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Anne T. Kent California Room

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INTERVIEW WITH MARY KING

by Carla Ehat
October 9, 1982

INTERVIEWEE: Mary King (MK)
INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE)
DATE OF INTERVIEW: October 9, 1982

CE: Today is Saturday, October 9th, 1982. Continuing the Oral History Project for the Anne Kent California Room, this is Carla Ehat. We are going to have the pleasure today of speaking with Mrs. Mary King, who resides at number 58 Florence Street in San Anselmo, California. Mary is a retired teacher of history, an avid lover of nature closely associated with Audubon Society, the Sierra Club and the Marin Conservation League. For many years she ran the West Point Inn on Mount Tamalpais. For years she owned and ran the Mountain Shop here in Kentfield and the store in San Francisco and outfitted many California hikers for trips to our beautiful Sierras and our national parks. Today, however, Mary is going to share with us her experiences with West Point and tell us the story of its beginnings. It's a pleasure to be here this morning, Mary.

MK: Thank you. It's pleasant to work with you.

CE: Tell us, Mary, how did it all begin, and what is West Point?

MK: West Point is a mountain lodge nearly at the summit of Mount Tamalpais. It was a lodge built by the Crookedest Railroad which went from Mill Valley up to the top of Mount Tamalpais and was used as an overnight stop for the people going to Bolinas and Stinson Beach on the other side. The name West Point comes from the fact that it was the farthest west point of the Crookedest Railroad. It is not particularly a west peak or something of that sort.

CE: It's not synonymous with the top of the mountain.

MK: No.

CE: We have a map here of Mount Tamalpais and its environs and I see there is West Point.

MK: Yes.

CE: And many trails that converge on –

MK: That's right. I was just beginning to say that. There are three fire roads, partly based on the old railroad right-of-way. There are many trails that come into West Point and it's a sort of rest spot for hikers coming and going over the whole mountain.

CE: Now, Mary, for the neophyte who has never been there, hiked to the mountain but has driven, say, there up to the theater and the summer for the plays and have gone over to Stinson Beach, the Mountain Home Inn is not far from you, is it?

MK: Not too far. And it also is a take-off place for many of the trails, and several of which meet up with West Point. Usually, people ride up to that point and then begin their hike. They used to be able to drive into West Point but the water company has very wisely restricted our cars to very few and it's mainly a walk-in place for hikers. If you want a bit of the history, I'll go through some of that for you. The West Point Inn is a mountain lodge operated co-operatively by members of the West Point Inn Association whose dual purpose is to maintain the historic building and to keep it opened for hikers and lovers of the mountain. The Inn was built in 1896 by the Mount Tamalpais Scenic Railway as a stopover and as an accommodation for people going by connecting stage coach and buggy to Bolinas and Stinson Beach.

CE: Explain that, if you would. In other words there was a way to –

MK: Yes, they'd take the train out from Mill Valley and get off the train at West Point. They could stay overnight. They could stop for refreshments. They could have meals there and so forth. It was run as an inn. The old barn that use to house horses is long since gone, but the water troughs are still there. There is a gate, which leads to the roads that go down to Bolinas. And stagecoaches met the trains there and took people down to Bolinas, and there are pictures that show delightfully how all this went on.

CE: Thank you.

MK: The Scenic Railway passed by the inn on the way to the Summit Inn on the top of Mount Tamalpais. The Summit Inns were each in turn destroyed by fire before the railroad was taken off the mountain. By 1930, when the Scenic Railway had been abandoned and the rails had been removed from the mountain, the property was included in the Marin Municipal Water District. Several private attempts to run the inn profitably failed. In 1943, the Water District decided to burn down the old inn as it constituted a fire hazard since it was unoccupied. At this point, the Bay Area hiking clubs came to the rescue and formed the West Point Club, as it was called at that time, to keep the inn available to hikers. The club formed a private corporation and took a lease from the Water District. Money was raised by subscription to buy equipment, and a caretaker was hired to ensure surveillance at all times.

CE: What year was this again, roughly?

MK: That was about 1930.

CE: So for 50 years it's –

MK: The railroad was abandoned on the mountain, and then there was a period of about ten years of private efforts to run the place, and never did any of them succeed. Then in about 1940 the club took over from the water company; 1943 was the actual date.

CE: So for 40 years almost it has been in this latest state?

MK: Right. And run by volunteers through all those years and we certainly have to salute the original charter members in the club who made such an effort to save it and

keep it through the years. In October 1978 or 1977, at the direction of the water company, a new set of bylaws was evolved and plans for much needed heavy repairs were put into operation and are now being implemented at a great rate. The name was changed in 1978 to West Point Inn Association to better reflect the organization of volunteers dedicated to the preservation and the public use of the inn. The membership is growing, restoration to 1890 décor is proceeding, services to hikers are increasing, and hikers are using this facility more than ever. Three porch display cases have been added to provide displays of the chief rocks, birds and flowers of Mount Tamalpais, and a free-standing display donated by the Park Service has been set up with historic display of the old scenic railway and the old inns.

CE: Photographs?

MK: There are photographs and story in the big case at the foot of the steps to West Point. And they give hikers who may not know the mountain and its history too well; they give a quick insight on how the inn happens to be there a mile and a half off the road and what purposes it serves. That in the main gives you a history of West Point to date. To give you a feeling of what makes up the life of West Point Inn there are occasions we can tell you about.

CE: Yes, I want to hear about that. I saw some photographs that you have in your own personal album. It looks like you've had some wonderful parties there.

MK: We surely have.

CE: Well tell us a few of those events, if you would.

MK: All right. First I'll give you some picture of what goes on day by day. On weekdays the caretaker is there to keep the place in order and to serve coffee, tea and lemonade to thirsty hikers.

CE: Is he a paid personnel?

MK: Yes he's a paid –

CE: And he lives there?

MK: He lives there and is there the five weekdays at all times. The weekend days are taken care of by volunteer members, who arrange to take care of the trade, we call it, the selling of lemonade and maps and so forth.

CE: You have a regular schedule like docents?

MK: We have a schedule made up two months at a time as to who is to be there and what weekends. If you call the inn to get information, he can tell you who's going to be on hand the weekend so you can contact them.

CE: Who's going to be on duty? Is this man been there sometime?

MK: The present one has been there a couple of years and others have served from two years to maybe ten years. The current keeper or caretaker is Ed Conaway. Ed is very much interested in the place and its history and its membership and is being very helpful about the whole place.

CE: Good.

MK: The decks which surround the view side of the inn have tables and benches for eating, drinking or just viewing. The view stretches below from the Delta to the Farallones and beyond. Richmond, Berkeley, San Francisco, Sausalito and Mill Valley, a bracelet of many colored jewels at night. In extremely clear weather, the snowy peaks of the Sierra are visible. On weekends, various members of the Association, as I told you, take care of it and they often prepare a commissary, we call it, which is a meal prepared

for all who want to make reservations and come up. Two or three people will work together to take care of the responsibilities for happy hour, breakfast, dinner and bag lunch. That's quite a responsibility.

CE: I should think so. Nobody stays there too late do they?

MK: The passing public doesn't stay there much after six p.m.

CE: They have to get home by dark.

MK: Yes, right, they'll get home by daylight. The persons who stay overnight are the persons who have made reservations well in advance to do so. And on the weekends we often have up to 30 people staying overnight, and have provisions for them.

CE: What do they have to bring?

MK: They have to bring their own sleeping bag and sleeping arrangements and their own personal equipment. They are asked especially to bring flashlights for light because we do not have electricity up there. We have gas butane lights in the main lounge and main building, but the others have no lights whatsoever, and we can't use coal oil lamps anymore nor candles because they are too much of a fire hazard. We have a big fire line in now but that doesn't take care of the situation. We have to be extremely careful about cigarettes and about lights.

CE: Are they permitted to smoke?

MK: They smoke only in the main lounge and on the porch.

CE: Do you have rules about alcohol?

MK: So far we have not allowed as a selling item.

CE: No, but I mean if somebody stays overnight and brings something, is that permitted or not?

MK: Yes, that is permitted. We have a very happy cocktail hour before every dinner and people have their own lockers in which they can keep liquor and whatever. Most of them are very generous hosts with others who are around.

CE: Everything is fine in moderation.

MK: We do not sell any liquor up there and it has recently come up as a question because with the heavy repairs we're making, we need funds and they have considered whether or not we should have beer and wine and liquor to sell and the general opinion is absolutely not; it will change the nature of the place.

CE: I think you're most correct.

MK: So that's where we stand on that. The general atmosphere of the old inn, the wood paneling, the fireplaces, the gas lights, make it a wonderful setting for holidays and other special parties. I would like to tell you some of these that I've managed, along with much help from members and friends, as they are the ones which I know most about.

CE: Certainly. Well, please do.

MK: Before I do that, I've forgotten one little item. To take care of 30 or 31 overnight guests, we have not only dormitory rooms in the top of the old inn but we have five cabins which have gradually been built through the years along the ridge of the mountain which have beautiful outlooks, each one of them, to the whole Bay Area and they're a delight to stay in. To see the moon at night, to see the sun rise in the morning, they are –

CE: And is one of these a honeymoon cottage?

MK: Yes, one of those is the honeymoon cottage, which is the most deluxe of them all. It has a bathroom and a fireplace and a beautiful deck from which to see the world.

CE: Now, there must be a fee for these accommodations?

MK: There is an overnight charge, very modest ones, like nine dollars, twelve dollars, six dollars for members, something like that. That's just roughing it. But very, very, modest prices because of the facilities and because we aren't making profit; we're making just enough to maintain the place.

CE: Good.

MK: The general atmosphere of the inn was the wood paneling and the fireplaces and the gas lighting, make it a wonderful setting for holidays and special parties, which I've already said. If you'd care to hear a description of one or two of the parties –

CE: I'd love to.

MK: Shall I go ahead with that?

CE: Yes, please.

MK: In January of 1974, a social chairman of the Marin regional group of the Sierra Club had planned a comet watching party at West Point. The night for the viewing, that was on January 11th –

CE: What was that comet?

MK: Kohutek, and it was the most outstanding comet for many, many, years, so everybody was paying attention to it and we picked the night it was supposed to be most visible to plan this party up at West Point. The night for the viewing came and the weather on Mount Tamalpais was dreadful, the worst night in years. Snow had fallen during the week, and was pushed off the roads to the right and left. Rain and wind were coming down in gusts and gales. I went up to West Point early with all the supplies, but I realized that it was no fit night for newcomers to be driving into West Point because you go up the main highway but you turn off and have to go a mile and a half on a poorly graded, usually poorly graded, fire trail into West Point.

CE: Kind of a road that needs a four-wheel, four gears.

MK: It needs somebody who knows what's there. So, I drove back to Pantoll in my raincoat and over poncho and stood where the road turns up to the summit and stopped all cars and advised anyone who did not thoroughly know the way to West Point not to try it under these conditions. By this means, a crowd of 235 pre-reserved guests was whittled down to 75 more or less veterans on the mountain, who, by the way, all got there and back to their homes safely. The clam chowder and borscht that had been provided were gulped down with gusto, about five bowls per person. And the party went on. An astronomer from down the Peninsula showed us slides of the comet, which had been taken currently, and he talked with us about the phenomena. I had rented a generator and had parked my car holding it as close as possible to the lounge windows and then ran a connecting wire to the projector inside. West Point had no electricity then. We now have a small generator for emergency and special use.

CE: Very resourceful.

MK: Well, it was one way of accomplishing it. About 9:30 that evening, as the program was drawing to a close, a most amazing thing happened. The front door opened and a woman who had hiked up alone from Mill Valley through rain and snow and wind, fallen trees and trails lost in the snow, and her flashlight had given out after the first half hour of her trek. We filled her with hot soup and goodies and she seemed none the worse for wear. We learned that she was an experienced hiker on Mount Tam and knew the trails well. But, even so, her accomplishment that miserable night was nothing short of a miracle.

CE: Oh, what a story. What an experience for her.

MK: If you'd like to hear about some of the Christmas parties –

CE: I love the fact your membership enjoys celebrating, enjoys using it.

MK: Yes, that's really what we do. The yen to do a Christmas party at West Point got the best of me as early as 1975. That year, on December 6 and 7, we worked out a combination of a Swedish Christmas dinner and a Santa Lucia breakfast. We decorated the lounge room with greens and berries and Swedish art objects gathered from several Swedish friends. The tables and buffet were graced with Swedish candelabra. The happy hour was set up handsomely with the usual things plus glug, meatballs and herring, of course. The dinner menu included baked ham, meatballs and sausages, "Johnson's Temptation," a Swedish potato dish, red cabbage, pickled beets, carrots and so forth. Dessert was Princess Torte, an elegant Swedish specialty cake with filling and almond paste.

CE: Were there some of your membership that were Swedish?

MK: Yes, there were, and we tried to gather in as many of them as we could. One family we honored with asking their oldest daughter to do the ceremony of Santa Lucia.

CE: Now what is that ceremony?

MK: Well, the young girl, on the next morning – It would be Santa Lucia Day in Sweden which is the middle of December. The young girl is dressed in a white gown and with the traditional headdress of greens and candles, in this case battery powered, made the rounds of rooms and guests serving Lucia buns and coffee. Later a hearty breakfast was served. Then we had several Christmas parties after that.

CE: Did you have a Christmas tree?

MK: Yes. One of the members very kindly each year, cuts down a Christmas tree that goes from the floor to the ceiling, from his own private land.

CE: Do you all decorate it?

MK: Then we all decorate it and decorate the fireplaces and bookshelves and so forth.

CE: What about music?

MK: Music, the time when I was doing these parties up there, was provided mainly by the piano.

CE: You've got a piano up there?

MK: It's a good piano; it's an upright.

CE: But you got that up the mountain?

MK: Yes, they got that up the mountain before my time, but I was there when we managed to hire a tuner to come up and really investigate the worth of the piano and to repair it and bring it back to shape. And he spoke very highly of the piano and he tuned it very well.

CE: I suppose somebody just donated it.

MK: Somebody must have donated it and I don't have in the records who did that, but we thank them heartily.

CE: And then you would sing, I guess, carols?

MK: We'd sing Christmas carols and even one of our members loves to bang off dance music and even the oldest members sometimes get out and do the light fantastic all by themselves.

CE: That sounds like a lot of fun, Mary. What other parties have you had there?

MK: Well, I can tell you about a – We have lots of our own parties, but once in a while, we, as members, invite our own particular groups up there. And this is another case of inviting the Marin regional group of the Sierra Club. I invited them up for a Halloween party, and it was potluck, and guests were required to come as you have always wanted to be, and that leaves it wide open.

CE: Costume party.

MK: A costume party.

CE: How did you dress, by the way, Mary?

MK: Oh, I hate to tell you but it's included here. We won't say who is responsible. It was a potluck, and guest were required to come as they always wanted to be, so the attendance was great and the variety and cleverness of costumes were outstanding, from an Indian Shaman to a pseudo-pregnant woman. We won't say who –

CE: How can you be pseudo-pregnant?

MK: You can wear an evening wrapper that looks as if you were. They kidded me royally about that. Several couples were allowed to sleep out that night. I find in my notes such entries as own tent, patio, porch and so forth, as well as the usual cabin assignments.

CE: Was it a beautiful night or something?

MK: It was a lovely night. They all had their fun sleeping out. For three years in succession now, this is another kind of party. For three years in succession, 1978, '79, and '80, we had a regular old English-type Christmas dinner, inspired by the Bracebridge dinner in Yosemite.

CE: At the Ahwahnee?

MK: Yes. I must say we call ourselves a very mini-Bracebridge. We decked the halls with boughs of holly, and set up an elaborate happy hour with mulled wine and cranberry punch. The dinner was the traditional roast beef, Yorkshire pudding – we substituted popovers – horseradish sauce, potatoes, carrots, and so forth, concluding with warm plum pudding flambé and brandy sauce, or hard sauce, and after dinner, water crackers and cheese.

CE: Tell me, Mary, we haven't talked about the kitchen. You must have a very well equipped kitchen to do these things. What kind of stove?

MK: We have a six burner, large grill, big oven type of old iron stove that works with butane and it has served these 40, 50, you name it, how many years before, I don't know. But it's still serving perfectly. It's a wonderful old stove and it has never caused a fire nor an explosion or anything wrong. What good spirit prevails in it, I don't know, but it bears with us all.

CE: Is the kitchen a pretty good-sized room?

MK: It's a fair-sized room. It's possible for big dinners.

CE: Is it as big as your living room?

MK: About half as big as my living room. It has a stove. It has a cabinet. It has big restaurant-type basins in stainless steel and it has a sort of storage cupboard; room for the big pans down below and room for the spices and tea-serving affairs up top.

CE: And you, over the years, your organization has accumulated china and all the cooking utensils, and that's all part of the inventory?

MK: Yes. We were very fortunate recently to talk with one of the sons of a family who ran the inn privately after it belonged to the water company, and they gave us – Now

many years have passed; they gave us several of the heavy ironstone dishes and pitchers and things that were used at the time they were running the inn.

CE: Oh, that's what you were looking for, too.

MK: Yes, exactly. So we put them mostly where people could look at them rather than use them, although they are very nice to have. The kitchen is side by side with what we now call the pantry, which is a much larger room, twice as big, and the pantry has a long counter, high counter, on which salads and deserts can beautifully be fixed. And it has its own sink, and it's possible to wash the silver and the glasses there and shelves to put them in. It formerly was the bar. In the days of private ownership, the pantry was the bar, and it serves now very handily for an assist on all the entertaining and preparation of food that we do.

CE: Do you have an inventory of tin goods?

MK: We have not too much of tin, mostly aluminum, granite, or what we use to call granite, and there are even still quite an inventory of old heavy iron.

CE: I meant canned goods.

MK: Oh, canned goods. No. You see, we don't support – We bring what we want each time. The keeper does his own marketing for his own private cooking.

CE: I see. Other than for the drop-in hiker who you provide coffee, tea or lemonade.

MK: Yes, coffee, tea or lemonade. And now we have crunchies for the hungry and we sell maps. Those are the only provisions except for the running of the inn, the bathroom paper supplies, kitchen paper supplies and so on.

CE: That brings up a point. What about the water? How do you get your water? Is it a well?

MK: The water comes from a spring above us on the mountain and it is caught in a reservoir, so to speak, a built one. I can't think of the word at the moment. But it feeds spring water, beautiful spring water, down to the lodge. We've had it tested and we know that it is excellent water. Since the big storm, which I'll tell you more about, they have rebuilt the tank for holding the water and rebuilt the water lines down to the inn, and we have an excellent supply of water at the inn. It's both good to drink and good for all the laundry purposes.

CE: Do you have a laundry?

MK: No. The heavy part of the laundry goes out. But, you see, we don't have a heavy part anymore because everybody brings his own sleeping bag and other personal things that they use.

CE: Well, let's get back to some more of these events. What are some of the other Christmas events, Mary?

MK: Well, we had those three Bracebridge dinners, so to speak. And I would like to tell you one little feature of those dinners that is enjoyable. It was the singing of madrigals by students of the College of Marin who literally sang for their dinners. One year, with the help of their instructor, we rigged up a piece of old driftwood resembling a boar's head with all the traditional fruit and holly décor and the singers, holding it high on a fine silver tray, marched us into dinner singing the medieval boars head song. We entertained ourselves otherwise with Christmas poems and songs and a variety of lyrics, both selected and ad-libbed.

CE: Well that's just a wonderful treat.

End, Side A

CE: Mary, I know there are all sorts of events that you've had and I want you to lead up somehow to the great experience you had on January 4th.

MK: All right. We've covered pretty well the kind of occasions that go on up there, but there are some that are most unusual. The carrying along day by day and month by month are days of responsibilities with parties, fund raisers, keeping supplies going and coming, doing special housekeeping chores and serving on the Board of Directors and so forth, selling coffee, tea and lemonade and Mount Tamalpais maps and other things. Miscellaneous contributions help to make money for repairs and maintenance.

CE: Tell us, in the last few years what the –

MK: Yes, in the last few years, under this new arrangement with the Water District, we have put in, first of all, a very adequate fire line which reaches to hose outlets around the inn.

CE: So you've encircled it with water protection.

MK: We're encircled with water protection. And that took a lot of work parties and a lot of shoveling and digging and moving in of pipes and all that sort of thing. It was a real workout which the members fell into with great gusto and very proud of their accomplishment. Then we had to put in a whole new septic tank arrangement. The old set had just given up completely. And there again, it was a matter of much digging and putting in of pipes and eventually, when the big tank was to be put in the ground, it had real difficulty getting in, big trucks like that getting in to place the thing. Some trees had to be cut even to do it.

CE: It was a logistic problem.

MK: It was a real one.

CE: Well, from your membership, then, I gather you have a cross-section of all sorts of mechanical talents?

MK: We fortunately have.

CE: Electricians, plumbers –

MK: Backhoe drivers, electricians, plumbers, carpenters and so forth.

CE: Well, then I imagine at the end of each of these work days there were lovely meals and –

MK: There were free lunches made to satisfy the big appetites.

CE: But that was part of the fun, wasn't it?

MK: Yes, yes. Now, we did have to hire professional help for one of our big undertakings, and that was putting on new roofs, taking off five old roofs, by the way, and putting on new roofs on the main lodge building and the five cabins. The storm of January made it absolutely imperative that we get going on the roofs and they're completed and in good condition now.

CE: Well, I think it's time, Mary, that you told us about your most unusual experiences. You were there the night of the January 4th, '82 storm?

MK: The bad storm.

CE: You weren't there alone, I hope?

MK: Well, almost. I had gone up to remove the Christmas decorations that a friend and I had put up long before Christmas, and the holiday season was over, New Year's was over, so we were up there – I was going up there to take down the decorations. The friend who helped me put them up was there because she had entertained friends there over the weekend. The friends left, and she and I were there alone from Sunday afternoon to go on

with our work. But, we expected relief; as far as keeping the house running was concerned, we expected relief on Monday. Well, this, then, is a story, one of the most ridiculous happenings I think that might ever have been up there. Another member and I, both in our 70s, as I said, were taking down the decorations and the storm began. The storm raged all Sunday and Monday.

CE: Were you frightened that night when it first hit, Mary?

MK: I heard all the windows creak, and I heard all the doors swing, and they were doing it all over the building, so it was hopeless to get around and stop it.

CE: Were you frightened?

MK: Not really frightened, but just concerned. The friend who was with me loves the wind so I knew she wouldn't be doing anything about the noise from the storm and wouldn't be afraid of it. We got through the night and it continued to rain the next day and I think still the next. She stayed over with me because the relief help couldn't get in in that storm.

CE: You were marooned in a sense, weren't you?

MK: We were marooned. And we found out a day or so later –

CE: Did your power go out?

MK: Well, we don't have electricity. The telephone went out and we didn't have any connection by telephone for quite a while. The substitute relief that was supposed to come in for us while the keeper was away on holiday couldn't get in touch with us until Tuesday, and he let us know that he was caught in the flood in Kentfield. His car was underwater. He was staying in a temporary hostel until he could get his car out. So it was hopeless, and the two of us had to stay there.

CE: May I interrupt you a moment? Did you, by any chance, have a transistor radio?

MK: We did not. I could have had one there perfectly well but didn't anticipate anything.

CE: So you didn't know what was happening around you, and the devastation?

MK: We knew nothing of the devastation around us until the rain stopped enough for us to get out. And I walked the trails in the different direction, all three of the fire trails, the roads that come into West Point, had fearful washouts in them and we knew that nobody could get in and we couldn't get anybody by phone but eventually they got to us. And part of the time the phone was usable and part of the time it wasn't. And they told us all these things that were happening down below.

CE: But people did know you were up there?

MK: Yes people knew we were up there. And we weren't frightened. The building was as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar. Streams of water, rivers of water, were running down the roadsides, down the hillsides, and some of the hillsides were washing out within sight, but we were safe and sound.

CE: Does West Point sort of sit on the solid base –

MK: It sort of sits on a solid reach out of the mountain, and everything descends all around it except the road up to the summit.

CE: It was a good site, in other words, that somebody –

MK: It's a very good site that somebody picked, and the building is as solid, as I say, as it could possibly be. So we didn't have to fear that. We had food enough from the weekend leftovers to keep us well fed for the rest of the week.

CE: And you could fire up the butane stove?

MK: And we had butane to last us. We began to wonder if we had enough to last us, and we finally found where the tank was and read that it was at zero but that was the fourth day and the fourth day we got help. That fourth day was a Thursday, and on that Thursday both the caretaker and the water company ranger got into us by throwing rocks into the smallest of the road wash-outs until they could cross it with their four-wheel drive.

CE: They had to make a path for themselves.

MK: They had to make a way in before they could get to us. We couldn't get our cars out. They took us out that day in the four-wheel drive, but we couldn't get our cars out until Saturday after the water company had brought in a bulldozer to fill the great gap in the road up to Panoramic Highway. My careful ride that day down the mountain, still devoid of any traffic, was something to remember. The rest of my life I shall remember it. Wild nature was still prevailing over the whole mountain. I stopped and stared with fascination at waterfall after waterfall and rushing streams everywhere. In spite of all the destruction I gloried in those wild rushing waters.

CE: Mary, you know that is a wonderful experience.

MK: Yeah.

CE: Were there any trees that were toppled?

MK: Indeed, there were trees that were toppled, and rocks that fell all over the place, loosened by the wetness of the ground, just all kinds of hazards everywhere. But that Saturday we were able to drive down in spite of all of the debris that had washed down on the roads. So, repairs began from there.

CE: Tell us a little bit about other activities, Mary. You do other things, I know. Your membership – Don't you give some breakfasts or something?

MK: Yes, we do have to do a number of things to raise money, to help with all these expensive repairs. One of the things some of the members do is to put on a lovely medieval music concert once a year.

CE: Up there?

MK: Up at West Point. It's a walk-in concert and the music is provided by various groups or individuals who specialized in renaissance music and they are perfectly delightful classical programs. We always have a good crowd.

CE: Is this a tradition now with –

MK: Well, for two years now it's been – Three years it's been –

CE: What time of the year do you do this?

MK: Various times. The last one was just two or three weeks ago and it was led and sponsored by Madi Bacon, who used to run the San Francisco Boys Choir.

CE: Very good.

MK: And so it's a very well-done affair. Other things that have been done to raise money up there are, for instance, an auction. Things which members brought up and you would think no one would be up there to buy it, but we made a very nice piece of money off of that auction and had loads of fun.

CE: You mean all of these items had to be toted up there?

MK: All had to be toted up there.

CE: And had to be displayed and then taken down?

MK: Taken down and delivered, some of them. It was a fun day for everybody.

Recently they've been doing, what you suggested, the pancake breakfasts. This was an

idea from Pete Martin who used to serve at the fire station on Mount Tamalpais, and he's a history buff of the first order on Mount Tamalpais history, especially of the old Crooked Railroad. Pete began the breakfasts, and they have grown each time until we have almost more takers than we can handle.

CE: Is that an ongoing thing, or is that just for –

MK: Yes, that will be an ongoing thing. It may not go through the winter months, but it will begin early in the spring and at least once a month they will have a pancake breakfast which they will announce publicly as well as in the membership. One of the recent ones was bowled over in the middle of their performance by a hiking group of 76 people coming in on them all at once, but they managed to stretch the supplies out and feed everybody. The breakfast is for the unheard-of price of two dollars and fifty cents per person for all you want; you can have refills. And believe it or not, at that low price and with present inflation, we have made some considerable profit off of it. Isn't that fantastic?

CE: And all of your membership, certain ones, donate the preparation and the serving and cleanup?

MK: Yes, and do things, right. Oh, they're busy as bird dogs, various members, especially the young ones, waiting tables. They have a reputation for being very efficient with it. Most of the serving is done on the porches with everybody enjoying the view and the mountain air. That gives you an idea of some of the earning projects. To give you general ideas of the membership –

CE: Yes. First of all, Mary, what is your membership, roughly, about 175?

MK: Yes, about 175 to 200 is where we've kept it so far.

CE: Are the dues reasonable?

MK: The dues are reasonable, thirty-five dollars for a single person per year, and \$50 per couple, plus incidental expenses that are paid for straight-out. Work parties are required for members, new members, and two sponsors are required. And if you talk with any of the members or with the caretaker, he can give anybody those facts and an application blank.

CE: Is a printed list of your membership available?

MK: It is printed up and mailed to the members, and they haven't, so far, published an extra batch. But, it's possible for anybody to have it.

CE: But membership is by invitation?

MK: Well, it's new. It comes largely from people who have been up there on a hike and seen how delightful the place is, and they ask us if and how they can become members. Also, members introduce their friends, and –

CE: Well, it's to your advantage to have more members, is it not?

MK: Yes it is, to an extent.

CE: To support –

MK: To support it and keep it going.

CE: Can a person be a non-working member and pay more, for example?

MK: Yes, they're working on arrangements for that sort of thing right now.

CE: That sort of might be helpful.

MK: Sustaining members. The membership is open to the public with suitable screening by the Membership Committee. The inn is considered a walk-in facility and that's important for people to know.

CE: In other words, if a stranger from another state wants to visit the Point Reyes National Seashore or Mount Tamalpais State Park, or whatever, and he is over in that area and comes upon your place, he can be made welcome?

MK: The walkers are definitely made welcome and served whatever they wish, in the lines that we carry. There is a certain limit of ability to get cars in. During the week time, five cars can be allowed on any one day or any one occasion.

CE: You don't want to even advertise that.

MK: We don't want to advertise the cars because they make trouble on the mountain.

CE: Tell me, interrupting you just a moment in your story, are you in close association with the park department and the rangers? Do you have any liaison with them?

MK: We certainly feel that it is important to have a good relationship.

CE: Yes, for they're there on the mountain.

MK: Yes, and they're a very great help and protection to us, and we want to be a very satisfactory resident to them. They have been most helpful, and we in turn try to maintain the place in a way that's very satisfactory to them. West Point Inn is the only surviving structure of the old Mount Tam Railroad.

CE: Gosh, it won't be long it will be in its 100th year.

MK: Yes, and will we have a celebration and all in the ways of 1895. It will be a lot of fun one of these times. The old roadbed is now used as fire roads and they've been repaired since the storm.

CE: Things pretty well back to normal?

MK: Things are back to normal in the main. Even the last detour has been wiped out on the mountain road. So you can get in without any trouble. With its nostalgic construction and its superb view, let us hope that it can always be maintained and enjoyed.

CE: Well, I certainly think it will with, if its membership is made up by people like yourself, Mary. Before we conclude, I'd like you to talk a little about the future of the inn, some of the goals and financial help. It takes a lot of money, doesn't it, to maintain it in today's world?

MK: Yes, it does. And up in that high part in the world it's not the easiest thing to get people up there to spend money. But, we've managed with the things I've told you about to do considerable. And each commissary, each host and hostess that put on a party, try to make the dinner and the meals sufficiently simple so there is some profit from the fees for the meals and for the overnight. And between selling the lemonade and so forth, and the overnights and the dinners, we keep a certain amount going, but these big things that I told you about –

CE: Like the roofs for instance.

MK: The fire road and the septic tank and the roofs took thousands of dollars.

CE: Did you get any help?

MK: We did get help.

CE: May I ask from whom?

MK: The Buck Fund has helped us. They've given us matching funds particularly to help us get the roof on. It was a terribly expensive project, and they very kindly have helped us. We raised our matching funds sufficiently.

CE: Within your membership?

MK: Within the membership. And the help has come from them quite adequately to get us through that ordeal. Another source of help has been private individuals. Some of the

members and some even not members have given considerable sums. For instance, one member offered to give us fifteen hundred dollars if we would match it. And with that three thousand dollars he had a way available to him of buying all new beds and all new mattresses for West Point, and that was a considerable gift, I'll tell you. And we did match it and the beds are superb and very, very much a joy to everyone who comes.

CE: What other needs do you see that you would like to see fulfilled, if you could, to make you happy?

MK: Right now they're replacing all the studding and the floorboards of the deck that goes around two thirds of the building.

CE: The lodge.

MK: Yes, the deck of the lodge. It has grown too old and too questionable, so that is all being replaced and that will take a nice piece of money. The other projects will be probably, will be tying in with something that is already started. There is a large open area in front of the lodge, looking toward San Francisco, and they have installed already a lovely little fountain for public drinking. They have restored the old water trough for the horses and have installed hitching posts for horses, on the mountain, and that area will probably be developed into a little more of a picnic area with tables and benches and that sort of thing.

CE: Very good.

MK: The various cabins could do with some improvement.

CE: Little refurbishing.

MK: Refurbishing and that sort of thing will be our future investment; the immediate things at any rate.

CE: Things that have nothing to do with money, the intangible goals. For example, is it within the realm of possibility that you could foresee the property becoming part of the state landmark?

MK: It is possible, and it has been considered at the time when we redid the bylaws and made new contracts with the water company.

CE: Soon it will be centennial.

MK: Right. The bylaws took care of our rootings for the immediate future. The possibility of going into the State Park is there, of course, and our reason for wanting to keep it in the hands of the citizens of Marin County, largely. Of course we have members and guests from all over the Bay Area and even members who live in far points of the country. But, our reasons for trying to keep it in private hands is for the community input, the personal thing, and a thing with lots of feeling and history and tradition that wouldn't be kept up too well by a governmental installation up there. It's kept up much better by people who love it, who are sensitive to it, who want to keep it and –

CE: Are willing to assume that responsibility, too.

MK: Yes.

CE: One further thing. Nancy Skinner, whom we know, she gives these walks, these history walks all over the mountain.

MK: Right.

CE: Has she brought her classes from the College of Marin to visit West Point?

MK: Yes, she has brought them up each year, maybe two or three different groups. There's one group which celebrates the old railroad right-of-way and that railroad group comes up. Another group is called Tribute to the Mountain. Nancy usually gets a group

of 20, 25, who want to know all the things about the mountain and to experience it. So they come up and they stay overnight and we make things as comfortable as possible for them and they're always delightful groups. And then there are other times that Nancy brings just most any of her hikes, either daytime or nighttime; sometimes they go up to the top of the mountain after dark.

CE: They do?

MK: Yes, with special permission. And that's quite an experience, too. Nancy has long since become a member and also she's our appointed historian and she is working on, at the present time, perhaps getting some kind of official status either heritage or state monument or something of the sort, for the place to keep it guaranteeably intact.

CE: Well, Mary, you are to be complimented for your love of the place and your tireless effort in revitalizing West Point and it's been a pleasure today to have you share with us this wonderful story. Thank you so much.

MK: Thank you.