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Anne T. Kent California Room

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INTERVIEW WITH MABEL DODGE BULLIS

by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent
August 22, 1977

INTERVIEWEE: Mabel Dodge Bullis (MB)
INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE) and Anne Kent (AK)
DATE OF INTERVIEW: August 22, 1977
TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: Today is Monday August 22, 1977. Continuing the Oral History program of the Marin County Library, Civic Center, this is Carla Ehat, and joining me today is Mrs. Thomas Kent. We have the pleasure of being in the beautiful part of Marin County in Bolinas, and we're on Horseshoe Hill, which is a beautiful hill here, at the residence of Mabel Dodge Bullis, number 240 Horseshoe Hill. We are looking south, seated in her beautiful contemporary living room looking south, and we can see the Bolinas Lagoon and we can see Seadrift and beyond it, the ocean, and in the fog, the city. This is a beautiful part of the world, Mrs. Bullis. It's awfully nice to be here today.

MB: Well, I'm glad you could be here.

CE: Now I understand from Mrs. Kent that you were born in San Rafael, and you told me earlier the date was October 3, 1883.

MB: Yes, that's right.

CE: Where was the family home then?

MB: It was on Irwin Street near Belle Avenue.

CE: Near Belle. And the address?

MB: 738 was the number. Our old house is still there.

CE: And that was the entrance near the --

MB: The Hotel.

CE: Rafael Hotel.

MB: Yes.

CE: What brought your family to Marin County?

MB: Well, my father -- The family came from Vermont, and my grandfather came to San Francisco, I think, originally, hoping to make a fortune on gold, but that didn't work out so he went into some business in San Francisco, and my father was sent back to Vermont to college, and he graduated as a civil engineer. He wanted to come back to California then and he looked around for a suitable place for his surveying work, and I don't know how he happened to come across to Marin County, but he did in looking around from San Francisco and evidently fell in love with it and decided that was the place he wanted to settle. I always thought it was because the hills reminded him of the Green Mountains in Vermont, but I don't know for sure.

CE: It could be because --

MB: It reminds me of it.

CE: Many people from Vermont have selected Marin.

MB: That's true. So he settled there and stayed there the rest of his life.

CE: What was your mother's maiden name?

MB: My mother's maiden name was Vilas.

CE: Was she a Marin lady?

MB: No, no, she was Vermont, too. They both -- They knew each other as children, grew up together in Burlington, Vermont. And so when he decided to stay out here -- I guess they became engaged when he was in college; that must have been it, and she came all the way across the continent to marry him out here, which was quite an adventure for those days.

CE: Isn't that wonderful? Were there other children in the family besides yourself?

MB: No, I was an only child. My father was an only child.

CE: I noticed in 1974, I believe, you published a charming little book entitled *Early Bolinas Memories*. I might add now, what brought your family to Bolinas?

MB: Well again, it was my father. It was his surveying. Mr. Waterhouse, you may have heard of him.

CE: Yes.

MB: Owned big tracts of land here and he got my father over here to subdivide it for him in lots. And again, as soon as he saw it he fell in love with Bolinas and bought a couple of lots on the bluff above the beach.

CE: Was that Terrace?

MB: That was Terrace, yes.

CE: Is that road still there?

MB: The road is still there but the lot is not there and the house had to be torn down. It became so undermined one winter with terrible storms; high tides and storms together.

CE: Your father, when you go to the Registrar office at the Civic Center, your father's name appears on so many maps. I understand from Mrs. Kent and Dolly that he laid out the "Crookedest Railroad" up Mount Tam.

MB: Oh, yes, he did, yes.

CE: Do you know anything about that, that you'd care to share with us?

MB: Well I remember it very well. Maybe this would be interesting. One thing I remember when he was surveying it there was one part that became the main thing about the road, the double bowknot, maybe you've seen the pictures of it.

CE: Yes.

MB: Well that was a particularly difficult part, evidently. It was very steep and he was trying to keep it at an even seven percent grade, and he told us laughingly that he thought up that idea of the double bowknot in the night.

CE: That was his creation?

MB: In his sleep, he said.

CE: That was his inspiration?

MB: That was his inspiration, how to do it; he thought of it in the night. But I don't remember much else except I remember his talking about running into a lot of rattlesnakes when they were surveying up there.

CE: Were there other areas in San Rafael that he laid out?

MB: Oh, yes, yes. Big, big areas. The Coleman tract, if you know, where the convent is.

CE: I certainly do.

MB: He surveyed all of that, and Woodacre, and all through -- A lot of San Anselmo and -- Oh I don't know, a great deal of the county.

CE: Are there any artifacts left of your father's efforts other than in the Recorder's office? Do you have any?

MB: Well, I have the map of Marin County that he made. I don't know; they probably have one of those in the Recorder's office.

CE: Maybe you could show it to us.

MB: Yes, I'll show it to you.

CE: When you went to school -- Where did you go to school, in San Rafael?

MB: My first school was a little private school called -- run by Miss Stewart, and it was in -- Some friend of ours had a barn that they didn't use; they didn't have a horse any more and there was a little room in that barn that they made into a school for this woman, this teacher. And this little school -- Oh I guess there weren't more than 15 students to start with.

CE: Dolly went there.

MB: Yes, she went there, and her brother went there. But then after a few years she moved into a larger building, and it became quite a bit larger.

CE: Do you remember -- Could you place the site of that school?

MB: The first one, yes, it was on Laurel Place.

CE: Laurel Place.

MB: Laurel Place, which is one block north of Mission. It's a short street. Do you know it?

CE: Yes.

AK: Yes.

MB: You do, I'm sure, Mrs. Kent

AK: Yes.

MB: And it was in the Wintringham house. Do you remember the Wintringham house?

AK: Yes, I do.

MB: Well, it was in their barn.

AK: Was that the same place that Georgia fixed up for herself?
MB: Yes, afterwards she made it into a house afterwards.
AK: I never knew it had been a school.
CE: Well, it was either -- I guess that was the school then.
MB: Then she moved to a building in Fifth Street which also had been a barn. It was funny that she had two barns, but that was made into two nice big rooms for the school. I can't remember whose barn it was. It was some old family. And then after a few years I went to the public school in San Rafael for a few years.
CE: Is there where you met Dolly, might I ask, at Miss Stewart's?
MB: Yes, I think so.
CE: Probably.
MB: Yes, it must have been because it seems as though I've known her all my life, you know.
AK: Did you go to San Rafael High School by any chance?
MB: I went one year to San Rafael High School, and then all my friends had left to go to Miss Murison's Private School in San Francisco, so, of course, I wanted to go, too, and my father finally let me go. And we commuted every day to San Francisco to school, about eight of us, eight girls.
CE: And how would you do that? Tell us how you would accomplish that.
CE: We took the train to Tiburon and the ferryboat to San Francisco.
CE: Train to Tiburon.
MB: Yes. There were two railroads in those days. I don't know how they were supported, but there was the Broad Gauge and the Narrow Gauge, we called them. The Broad Gauge went to Tiburon, and the Narrow Gauge went to Sausalito, and then, of course, it had this branch up to Cazadero and the other one, the Broad Gauge, went to Eureka.
CE: All right, then you get the train and the ferry to the city, and then you would go to Miss Murison's School? Where was it located?
MB: On Pacific Avenue near Fillmore. I think we took the Jackson, yes. Sometimes we took the Jackson streetcar and walked a block over, and sometimes we took the little horse car from the ferry which transferred to a dummy car at Sutter Street, and then it went up to Pacific Avenue and stopped in front of the school.
CE: What were some of the subjects you took when you went to Miss Murison's?
MB: Oh, just the regular things.
CE: The regular curriculum?
MB: Yes.
CE: Anything impress you in retrospect or a teacher?
MB: Well, the literature impressed me the most. Miss Murison taught that herself, and she was a very interesting teacher and a very -- and made everything very interesting, the literature that we had.
CE: Is it true that the school, after the earthquake, sort of disappeared?
MB: I think so.
CE: 1906.
MB: Yes, yes. I've forgotten just when it was, when it disappeared. It was just a short time after I left. I can't remember.

CE: Well let's get back to Bolinas. Now in the frontispiece of this little booklet that you've written, *Early Bolinas Memories*, there's a charming photograph of you taken 1910 with a dog, beautiful dog. Tell us about your first visit to the beach. Was this a new phenomenon for you?

MB: Yes. The first time I came I was a very little girl, I think of maybe six or seven, something like that. It was shortly after my father had discovered it. And so he brought my mother and a friend of hers who had a little girl just my age; we were great friends, and the four of us came over and boarded at a house down on the main street, the Andersons, who took in boarders. And we played on the beach. That was my first experience with playing on the beach, and I think I say in that book that -- mention that about mother sitting me down at the edge of the water and the water coming up around me and frightening me terribly, because when a wave went out, I thought it was carrying me out with it.

CE: Well, Mr. Anderson, I understand, was called Captain Anderson.

MB: Captain Anderson, yes. He ran a boat -- schooner from Bolinas to San Francisco, freight boat.

CE: Well, there were many important schooners, the *Jenny Griffin*, the *Ida A*, and the *Owl*. Could it have been one of those three?

MB: Yes, it was. I think it was the *Jenny Griffin*.

CE: The *Jenny Griffin*.

MB: I think so. I remember all those names.

CE: Do you remember the Flagstaff Hotel?

MB: Yes.

CE: Before it went into the bay after the earthquake.

MB: Yes, I think that was after the earthquake that it went into the bay.

CE: How would you get over here, might I ask? Describe your trip. How did you get physically from San Rafael to Bolinas.

MB: There was a stage that ran everyday from San Rafael to Bolinas and brought the mail, over the ridge road, you know.

CE: Yes, the one that goes

MB: Fairfax

CE: through now where the Alpine Dam is?

MB: Yes, yes.

CE: And up to --

MB: Up to Summit, and then down.

CE: At Summit House.

MB: Yes, and it brought the mail every day to Bolinas. But my father had a horse and buggy, and we sometimes drove over ourselves.

CE: How long a trip would that be?

MB: Oh, it took, with our horse and buggy, at least four hours. The stage made it in three I believe.

CE: Must have been a magnificent sight when you reached the summit and panoramic --

MB: I still remember how thrilling that was.

CE: It must have been a thrill to go down there with the four horses --

MB: Oh, it was, it was just wonderful, especially after you 'd been crawling up the other side so slowly. Sometimes I remember it just seemed endless to get up to the top.

CE: Then you boarded with the Andersons for a while, and then did you say your father bought the property?

MB: Yes, my father bought this property. Yes, he bought two lots right on the cliff there.

CE: You built a home then.

MB: Yes. I can't remember what year that was.

CE: Dolly tells us that everybody went to the beach early in the morning, barefoot, and all day, regardless of the weather.

MB: Regardless of the weather, that's right. And we went in swimming everyday, regardless of the weather, no matter how foggy and cold it was.

CE: Bolinas people seem to love picnics and Marin picnics. Did you bring a picnic to the beach or come home?

MB: No, I don't think we ever did; not after we had our house, because we were too close to the beach, then. But when we brought it -- I don't think we were -- I don't remember having a picnic on the beach.

CE: Bonfires?

MB: Yes, we used to have bonfires on the beach, in the evenings.

CE: Just burn the driftwood?

MB: Burn the driftwood, and somebody maybe would have a guitar or banjo, and we'd all sing. And sometimes we made hot chocolate over the fire.

CE: It seems to me, in talking with more and more people who had the pleasure of living around the turn of the century, that those were happy days for young people.

MB: It seems to me they were, too.

CE: They were sweetly innocent.

MB: But we had awfully good times.

CE: Awfully good times.

MB: In a very simple way. We had lots of picnics around Bolinas. We went, for instance, over across the bay. We would go to some of those canyons. Mr. McKennan had a lodge

CE: Oh, that's right. Tell us about Mr. McKennan because Dolly showed me a photograph of his wharf.

MB: Oh, yes.

CE: I have it somewhere. And there is a story about the tide. Here's the photograph, and Dolly says McKennan Pier.

MB: Yes, McKennan Pier.

CE: There was a stake near here at the edge of the bay. If it was covered by water one had to wait until the tide turned and ebbed otherwise one couldn't drive on the road to leading to Bolinas. Sometimes it was a long wait before the stake would appear out of the water. Do you remember that?

MB: No, I don't remember the stake. No, I don't. But I remember driving through the water sometimes. We didn't stop if the water was over the road; we drove through it. I don't remember ever having to wait for the tide.

CE: Tell us about Mr. McKennan. He had a launch.

MB: He had this big launch and he used it for -- Hikers would come down over the mountains and walk to his place, and he would ferry them over to Bolinas sometimes.

CE: Was that little launch called the *Alice F.*?

MB: The *Alice F.* And then he would take -- It was a great entertainment for somebody to rent his launch or hire his launch and invite a lot of people to go on launch ride, and he would take us all over the lagoon.

CE: In the moonlight?

MB: Yes, in the moonlight, usually. And, if the tide was high, in those days, we could go way up to the head of the lagoon in this launch. And then sometimes he would take us over across the bay for a picnic on his canyon and that would be in the daytime.

CE: Where is his canyon in relation to the present Audubon Canyon Ranch?

MB: South of it about two canyons, I think, two or three; I'm not sure which it is.

AK: It's where that nice white house is.

MB: I don't know who lives there now.

AK: I think it's empty.

CE: Did you ever fish in the lagoon?

MB: Oh, yes, yes. That was another thing we loved to do. We'd hire a rowboat and go out and anchor somewhere in the bay and stick out our long bamboo poles and sit there and wait for a fish to bite.

CE: Well, your house, which was on Terrace. You had a magnificent view.

MB: Oh, a magnificent view, yes.

CE: You could see more than where you're situated today.

MB: Oh, yes, we could see the whole coast all the way down to San Francisco and, of course, see all the lights.

CE: You could see the whales coming down in January and spouting.

MB: Yes. In fact, I remember seeing whales in the summer.

CE: Coming which way?

M: I just remember them out in front of our house spouting. I don't remember which way they were going. Nobody spoke about their going anywhere; it was just seeing them.

CE: I'm going to mention some names here, and it would be fun if you would share your reminiscences with us of those people or places. Where was Garzoli's Gulch?

MB: Garzoli's Gulch was up the beach. When you go on the main beach you walk up almost to Duxbury Reef. Just before you come to the Reef there's a sharp curve in the coast there and a little gulch. That was Garzoli's Gulch. It had a lovely old willow tree in it, I remember.

CE: That was a favorite picnic area.

MB: That was a picnic area, yes, and then there is a trail up to the top and Garzoli owned this huge big ranch on top of the mesa, and that's why they called it Garzoli's Gulch.

CE: Was that the same mesa that subsequently was subdivided into tiny lots?

MB: Yes.

CE: Did you go to that exciting trip to the Farallon Islands when the *Ida A.* was chartered? Were you part of that group?

MB: Yes. Yes, I was.

CE: What year would that have been?

MB: Oh, I don't know.

CE: I mean, were you still a teenager?

MB: Yes, I was a teenager.

CE: Tell us about it.

MB: I remember that the boat was chartered and I remember when we started out it was a foggy morning.

CE: Right here? You took the boat here?

MB: Yes, right in the channel; there was a wharf there.

CE: Was the wharf near the Hotel?

MB: There was one -- I think we left -- The lagoon began to silt, and so they couldn't go that far, and there was a wharf down by the -- where those houses are now on the channel, so I think that's where we started from. It was a foggy still morning, and I remember there was what they call a ground swell. The boat went up and down over this ground swell.

CE: Would this be in the summer?

MB: In the summer, yes. And one by one everybody got sick. It was really funny to see all these people running over to the edge of the boat.

CE: Were you also sick?

MB: I hung on until we were almost there. I remember there was one other girl and I. I remember her saying, "I'm going, Mabel. I'm going." Just before we got there I had to heave up, too. But my father went, too, and he was the only person on the boat that was absolutely not sick at all. He was a wonderful sailor.

CE: Well, what happened when you got there?

MB: When we got there we anchored just off shore and had to land in a rowboat and go through the surf.

CE: There were no piers or docks there?

MB: No, no piers or docks, no. But then we went all over the island. It was very interesting. There's not a tree on the island, just rocks, you know.

CE: Was this the southeast Farallon, do you recall? Sure the Lighthouse --

MB: It was where the lighthouse was.

CE: And did you visit the lighthouse?

MB: Yes, we visited the lighthouse. I don't remember much about it.

CE: We had the pleasure of interviewing a woman, Katherine Strittmatter, who lived on the southeast Farallon Island for twenty years. Her father was Keeper of the Light.

MB: Oh, he was Keeper of the Light, well, well.

CE: And she said it was beautiful; it was her world.

MB: Yes, of course. Well, it was beautiful. I remember so many birds' nests in the hollow of the rocks with the eggs.

CE: No soil, is there?

MB: No soil, absolutely no soil.

CE: Well, it's wonderful now that the Point Reyes Bird Observatory people are controlling that.

MB: Controlling that, yes. But then the fog lifted, and the wind came up, so when we came back, the wind was blowing, and they could put up the sail of the schooner, and so it was much smoother, so everybody was quite happy coming home. But that was really quite a wonderful experience.

CE: You mentioned in your booklet the Wilkins Ranch.

MB: Oh, yes. That was right at the head of the lagoon. The white house is still there.

CE: That's right at the --

MB: Yes.

CE: Did you know the family?

MB: Yes, I knew them a little bit, not very much. Just coming for the summer we didn't get to know the people who lived here all year round very much, but I used to see the girls. I remember they wore overalls, because they helped their father on the ranch. They did all kinds of -- just boy's work, you know. That was very unusual in those days.

CE: I understand they bought the ranch in 1869. Do you know the girls' names?

MB: Yes. Let's see now. It's just gone from me now.

CE: All right, let's get back to town then.

MB: One of them has lived here until quite recently. She moved away recently.

CE: The property isn't in the family any longer, is it?

MB: I don't think so. I think they sold it. Oh, in fact, the Point Reyes Seashore took it over.

CE: Oh.

MB: It's in their hands.

CE: Well, of course, the Point Reyes National Seashore, and, then, over there, Golden Gate National Recreation --

MB: Yes.

CE: How do you feel about that, the ownership of so much land in the public domain? There's fifty thousand acres of Point Reyes National Seashore and another thirty thousand for the Golden Gate. Don't you think it might be a good idea in the long view?

MB: It seems to me in the long run it's a good idea, because it's such beautiful land, and it's wonderful to think of having it kept this way. And after all, land like that isn't fit to be --

CE: Cultivated.

MB: Cultivated or lived on.

CE: All right, let's go back downtown to Bolinas. What's the main road called?

MB: Brighton Avenue.

CE: Brighton Avenue. Now there was a Flagstaff Inn, which then was destroyed.

MB: That wasn't on Brighton though.

CE: Oh, that was around on Cork.

MB: That was on Cork Road.

CE: Well, let's start at the wharf. Across from the old Flagstaff Hotel, wasn't there a Coast Guard Station at one time?

MB: Yes.

CE: Do you remember that, was it there?
MB: Yes, I remember that, yes.
CE: There is a little tower on the little Mesa, I noticed, driving up to Mrs. Evans'. Is that a lookout for the Coast Guard?
MB: Oh, is it still there? Yes, I guess it is.
CE: Remember we saw it, Anne?
AK: Yes.
MB: Yes, I think that was a lookout for the Coast Guard, and I think somebody bought it and made a house of it.
CE: Was it a life saving station sort of?
MB: Well, sort of, yes. If there was any trouble they would go. But I think it was given up, because they decided it wasn't practical. It was too hard to get out into the ocean quickly enough, if anything happened.
CE: All right. Mr. Bradford, does that name bring back some memories?
MB: Oh, yes.
CE: Was that the same Bradford whose house I showed you?
MB: Yes.
CE: That was on 333 G Street.
MB: I have a picture of his house.
CE: Mrs. Bullis' album here -- and that's a photograph of your house.
MB: Yes.
CE: And where is it in relation to the Bradford house?
MB: There's the Bradford house, and there's the -- There's one of their houses there.
CE: And these are the two houses that your father built on Terrace.
MB: Yes, yes.
CE: And where would Brighton be? Back roads there --
MB: Right about there.
CE: Yes. All right, now we mentioned Bradford. If I mention Sharon, what do you remember of the Sharon family?
MB: Here's a good picture of the house, too.
CE: Yes.
MB: Somebody gave me that. It shows the beach with all the tents on it.
CE: Beautiful. Do you remember the name Sharon?
MB: Oh, yes.
CE: What did the Sharon's do?
MB: Well, they bought the house, the Bradford house. The Newhall's bought it from the Bradfords.
CE: Almer Newhall?
MB: Yes, and they had it for quite a few years. I've forgotten how many. And then, I think, they sold it to the Sharons.
CE: I see.
MB: There may have been another buyer in between there. I'm not sure.
CE: Mr. Newhall was the gentleman I think Dolly talks about that loved the Fourth of July.
MB: Oh, yes.
CE: What was his involvement in the Fourth of July?

MB: Well, it was the father of the man who bought that house who was involved in the Fourth of July. He just loved to create a parade. I think his picture is in that book somewhere. And he got people started to make floats and various things for the Fourth of July parade. I don't remember if he had it more than one year or not. And then he also would have beautiful fireworks. He would provide the fireworks himself and set them off on the beach in front of his house.

CE: Were the majority of the people summer residents?

MB: They were then, yes. The people that I knew were. Of course, there were certain people who lived here all the year.

CE: I understand in those early days, before the turn-of-the-century, there wasn't any butcher shop in town. Is that true?

MB: No. That's true.

CE: How did you work that out?

MB: Well, there was a butcher came around in a wagon twice a week, as I remember. I think it was twice a week. I remember his coming to our house, and my mother going out and looking at his stuff in his wagon and buying something.

CE: I wonder how he could keep it cold.

MB: I don't know; I never thought about that.

CE: Sort of like an ice wagon.

MB: He must have. I think he had blocks of ice in there, in the wagon, because it wasn't a refrigerated thing. Then I remember finally we had a butcher shop. But the General Store did have most everything else.

CE: Who ran the General Store?

MB: Well, Doctor Gibson ran it at one time.

CE: Was he the -- Gibson House?

MB: The Gibson House, yes. And then Joseph Petar was the one I remember best, who ran it for many years.

CE: That's the same Petar whose brother ran , as skipper, the *Owl*?

MB: Yes, he was skipper of the *Owl*, yes.

CE: This same man was?

MB: Well his brother.

CE: Yes. How was the laundry handled in those days?

MB: Well, at the creek. You know that bridge as you go into town there is a sort of, you know, where the nursery is?

CE: Yes.

MB: Well, right across the street from the nursery the stream comes down there, Pine Gulch Creek. There was a Chinese man who had a laundry there, and he dipped water off from the stream and heated it over a fire and did the laundry. And I remember my mother taking sheets and stuff there to have it washed. But eventually we had a wash tub put into our woodshed back of our house so we could do some laundry at home.

CE: This Bolinas-Olema Road, this valley, is so beautiful. It hasn't changed too much has it?

MB: No, very little. I think it changed less than anyplace I know.

CE: That's wonderful. It must be gratifying to you.

MB: It is, it certainly is. The same ranches, the same buildings.

CE: Over the years, I guess particularly since the 1906 quake, the lagoon has silted in.

MB: Yes, I understand it has silted a good deal since the earthquake.

CE: And so they had to build a new wharf for the schooner, I understand.

MB: Yes, further down nearer the channel.

CE: But the summer cottages on Terrace fared fairly well, didn't they?

MB: Yes. I can't remember any damage to our house at that time.

CE: Because of the quake?

MB: Because of the quake, except the chimney was cracked and dishes were broken but I can't remember that the foundations were affected in any way.

CE: Did you use to go down to the beach and watch the schooners come in?

MB: Oh, yes, that was one of the fun things to do, go around and watch it come in.

CE: That opening between Seadrift and -- It isn't too large, too broad.

MB: No, and it got so, as the years went on, more and more difficult to get in, because it was filling up.

CE: The bar would build up.

MB: Build up, and so they could only come in at high tide. Sometimes a schooner would come up from the city and anchor outside and have to wait until the tide was high enough so that they could come in. And once in a while it got stuck on the bar.

CE: You mentioned the name of these three schooners Captain Anderson was skipper of --

MB: *Jenny Griffin*, I guess it was.

CE: Then there was the *Ida A.* you mentioned.

MB: *Ida A.* and *Owl*.

CE: Well, what kind of cargo would they take from here to San Francisco?

MB: Way back I can remember they took butter, great kegs of butter, and pigs. I can remember every now and then they would take a whole load of live pigs.

AK: Yes, there was a sign up in the store. I remember the first time I ever saw it. It said, "*Owl* takes pigs on Monday."

CE: They took passengers as well?

MB: They took passengers as well.

CE: Did you ever take the run to San Francisco?

MB: Just once, only once.

CE: That was enough.

MB: Well, I just didn't have the chance to. It was fun.

CE: How would you get milk? There were certainly dairies around here. How would you get milk when you were in Bolinas?

MB: There was a dairy right where the post office is now.

CE: Oh, that little shopping complex was a dairy?

MB: Yes, that was a dairy. And they didn't deliver in my childhood days, and so one of my jobs was to go down every night and get milk. And I would stand outside the fence of this big dairy where they were milking cows and Macken, his name was Macken, the man who ran it, would come up with a big pail of milk and pour some into -- measure it and pour it into my pail, and I don't think it could have been very clean, but nobody thought anything about it. So that was the way we got the milk. Oh, then he made butter about once a week, and that was one of the

things we liked to do, go and watch him make butter. And I don't think we got eggs there; I've forgotten where we got eggs.

CE: I imagine that was part of the cargo, too, the San Francisco eggs.

MB: Yes, I imagine so.

CE: Tell me, on Brighton Avenue, that little Presbyterian Church, has that been there?

MB: Yes, that has been there as long as I can remember.

CE: And there was supposed to be a gentleman living in a cottage, Chicken Charlie --

MB: Chicken Charlie, oh yes.

CE: What do you know of Chicken Charlie?

MB: Well, I remember him very well. He was a funny old fellow, and he did all kinds of odd jobs around the town, and he had a boat and he would rent that, or he would take people out fishing if they wanted to. He would row them out. Sometimes he went out himself and caught fish and sold it. He would peddle it around town. Lots of smelt in the bay in those days. And he would also ferry people across from -- They would walk down the sand spit sometimes, hikers, and they would want to be taken across the channel and he would row people across there. He did all kinds of odd jobs like that.

CE: I wonder if there's anybody like him today that you can call upon.

MB: Well, I don't know.

CE: How about "Holy Joe"?

MB: Well, he did some ferrying of people across the channel, too. I don't remember what else he did. Seems to me he --

CE: Harrison Dibblee talked about him a little. Do you remember the Dibblees?

MB: Oh, yes.

CE: Now, next to Chicken Charlie we have the church, and we have Chicken Charlie, and then Captain Anderson was supposed to have lived there.

MB: Yes, Captain Anderson was next.

CE: And that's where you first boarded, your family.

MB: That's where we first boarded, yes.

CE: And the house, I understand, is still there.

MB: Oh, yes, it's still there. In fact they've built a little extra house in between, but the old house is still there.

CE: And then, next door was another house.

MB: There was another house very much like it.

CE: How do you pronounce it?

MB: Sjogrens, and she took boarders also, and we stayed there one summer, I remember.

CE: You tell a charming vignette about her bathroom.

MB: Oh, yes.

CE: Would you mind repeating that?

MB: She locked the bathroom, because she said people went swimming on the beach, and she didn't see why they needed a bath when they got back.

CE: Sounds like today, with our water shortage.

MB: Yes, with our water shortage.

CE: And next to that house, I understand, was a house that was built with lumber washed ashore from a wreck.

MB: That was what Holy Joe built. That was one he built, I think. Yes, that's what I understood, that it was built with lumber washed ashore.

CE: His name is Mr. Josephson, but he's known -- Why is he called Holy Joe?

MB: I think his name was Joe Josephson. Well, the story we heard was he had once belonged to Salvation Army, and he also used to pass the plate in the church. Whether that's why he was called -- I don't know.

CE: How about the Peppers? Certainly you can't mention Bolinas without the Peppers.

MB: Well Mr. and Mrs. Pepper lived in a house right next to where the nursery is now, and he was a carpenter. In fact he built our house that my father had built. Then his son, one of his sons, married Marin Waterhouse, and they had nine Peppers, I think it was. Wasn't it, Mrs. Kent?

AK: I think so.

MB: Is it Marin Pepper Waterhouse who wrote the book *The Story*?

AK: Waterhouse comes first, Waterhouse Pepper.

MB: Yes, she wrote a book about Bolinas.

CE: Rancho Bolinas.

MB: Yes.

AK: She didn't tell much about Bolinas, though.

MB: I don't think she did.

AK: She could have called it Briones, I think.

MB: Yes.

CE: You know, we had the pleasure of interviewing Rose Briones just recently, and I think she's just about your age.

MB: Yes, I think she is. I went to see her one day. A friend took me to see her.

AK: Should go often. She is so lonesome. She sits there in that chair and never complains, looking up the road, hoping somebody's going to come in the gate. Oh, she is just darling.

MB: Oh, it seems too bad she has to live way off there by herself.

AK: Yes.

CE: She has a wonderful endurance and not embittered at all, she's so sweet. Well, let's see, where else would you around here? Paradise Valley, what does that mean to you? And where is that?

MB: You go about a block down this road, and there's a road that branches off to the left.

CE: Is that where the Jordan Martinellis have a place?

MB: Yes, down in Paradise Valley, yes. But that's where you go down. The road turns off there.

CE: And there was a name, Johnny Elphick, who lived there. What is he known for?

MB: Well he had a sort of a little ranch. He used to grow vegetables. He had delicious corn, I remember, and strawberries and other vegetables that he used to peddle. He used to come in a wagon. There used to be a funny story about him. They said he wanted to be married. He was a funny, old fellow. And he advertised for a wife.

CE: In the newspaper?

MB: Yes. I've forgotten whether he advertised or whether he answered an ad, but anyway he got his wife through an advertisement.

CE: A large buxom Irish woman, he wrote.
MB: Yes.
CE: What happened?
MB: I've sort of forgotten what -- I think --
CE: She became an invalid.
MB: I think so. I think that was it and he had to take care of her, so I don't think she did him much good. Do you remember anything about it?
AK: I never knew about that.
MB: You never knew about that.
CE: How about apple orchards around here?
MB: Yes, well, down in Paradise Valley there were quite a lot of apple orchards. Awfully good. We use to go down there and get apples.
CE: Gravenstein, I presume.
MB: Yes, Gravenstein apples, yes. There were two or three ranches down there.
CE: Mr. Dibblee told me one time there was an oil well out here.
MB: Oil well. Oh, I remember there was kind of a frenzy about oil at one point. They thought they discovered oil out near the reef. I remember some man, his name was Harvey, who was interested and rented our house for the winter, because we never came over in the winter, so my father decided to rent it to him. He explored but it -- I think they did sink one well, but it didn't amount to anything. They didn't get any.
CE: Just like the gold in Rancho San Geronimo that Mr. Mailliard got involved with. Did you ever visit the lime kilns up the road there?
MB: Yes, we use to have picnics there sometimes.
CE: Is that true? Do you know anything about who might have done it?
MB: Well the story was the Russians built them.
CE: Built them.
MB: Yes, they came down from the north.
CE: When you were out there, did you ride horseback?
MB: Sometimes. Yes. My father had this horse that could be ridden as well as driven, and so sometimes I rode him. We went for rides around the country.
CE: I suppose you did what all young people today are interested in doing, watching the birds, being outdoors and collecting things.
MB: Yes. I don't remember watching the birds at all; I wasn't interested in birds then.
CE: What were some of your interests?
MB: I remember collecting shells on the beach and having at one time a can full of salt water and collecting sea anemones and various things.
CE: Tide pool --
MB: Oh, yes, tide pool things.
CE: Did you bring some of your classmates here with you for the summer?
MB: Yes.
CE: Who were some of your contemporaries that enjoyed this life out here?
MB: Well, Georgia Wintringham and Agnes Menzies.
CE: Does she have any descendents?
AK: Well, Georgia never married.

MB: She never married but she has -- Her brother has two children, so she has nieces and nephews.

CE: Are they still in this area?

MB: Well, I've lost track of them; I don't really know.

CE: Georgia Wintringham. Who else might you have --

MB: Agnes Menzies, you know that name.

CE: I know Robert Menzies.

AK: Robert's sister.

MB: I've a picture of their house here.

CE: Robert Menzies' sister. We had the pleasure of talking with her daughter, Mary Menzies Halloway.

MB: Oh yes, Halloway, yes.

CE: And he sounded like a delightful gentleman.

MB: Yes, he was.

CE: And some of your other --

MB: Well, let's see, Edith Foster and Anna Foster and --

CE: Would that be Martha Foster's --

MB: Anna would be Martha Foster's sister. Edith Foster was another family.

AK: Did you know Edith?

MB: Oh, yes, very well.

CE: Well, you spent all your summers here and delightful years and then you are a grown woman and you obviously got married. When did this take place?

MB: I was married in 1913.

CE: 1913, where?

MB: In San Rafael, in my old home in San Rafael.

CE: Do you remember who married you?

MB: Yes, a minister from San Francisco, Doctor Meserve, his name was. A Unitarian minister.

CE: And you told me earlier, and I think we should put it into the record, you think that Doctor Alfred Taliaferro delivered you.

MB: I think so. I remember hearing my mother talking about him. I think he did.

CE: And Mr. Bullis and you settled where?

MB: We lived in San Francisco for about a year, and then my father gave us this lot next to his house, and we built a house there.

CE: Is the house there still?

MB: Still there, yes. And we lived there five or six years, and then my husband's business was transferred to Oakland, rather, Berkeley. So we moved to Berkeley.

CE: And lived there many years?

MB: Yes, lived there, oh my, lived there almost 50 years, until I came here to Bolinas five years ago.

CE: And you have children?

MB: Two. I have a son who lives in Mississippi right now.

CE: What is his name?

MB: George. He was named after my father.

CE: George Bullis. And your daughter's name?

MB: Barbara Pace.

CE: And is this lovely place her home?
MB: Well, we did it together.
CE: It's a stunning contemporary house. What is the name of the architect again?
MB: Don Batchelder.
CE: Don Batchelder.
MB: Yes, and as I say he lived in Bolinas at the time, that's why we thought it would be nice to have him. But he's moved up into the country now.
CE: Living in Berkeley, where did you live in Berkeley?
MB: Well I lived in several places, but longest on Oxford Street.
CE: Know it well.
MB: Do you -- near Los Angeles?
CE: Yes.
MB: Then, after my husband died, and the children were married, I sold the house and moved into a charming little house on Arch Street. Do you know Arch?
CE: I certainly do.
MB: Near Eunice. Same neighborhood. And I lived there for about twenty years, until I came over here.
CE: And you have been here five years?
MB: Five years, yes.
CE: Well, Berkeley is a stimulating place to live.
MB: Oh, it's a lovely place to live.
CE: And we had our family home there, too.
MB: Did you?
CE: Yes, and it's beautiful to look out and see the sun go down on Marin.
MB: Just beautiful.
CE: Have you ever done any writing, Mrs. Bullis?
MB: Except for that little book? I wrote a play once, a children's play, but it was never published or anything. But some people, a group put it on in San Rafael once. I did quite a bit of scribbling, but never had anything published.
CE: Are you active in this beautiful garden? Is this some of your efforts?
MB: Well, I do. I trim the dead flowers off; that's all I'm fit for now. I can't really dig and plant.
CE: Do you feel, in a sense, you've come home, when you returned here in Bolinas?
MB: Well, yes, in a sense, I do, yes.
CE: I have a photograph of the San Rafael High School entire student body 1904. Now there are 84 people in the photograph. Dolly Cushing gave it to us. She's in the picture, and the teacher in it is Miss McKinne.
MB: Neal McKinne.
CE: Do you know her, remember her?
MB: Oh very well, yes.
CE: She later went on and bought the Hamlin school?
MB: Yes. You see the Lichtenbergs took boarders at that time. Do you remember, Mrs. Kent?
AK: No.
CE: And she lived there. And so I used to go up to the Lichtenbergs a lot.. Elsa was a good friend of mine so I saw her outside of the school as well, so I got to know

her. And then I met her brother somewhere, at some dance or something, and I got to know her very well, and she had a younger sister. I got to know her. I knew the whole family and visited their house in San Francisco. But I only went to the high school for one year, and then we went to Miss Murison's in San Francisco.

CE: I see.

MB: And she came -- That was her first year of teaching, I think from college.

CE: In 1904?

MB: I guess it must have been. And so she taught me English that one year. So that was the only time she was my teacher.

CE: Well, I met her when she was Head Mistress and owner of the Sarah Dix Hamlin School, and was known as Mrs. Stanwood.

MB: Mrs. Stanwood, yes.

CE: Very forceful, wonderful woman.

MB: Very forceful person, yes.

CE: Do you have any idea, knowing her when she was such a young woman she could achieve what she did.

MB: No, I didn't. I didn't have any idea of that at that time. Well, I was young. I didn't think much about it, I guess, anyway.

CE: On your same block on Irwin, no, I guess it was on Grand, there was Eleanor Gilogly Murray. Did you know her?

AK: The name is Eleanor Gilogly.

MB: Gilogly, yes I remember that name.

CE: She was a teacher also. I just wondered if you might have known her.

AK: Latin teacher at one time.

MB: I don't think I had her for a teacher. I don't remember her.

CE: Was San Rafael a nice place to grow up at that time?

MB: I think it was. I think it was a lovely place to grow up. It was so beautiful, and we did so many happy kinds of things when I was a girl.

CE: Tell us some of the things you might do.

MB: Well, you see, for one thing, there were two boys schools in San Rafael, The Hitchcock Military Academy, and the Tamalpais Academy, and every month they each gave a dance. They wanted the boys to get to know how to dance and how to behave socially. So the girls of the town were invited to these dances. So that was great fun. We had two dances a month we went to at these schools.

CE: That's wonderful.

MB: It was really lots of fun. And we had a little club, I remember, of boys and girls. I've forgotten what we called it -- Oh, it was a tennis club. Mrs. A. W. Foster gave us an old -- He owned a piece of land with an old tennis court on it, and we fixed that tennis court up and had a tennis club.

CE: Isn't that where the San Rafael Improvement Club is today?

MB: Improvement Club, yes, yes, that's where that is today.

CE: Martha Foster Abbott gave us some beautiful pictures of that.

MB: Did she?

CE: I'll show them to you, they're in the car. I'll bring them in later.

MB: I'd love to see them.

CE: Were the San Rafael Baths going then?

MB: I can't remember when that started. I'm not sure. I don't think they were, though.

CE: All right.

MB: But our tennis club would put on dances and have various social things. We had quite a lot of sociability in that. Then we would sometimes, when I was younger, my father and a friend of his, and his little girl, who was my great friend, we took walks quite a lot in the hills above San Rafael. There were trails up there back of the convent through there, and we took lots of lovely walks.

CE: What was your impression of the convent, Dominican? Did you get over there often?

MB: No, no, my father I'm sorry to say, was rather prejudiced against Catholics, and he didn't want me to have anything to do with the convent.

AK: He was afraid you'd want to go, I suppose.

MB: There were some girls, did go, you know, from San Rafael for day students, but I never went. So I really had no contact with the convent at all until years later when I grew up. A girl whose sister was a nun became a great friend of mine, and so I went there with her several times and met her nun sister.

CE: They're really a wonderful group of sisters.

MB: Yes, they are.

CE: We've had the pleasure of talking with two of them; Sister Patrick who had been the head of the college for twenty years, and Sister Marguerite is very helpful to us. She's a librarian. They have a beautiful library.

MB: Have they?

CE: Beautiful.

MB: I remember Sister Dominique. She was the head of the music department.

AK: Oh, yes.

CE: The things that played a part in the building of this, I think, rather unusual county.

MB: Yes. Where the convent is and all through there was called the Coleman tract, and my father sub-divided all of that, I remember. And the part that now is where they have a stage and do plays.

CE: Forest Meadows?

MB: Forest Meadows, yes. He was going to keep that for his home. It was all fenced in beautifully, and he planted quite a few trees in there, but he died before he ever got it built, and so the convent bought it, and fortunately they did, because it's been kept in that beautiful natural condition.

CE: Were you living in Marin when they had the Marin Music Chest or were you in Berkeley?

MB: I was in Berkeley, but I came over for quite a few of them. And that was a lovely thing; they had the outdoor concerts.

AK: I like it in the Meadows.

MB: Oh, it is beautiful, just beautiful.

CE: Well, living in Berkeley, you had entree to many lovely things, with great flair.

MB: We certainly did.

CE: What was your husband's interest? What was his business?

MB: Well, he was in the insurance business. He was very fond of swimming. He loved Bolinas.

CE: I meant to ask you, in your early days out here, did you ever, were you ever around when any of these wrecks occurred around Duxbury Reef?

MB: Yes, I remember one and going out the next day and climbing up on to it. It went on the rocks.

CE: Oh, really?

MB: Yes, right above Duxbury Reef, and at low tide you could walk right out to it.

CE: You don't remember the name of it do you?

MB: No, I don't, I'm sorry. I don't remember it.

CE: There was the *Polaris* in 1924.

MB: I just can't remember at all what the name of it was. I remember climbing up the ladder to get on to it, and then thinking, being scared to death to go down the ladder. I was more scared to go down the ladder than to go up.

CE: Someone in your family is very artistic. Are you an artistic person?

MB: I don't know.

CE: Is it your daughter?

MB: I think it's my daughter.

AK: I think both of them are.

CE: Everywhere your eye falls in this house there is beauty, the arrangement on this table of those beautiful nasturtiums and daisies.

MB: Well, I did that, but that's nothing.

CE: Very beautiful.

MB: My daughter is very artistic.

CE: Does she paint or draw?

MB: She used to paint and draw when she was very young, but she doesn't do it anymore.

CE: Who plays the magnificent piano?

MB: Oh, I used to play a lot, but this young man, Bill Crist, who came is quite a pianist. He uses it a lot.

CE: Coming from Berkeley, did you ever know Janet Graham, who became Janet Graham Dewing?

MB: Yes, I did know her. I knew her mother.

CE: She has given us an interview about her life as a concert pianist. She lives in Kentfield now.

MB: I thought she lived somewhere in Marin County.

CE: Mrs. Bullis has gone in and gotten us her father's photo album. Tell us a little bit about it.

MB: This is a picture of the schooner. Let's see, what does that say?

CE: Oh, you mean it's caught on the sand spit.

MB: Bolinas schooner on sand spit. It doesn't say what the name of it is.

CE: We can find that out.

MB: And that's the convent.

CE: In San Rafael.

MB: And this is our old house in San Rafael, where I was born.

CE: Oh, we'll have to take a photograph of that. That's wonderful. Here's a close-up of it.

MB: That's the way it was originally. It was added onto afterwards.

CE: Oh. We'll have to take a picture of that. These are wonderful.

MB: Some of these are family friends.

CE: Now you have -- Your father has a photograph of the old paper mill at Taylorville.

MB: Is that the -- I didn't know what that was.

CE: Yes, that's Taylorville.

MB: That was on top of the mountain, on top of Tamalpais.

CE: See, they didn't spend holidays up at --Who's Old Pete?

MB: Oh, that was a horse we had. And that's the old hotel, the Rafael Hotel.

CE: Oh, that's an unusual shot of it.

MB: And then, this is another one.

CE: Yes, we will have to take a picture of that.

MB: This is when it was being built.

CE: Being built certainly.

MB: That was the court house.

AK: That was the son-in-law of the railroad man who built it?

MB: Baron Von Schroeder, yes.

CE: Did you ever go to the hotel?

MB: Oh, yes.

CE: For dances?

MB: Oh, yes, for dances.

CE: Tell us what was it like.

MB: Oh it was lovely.

CE: Was it like the Claremont or the Coronado?

MB: Yes, I think it was like, yes, the same type, same vintage you know. And they had dances in the dining room, which was a great big room. It was a lovely hotel, don't you think? You remember it?

AK: Well, it was in its last days when I came and it was beautiful, just lovely. And I had come up from the Coronado, so I was very familiar with it.

CE: Well, I certainly want to thank you, Mrs. Bullis, for letting us come today and share some of your reminiscences.

MB: Well, I hope you've gotten something out of it.

CE: Would you like to say anything in conclusion about this area? Dreams you might have for preserving this beauty? We do have a buffer now of two areas in the public domain that should maintain it very much as you remember.

MB: Yes, it seems to me that it's going to be saved pretty much as it has been, and I think that's very fine, very wonderful.

CE: And I hope you have many, many years here in this lovely property with your daughter.

MB: Thank you. Did you see these pictures? This is the picture of the Fourth of July parade that Mr. Newhall organized. They're very faint and not very good.

CE: Well, we might be able to get a snapshot.

MB: I guess those are the only two. Oh, that's the end of Irwin Street.

CE: And your home was where?

MB: Right here.

CE: And that's the entrance.

MB: That's the entrance and that was the tower. Do you remember, Mrs. Kent, was that there?

AK: Yes, that was there.

MB: And that, I remember, was the day -- They had a water tank in the top of it, and I remember the day it collapsed. We lived right here, just below it, and we heard this terrible noise and could see the water falling down on all sides of it.

CE: Well, Mrs. Bullis it's time for us to leave. Thank you very much. It's been a pleasure to come here today in your lovely home of you and Barbara Pace.

MB: I'm so glad you could come.

CE: Thank you so much.