE: Of course you did.

LG: And I remember my chair at the table in the dining room when we had our ice cream and cake was covered with garlands. It was my grandmother's chair, and I sat there. Then we played games out on the lawn.

CE: Would you have all your little friends from the city over?

LG: No.

CE: Or from here? Your friends from this area?

LG: No, I didn't have any friends.

CE: You didn't?

LG: That was the trouble. Well you see, my friends were in the city and they went other places for the summer. None of them came to Marin.

CE: Oh.

LG: And so what would be found were various children of my mother's friends or anyway children would be found.

CE: In the area?

LG: Yes. They weren't really friends.

CE: But you didn't mind that. You loved to party.

LG: Yes, that was fun. It was fun.

CE: Tell me Lucia, what are your remembrances of the Octagon House, the Tank House, as a child or growing up? Do you remember it being used as a Tank House over the –

LG: Well I'll tell you what it was used for. It was my grandfather's billiard room.

CE: It was?

LG: Yes. And I remember it with a billiard table in it.

CE: I'd never heard that.

LG: Of course, I didn't know my grandfather, so I never saw anybody play billiards there, but that's what it was used for. Now that had been built by the Worns, you see.

CE: Yes.

LG: And the other use was at the time of the earthquake.

CE: What happened then?

LG: The first I remember about it, I don't remember actually seeing it used this way, but you see, at the time of the earthquake, these big brick chimneys on the house

fell down and that made a great crash and rattle, and the kitchen could not be used. None of the fireplaces could be used, and so cooking had to be done in the Octagon House. There was a stove there, and one of those tile chimneys that went up on the side, which evidently did not get broken.

CE: So that's where all this cooking took place.

LG: The cooking took place there. Well I don't remember a thing about it.

CE: No. Well you were five years old when the earthquake happened.

LG: Well actually, Carla, I was four.

CE: Were you, excuse me.

LG: And a half.

CE: Were you in San Francisco, or were you –

LG: No I was right in this house.

CE: Do you remember anything about it?

LG: You bet I do. Oh everything about it.

CE: Well tell us.

LG: That was what I was practicing before you came up. So I can remember that. My mother and sister and I had come to Ross the day before the earthquake to spend the summer. And we were settled in and the morning of the earthquake, it was early in the morning, I was waked up by this rumbling and shaking and everything. And all the ornaments on the mantelpiece were falling onto the tile hearth and smashing, and I was impressed by it. I was sleeping in a big bed with my mother and I said, "Is this an earthquake?" and she said, "Yes." And she was scared to death, and of course, I was too little to be scared, and I just thought it was exciting.

CE: How strange, at that young age you could, you even knew the word earthquake.

LG: Oh I was terribly smart.

CE: You were bright. I keep forgetting, Lucia.

LG: Well probably these things had been discussed. I do not know.

CE: Do you have any other stories on the earthquake? Tell us.

LG: Well all I remember else about the earthquake is that the few days afterward I was standing on the lawn in front of the house and I saw Mrs. McAllister coming across the lawn pushing a baby carriage, and that was extraordinary because she belonged in San Francisco, and she would never push a baby carriage herself anyway. But the strangest thing about it was that she was so dirty; she was just covered with grime. And the story was that the fire had started, you see, and she was trying to get out of the city, and her husband had got her down to the ferry and she had gone on the ferry and the littlest boy – She had three boys. And the littlest was in the baby carriage and the other two were walking along side, I guess. And I was told this later that she had put on both of her, all her best blouses that were covered with embroidery.

CE: Underneath?

LG: Underneath her suit jacket. And so she was a handsome woman and looked very dignified, as she always did, and of course there was smoke and cinders everywhere, and she was filthy dirty.

CE: Why did she come to your home?

LG: Well that was a haven.

CE: It was a haven.
LG: It was the first place they could think of.
CE: Other people came then. Do you recall?
LG: No I don't remember any other people. But that impression of Mrs. McAllister –
CE: Mrs. McAllister?
LG: Mrs. Elliott –
CE: Mrs. Elliott McAllister.
LG: Two L's and two T's.
CE: That is fascinating. You didn't describe the house completely. As you enter the main vestibule there was a staircase that led up –
LG: No the staircase was in the hall.
CE: All right, after the vestibule, the hall.
LG: The vestibule was just a place to hang your hat.
CE: I see.
LG: It smelled of tennis balls because the tennis rackets were kept there, and there was a big seven antlers, you know, to put hats on.
CE: How big would the vestibule be, just about 10 by 12?
LG: Well there was a settee on one side of it about like where Anne is sitting, and that would be about, I don't know. How many feet is it?
CE: About 10 by 12.
LG: Something like that.
CE: And then the main hall would be there.
LG: The main hall had, in the middle of it, a table. And in the middle of the table there was a big vase which always had flowers in it, and that was it. And then it had a square piano.
CE: In the hall?
LG: In the hall. And on the other side of the piano was the bay window which I have mentioned with the polar bear rug. Then on the far side of the hall was the staircase, which did go up, open.
CE: Did it have a landing or two, do you recall?
LG: Two landings.
CE: Two landings. Were there any oil paintings on the way up, or window or anything that you remember? No.
LG: No there were no oil paintings. Oil paintings were in the library.
CE: And where was the library?
LG: The library was the room everybody sat in, and that was the room that was used.
CE: And where was that location?
LG: And that was on the right as you go in. In other words, it was on the south side of the house, and that had a nice fireplace and another bay window. The remarkable thing about that to me was that the windows were a little bit curved. They were plate glass, and they were curved just a little to fit into the bay window part.
CE: Of course.
LG: And there was a little rug on the floor, which I have upstairs still.
CE: Oh how nice. It sounds like a very warm, wonderful room.
LG: It was a very comfortable place. You know, nobody ever closed their doors in those days, did they Anne?

AK: No. No locks and no keys.
LG: You'd go into the house and just yell, "Whooo, whooo, who's home?"
AK: Yes.
CE: Well now, going upstairs, your grandmother's room, I imagine, was large and overlooked the front of the house.
LG: That was this room.
CE: That was your grandmother's.
LG: It had a pale green carpet, and it was a very pleasant, light room.
CE: I imagine that was large.
LG: And it was right at the top of the stairs. Yes, it was large.
CE: Did she have a chaise as well as a –
LG: She had a double bed. Well, everybody had a double bed.
CE: Did she have a chaise?
LG: On the foot of the double bed there was a, in every room a chaise lounge.
CE: Any of the furniture from that wonderful old house around?
LG: Well that used to be in the library.
CE: That lovely desk?
LG: Yes. I don't know what make it is. What would you call it? Do you know, Carla?
CE: Well it's a kneehole desk but I don't know what period it is. It's beautiful. And that's left. And the other –
LG: That's the only piece I have from that house.
CE: What ever happened to the old square piano, I wonder?
LG: It's in Peggy Kittle's house.
CE: It is!
LG: Yes.
CE: Any of the books from the library?
LG: No. I don't have any.
CE: Don't have any.
LG: There were sets of books, you know, like James Fennimore Cooper, and I suppose – I know I was reading Cooper and I lost one of those once and that made me feel so awful.
CE: Tell us Lucia –
LG: Left it on a ferry boat.
CE: Oh. Did you, as you grew older and lived there, did you make any of the friends across the other side of Ross? Did any of those girls like Mary Armsby – Did you get to know any of those people?
LG: Mary Armsby was much older than I was.
CE: Yes I realize that, but I thought maybe you might have known –
LG: Well that made a difference, you know.
CE: When you're young.
LG: And you know how I learned to know Adeline Kent?
AK: No.
CE: No.
LG: At Vassar.
AK: Oh, you have to go 3,000 miles.
LG: That's right.

AK: Oh dear.

LG: Well our paths did not meet. We did not go to the same school. She went to boarding school in the East Bay, Miss Hanson's, which was the fashionable school, and I went to a day school in San Francisco, Miss Burke's, which at that time was just building up, and not fashionable. At least some of the other girls let it be known to me that I was in a place that there were people, you might say, were "on the make."

CE: Tell us about your father a little bit.

LG: Well that's a totally different subject. He did not come weekends to Ross because he was busy.

CE: Of course.

LG: In those days, surgeons still went around and visited their patients. And my mother was an ardent Episcopalian. She was devoted to the church, went to church every Sunday. I went to church every Sunday of my life.

CE: Either in San Francisco or here?

LG: I met Anne Kent at the church the first time.

AK: Oh.

LG: I remember meeting you, Anne, but you don't remember it.

AK: Well I'm not sure, but I did go –

CE: Here in Ross?

LG: Because, you see, you were Tom's wife.

AK: Well –

LG: And Tom had a new wife, his only wife, and you went to church one day and I met you.

CE: Where? The church here?

LG: St. John's, down here in town.

CE: Here in Ross.

LG: And you had on a blue dress. I remember that.

AK: Oh isn't that something!

CE: Well your father, would he get over on weekends, or not always?

LG: Usually, no.

CE: Then, but you would come – You would come as often as you could?

LG: Well you see, I liked it.

CE: You loved it.

LG: I liked the sense of space, and that I could get lost anywhere. I loved the country, the trees, and being outdoors, and then later, you see, I loved horseback riding. I would ride with my uncles. It was a regular thing on Saturdays and Sundays.

CE: You mentioned tennis balls. Where did you play tennis?

LG: Oh I played tennis later up at the Lagunitas.

CE: Lagunitas. There weren't any courts on the property, were there?

LG: Well there had been one. In fact there was a part of the property that was always called the tennis court.

CE: Oh really.

LG: But it had been destroyed before I saw it.

CE: Well, where was it, I wonder. Did you ever know?

LG: It was just about where the parking lot for the museum is, for the –

CE: Art Gallery?

LG: Yes.

CE: I see.

LG: Down the flat part there.

CE: Well you know Lucia, we've heard what beautiful gardens were here, and plants that had been brought from all over. Would you corroborate that?

LG: Well they were. I enjoyed them anyway. It was just regular Victorian stuff, you know. You'd make a row than you'd put holes in it and put plants in the holes.

CE: Did you have gardeners? Regular that were here all the time on the property?

LG: Oh yes, oh my yes, Very impressive. Mr. Walters. And that was one of the main things of going to Ross was to see the Walters. Mrs. Walters, she was such a dear. And they lived over across on Laurel Grove, where there is a house there now built on the foundation, I suppose, or if you were to dig down a few levels you'd find the old house that the Walters lived in.

AK: That's right.

LG: It was a nice little house. Oh I could tell you so much about that.

CE: Well tell us. Tell us about it.

LG: I think we keep changing the subject.

CE: Well do you want to tell us any more about Sunnyside and your remembrances of it? Did it mean a great deal to your mother, as well as you? Did she love it here too?

LG: Well she liked to come, but of course she always missed my father and there was just that difficulty. And then, of course, she always thought she could do more than she could, and she said, "Well I'll come after Church on Sunday." She always went to Trinity Church in San Francisco, and she said, "I'll take the 12:15." And so she'd always be late for lunch, or else she wouldn't get there. And I was allowed to go by myself when I went on Friday afternoon, after school, or Saturday morning. And then I would ride on Saturday afternoon with my uncles and on Sunday morning we would have a special ride that we could do just before church.

CE: And where was that ride?

LG: And we would go down Greenbrae and over the hill to San Rafael, and there is no hill there now, you know, it's just highway, and then back over Wolfe Grade and back to Ross.

CE: And that was nice, mid-morning.

LG: That was just enough because it was good riding. The roads weren't too hard. You know, the roads were made of crushed rock, and they were too hard for the horses' hoofs, so we had to ride on the side, but there were some rather soft places on these roads.

CE: You mentioned Ross Landing earlier. Now you don't remember Ross Landing as such because It's name had been changed, I presume.

LG: I remember the station at Kentfield which had the elevation of two feet. You know, that impressed me. The whole place should have been marsh. I mean, even Sunnyside should have been half marsh. And the house that, or the place that the art gallery is, was on the edge of the marsh, and if that were all marsh

there wouldn't be this trouble with floods. Just the same as what they thought over the, the Graton Park.

CE: Yes.

LG: You know Graton.

CE: Yes, down near the College of Marin, that used to flood every winter. Where would you go?

LG: In College Park.

CE: Yes.

LG: That floods.

CE: Getting back to the property a minute, Lucia, did the cook also or the gardener together have a vegetable garden, do you recall?

LG: The gardener had a vegetable garden.

CE: There was an area for vegetables.

LG: That was over on the side where the Walters lived; that was across the road.

CE: Over there was the vegetable garden.

LG: Yes, and it was a very good vegetable garden, and I loved the vegetables, and I'd go over and pick the tomatoes. And we used Indian baskets for everything and I'd pick tomatoes which were nice and warm in the sun and just eat them. Oh they were good. And there was an orchard, of course. And the trees were always covered with netting so the birds didn't get the cherries, but we got the cherries; we'd climb inside and pick them. Cherries and strawberry peaches, and nectarines, and then I suppose apples, though that came later and was less interesting.

CE: Have you any remembrances of how the family did any other kind of shopping, for example, poultry or meat? How was that taken care of? Did the cook go to San Rafael, or do you have any remembrance of that?

LG: Well you know these are in different years and I can't tell you.

CE: No, but early, early.

LG: But I do remember going, driving with my grandmother, to San Anselmo for instance, to Grosjeans. That was the grocer. Well she would never get out of her carriage. The grocer would come out to the carriage and talk to her or ask her what she wanted. And I know I must tell you how Mrs. Walters did her shopping, because of course she had no conveyance and she would give her order one day to the delivery man who brought her groceries, and she would give him the order for the next day. She always had to know ahead. Of course there was just her husband and herself. She used to buy store cookies which my mother would scorn, you see, but she kept them in a special cupboard and if I was good she would give me one of those big lemon cookies. But you see the Walters also lived on the vegetables that were on the place there. And I remember shelling peas and stringing beans, sitting on the front steps of that little house. And she taught me how to knit and crochet and I suppose she taught me manners too, maybe, such as I ever learned. My mother was not very strong on teaching manners. She just expected you were normally just –

CE: To behave.

LG: Behave, yes.

CE: What would be the dress of a young girl in Ross comparable to what the youngsters wear today? The blue jeans of today? What would a youngster wear in the country then? Do you recall?

LG: Well it was a cotton dress.

CE: Cotton dress

LG: With a belt around the middle.

CE: With a belt around the middle and then white socks?

LG: And we were allowed to wear socks, though my father didn't really approve of it.

CE: And what, little Mary Jane's or something? Shoes.

LG: Sandals.

CE: Oh you would wear sandals.

LG: Yes, sandals. And that was a joy, to get into socks and sandals.

CE: When you attended Miss Burke's, did they have the uniform then? Was it a middie or –

LG: Middie blouse, which was supposed to simplify life, and I suppose it did because I never in my life dieted to get thin or fat or anything. Never thought about it. I just ate food because I loved it.

CE: Do you remember the Schmeidell family?

LG: Oh yes.

CE: Did you know Doris?

LG: I did. I knew Doris and Betty. But you see, they went to a different school. Doris was older and I only saw her occasionally when we were over in Ross, so we didn't really become friends.

CE: Well I thought maybe you knew her because of her interest in horseback riding too.

LG: No, that was long after.

CE: Yes. Did you enjoy the Lagunitas Club as you grew up?

LG: Well yes we did, and then also it was a duty.

CE: A duty in what way?

LG: Well, as time went on, the Lagunitas Club needed people to belong to it, needed people to go to the parties. And we'd be summer members when we were up, and we weren't all-year-round members you see. And then we'd go to the dances and the question was how important it was to go to the Lagunitas Club dance because the Club really needed –

CE: Support.

LG: People to go there.

CE: Well –

LG: Now that is the place that was lumbered out, you see, tourists. And we used to go up and have barbecues sometimes in those places that were left empty by the redwood trees having been taken out. You know what the Lagunitas Club looks like?

CE: Yes.

LG: In those great round empty places. But that was much later when I was grown up.

CE: You were married from Sunnyside by any chance?

LG: No, I was married in San Francisco in the simplest way I could think of. I wanted just to go to the City Hall. My mother thought that was terrible.

CE: It's not proper.

LG: And she said, "Wouldn't you like some of your friends to be with you at the wedding?" I said, "Yes I would." And so she arranged to have people come to her house. She had just moved there. It was very hard for her. And I think there was only room for about 25 people in the living room of the house. She was then living on Green Street. Well now that brings us up to about 1931. That's much too late.

CE: After your marriage did you continue visiting Sunnyside?

LG: Sunnyside was then no longer.

CE: After 31?

LG: No. It was just about – It was about 1930 when it burned.

CE: Did it burn all the way down, Lucia, or just –

LG: It just burned partly.

CE: And was it ever remodeled after that, or rebuilt? No. And it sort of remained in limbo status until it was taken over.

LG: Well my Uncle Allen was living there, because, you see, my grandmother had died, and so he was keeping up the place. And then, you see, he died just about 1930, I think, and do I have to tell you how he died, which is very simple?

CE: Well it's up to you.

LG: He ate toadstools instead of mushrooms.

CE: Well I've heard that the Sunday recreation in Ross was to pick mushrooms, but he got the toadstools.

LG: Well we used to. We used to go out in the fields and pick field mushrooms. They were delicious.

CE: Well was he confused. Did he –

LG: No, I'll tell you. He was somewhat eccentric, and he believed very much in living off the land. Anything you ate was good, and he liked to take the advice of peasant-type people. He took the advice of some Italian peasant and he found some kind of mushrooms that grow under the trees in the dead leaves, those brownish slimy things.

CE: Aw.

LG: And he insisted that they were alright, though he was warned, I think, and then when he got sick in the night he refused to call a doctor. He was one of those people that did not want to give in. So when they did get the doctor, of course it was too late.

CE: But he was the last person to reside in that house?

LG: Yes.

CE: Do you know how the fire started? Did anyone ever find that out?

LG: No.

CE: And then after that it just lay idle, I guess.

LG: Well I think they – See my younger uncle was still living.

CE: What was his name?

LG: Jonathan.

CE: Oh Jonathan.

LG: No John Casper.

CE: John Casper.

LG: Jack, Uncle Jack, and he inherited the whole place from his brother, and he decided, I suppose, anyway the family, somebody, decided to tear the whole place down and not have a mess standing there, so they had it torn down.

CE: I see.

LG: Now I was not around at the time of the fire. I think I was on my honeymoon.

CE: You must have been. Yes the time seems –

LG: Something like that.

CE: Well then, it lay – The house was razed and then the property was –

LG: The property belonged to my Uncle Jack and his wife, and when he died she – It belonged to her, namely Peggy Kittle.

CE: And then we're getting up near the period of when the Marin Art and Garden Center was formed, and the purchase was made.

LG: Now that was – Mrs. Livermore did that.

CE: Yes. Well you know, it seems to me Mrs. Kent, and I think Lucia would agree, that you had a wonderful life in that estate.

LG: Oh it was a lovely place to be a child in. It really was.

CE: And how do you feel now? Doesn't it rather please you that the property is used as it is, Lucia, rather than being a subdivision or –

LG: Yes, I know, because Peggy could have sold it to various –

CE: Developers.

LG: People for houses.

AK: Yes.

LG: Which she did in some cases. I mean, there are houses on parts of it.

CE: Yes. What you started to say, one reservation.

LG: What was it? I was going to say something about the planting. You remember asking me about it.

CE: Yes, yes.

LG: I'll tell you something. Do you want to know what some of the flowers were?

CE: Yes

LG: In the lawn there was a great big bunch of pampas grass. Do you know what that is?

CE: Yes.

LG: And then there was a, one palm tree. You know, they'd put in one of something. And then there was certain trees in another part of the lawn. There was one ginkgo tree which was beautiful. I loved it.

CE: That's still there, is it not, Mrs. Kent?

LG: Unless they took it out for that Northgate stuff.

AK: No. It's still there.

LG: And the tulip tree and the poppies which I loved.

CE: Yes.

AK: That's interesting.

CE: Well the lawn area was larger than what it is today, I presume.

LG: Well that's my regret, that the Art and Garden put so much –

CE: Roads?

LG: Housing in it.

CE: Well you are pleased with the Octagon House restoration, are you not?

LG: Oh yes, love it. It's fine.
CE: It's a beautiful effort.
LG: It was never a very pretty thing, but it looks so much better now.
CE: Yes. Well Mrs. Kent, this has been a lovely afternoon, hasn't it?
AK: Oh indeed it has.
CE: Do you have anything you'd like to ask, Lucia? We have just a moment left.
AK: Oh there are many things I would like to have known. I think it's almost enough to make another time. For instance, when the other children were added to the tutored family, was Jack sort of a pet when he came along? He would have been the youngest boy.
LG: Oh he certainly was. He was the jewel.
AK: He was a darling always, yes. Well I think you were a wonderful family and I didn't know that the grandfather died early, but I do know that you'd always hear, "Mrs. Kittle did this, Mrs. Kittle did that," and I used to wonder if there wasn't a Mr. Kittle. I never heard about him.
CE: Well she must have survived him by about 25 or 30 years.
AK: Yes she must have.
LG: She did.
AK: Yes, a long time.
LG: And I was amazed, really, when I look back and think of how she ran that place.
AK: Yes it must have been –
LG: Because she would – At first she used to go to the city every winter and stay in a hotel. In fact, I remember one hotel she stayed in, and it impressed me very much. In fact the name is still there but I don't remember. And it had a winding staircase going up, and a man would carry a tray on his head and walk down the staircase or come up.
AK: Oh dear.
CE: Well she was a woman, obviously, of inner strength and resources, and must have been a remarkable –
LG: Well she loved people. She loved her family and she loved her friends and she liked keeping things nice.
CE: Well Lucia, we can't thank you enough for allowing us to come into your home today, and share with us the reminiscences of Sunnyside, the Jonathan Kittle estate, and it's been indeed a pleasure to speak with you today.
LG: Well you're more than welcome.