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INTERVIEW WITH MARGARET NELSON HALL

by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent

April 19, 1980

INTERVIEWEE: Margaret Nelson Hall (MH)

INTERVIEWERS: Carla Ehat (CE) and Anne Kent (AK)

DATE OF INTERVIEW: April 19, 1980

TRANSCRIBER: Marjorie Hoffman

CE: Today is Saturday, April 19th, 1980. This morning we're at that beautiful Danish retirement home in San Rafael called Aldersly and we are going to have the pleasure this morning, Mrs. Kent and I, of talking with Margaret Hall, Mrs. Nelson Hall. She's going to share with us, hopefully, her reminiscences of the old Olema Hotel where she stayed when she was a young teacher, graduate of San Francisco Normal School and her first job was at the Olema School in 1920. It is awfully nice to be here with you today, Margaret. Now, I understand you were born in Seattle, March 23rd, 1899. What brought you to California?

MH: The death of my mother, and my grandmother, my Danish grandmother, came up and brought me down to her home in Bakersfield and I lived there through my grammar school days and high school days and then we moved to San Francisco.

CE: What precipitated your becoming a teacher? Was that a dream of yours, or --

MH: Yes, I always loved children and I enjoyed being with them and I thought it would be fun to teach them. I had hoped to teach in San Francisco and I took the Civil Service and they frightened me. I thought I hadn't done well, so I decided to try a country school that was near first. And remember, Mr. Anderson was in Normal School. He lived over here. I'm sure you remember him, Mrs. Kent.

AK: No, I don't.

MH: He talked me into taking Olema School.

CE: Had you any idea at that point, have any knowledge of Olema at all?

MH: No, nor Marin County.

CE: Well, tell us about that. Just share that experience with us. Did you go over alone?

MH: Yes. I remember came over to --

CE: On the ferry?

MH: Yes. Then the little train up to Point Reyes. Then the train was met every day by a little old Ford bus from the hotel to pick up any guests. And I rode back on this little old Ford, little seats at the side, and went to the hotel and had lunch and then I went to see one of the trustees, who at that time was Mrs. Gamboni, the butcher's wife there, old timers from up there at that time. Mrs. Bloom and Walter Nelson were the three trustees, and I guess they thought I was all right, so they signed me up.

CE: And Walter was one of the sons of John Nelson who owned the hotel.

MH: Yes. He had died many years before, of course.

CE: I remember interviewing some other teachers that some of them lived in ranch houses, but you elected to live in the hotel.

MH: Well, some of the country schools out in Point Reyes, you had to -- You couldn't get back.

CE: Where was this school located in relationship to the hotel? Can you kind of place the site?

MH: About what we call a block away, toward Bolinas.

CE: Toward Bolinas?

MH: Yes. It's up on a little knoll. There's an old lodge hall there; I think it was called Druids Hall. Well, next door to that, towards Bolinas, was the little school. It wasn't very old when I was there; it was only a few years old. The community was very proud of it.

CE: Well, tell me, did you teach all grades?

MH: I had 39 children, all eight grades. I'd never been in a country school, so it was quite an experience. I surely had to work, but I loved it.

CE: Who were some of the families that the children were attending there? Were they just from Olema or did it go all the way down towards Bolinas, Olema Valley, or --

MH: No.

CE: Do you recall some of those names?

MH: Oh, let me see. There were the Bloom children and the Gamboni boys, oh, so many.

CE: Well, we can think of them as you go along.

MH: Guido Baccaleoni.

CE: Initially, how did the parents react to you? Were they delighted to have a teacher come? Did you replace somebody, for example?

MH: Well, a teacher would only stay there a year or two, you know. So many times, in those days, you had to have country experience to teach in some of the cities. One of my friends went with me at the same time and she taught at Inverness and she was from Stockton. Well, she had to have a year's experience before she could teach in Stockton.

CE: In other words, you sort of served your apprenticeship out in the field?

MH: That's right.

CE: Were you nervous or were you excited?

MH: Scared to death and excited because I'd never even been in a country school.

CE: Well, was it rather difficult to teach all grades? What were the grades?

MH: One to eight. Well, you'd have three and four in one class and then maybe you wouldn't have any in the second grade and then five or six in the third grade. You could group them. And for social studies, we used to group them. So that worked out very nicely.

CE: Well, then, arrangements were where you could stay at the hotel.

MH: Right.

CE: Now, describe the hotel for us, if you would. We brought some old photographs. Was this veranda around it at the time that you were there?

MH: Oh, yes. I remember hearing many stories about the earthquake, you know, people came up from San Francisco and slept on the porch, all around there, to get away from the city.

CE: Well, what was on the ground floor? Rooms, or was that dining room and public rooms downstairs?

MH: There was a huge dining room and, of course, in the back a big kitchen and in the front was the office entrance and then there was a bar for guests off one side.

CE: Typical bar, with mahogany?

MH: As I remember, yes. I wasn't in the bar, though.

CE: You never went in there. There were no bedrooms?

MH: No, the bedrooms were all upstairs.

CE: They were all topside. Did they have permanent guests there? Like yourself?

MH: No, they had a couple of boarders. Mr. Martinelli, the store owner at the time, and a Mr. Frank Coley, an elderly man that lived there too, and they always had meals.

CE: What Martinelli are we talking about, Eno or --

MH: I think his name was Samuel.

CE: Did he have a store there?

MH: Yes, he had it many years when I went there. And that was an interesting place to go into. He sold everything you could think of in that store.

CE: A country general store?

MH: Yes, I guess so; I'd never seen one before. You could buy anything in there and it was so interesting.

CE: You mean hardware, from hardware to dry goods to --

MH: Any cosmetics, anything you wanted.

CE: Was that directly across the road from the --

MH: No.

CE: Where was this store?

MH: There was a picture of it I saw a minute ago. Here it is. He added on to that later.

CE: I see. That's on the southeast corner.

MH: They lived upstairs. When I left there, it was larger than that. That's still used as a store.

CE: Yes, and we understand there's a false front of the old butcher shop that is in the Smithsonian back in Washington.

MH: I've been told that too. That old, old butcher shop.

CE: Now, was that across the road from the hotel?
MH: No, that was toward Point Reyes.
CE: Point Reyes, on the same side of the road.
MH: You know where the Catholic church was? Well, I believe it's right next door to that, the old Gamboni home.
CE: Well, let's get back to the hotel. Tell us a little bit about the Nelson family, if you would.
MH: Well, I don't know just exactly what you'd like to hear. They worked very hard and were very kind people, very highly respected in the community. As I say, they raised these three children. Two of John's children hadn't married and Ed Nelson, Edgar --
CE: Would you name the children again for me?
MH: The daughters were Lydia, Elna and Bertha.
CE: And Bertha is --
MH: My husband's mother.
CE: The mother of your husband, and there were two sons?
MH: Yes, Edgar and Walter.
CE: Now were the children involved in the hotel in any way?
MH: Well, not my husband; he went off, but the two daughters were. They were home there until one married, and then one went to the city to work. They all helped in the hotel.
CE: Did they have livery accommodations? Horses?
MH: Well, in the early days, I guess, but not during my time. The barn was still there and used as a garage, you know.
CE: Well, I had heard that Mr. Nelson had run a stage line at one time. Is that correct?
MH: Yes, that was the grandfather, John Nelson.
CE: Yes, that's what I'm talking about. Was John alive when you were there in the '20s?
MH: No.
CE: Who was carrying on?
MH: Edgar. He was the older son.
CE: Edgar, he was carrying on, I see.
MH: And Walter with him. And then toward the end, Lydia Nelson did the cooking. Before my time, my husband's mother and his Aunt Elna, who were gone --
CE: Well, originally they must have had some Chinese help or some --
MH: They did. They had a Chinese cook, and he was there the first year I was there and after that they had to let him go. There wasn't enough business, you know.
CE: Well, as a steady boarder there, would it be quiet during the week and then fill up on the weekends?
MH: Yes, as a rule.
CE: Or was it seasonal? Did you have some tourists, summer business?
MH: Yes, they did, and vacationers, you know.
CE: What was the big attraction out there? Fishing?
MH: Oh, it was just quiet and restful, and they had a tennis court and croquet court and in later years, the creek had a big dam down below and they had a few rowboats and the children used to like to come there.

AK: Hatchery.

CE: Was there a fish hatchery around there?

MH: Around Bear Valley, I understand, but that was before my time. I'd heard of it, that's all.

CE: But people still came out in the train to Point Reyes Station and then the hotel met them with the little Ford car?

MH: Yes.

CE: What was it, a little open touring car?

MH: No, it was -- They called it "the bus." It was more like a pick-up truck, really, with little benches on the side. It was small. Then they had the family car, you know, the old Ford Motel T, I guess you called it.

CE: What were your hours when you were teaching? You'd have to walk over to the school; that was short --

MH: It was just a short distance.

CE: You'd be there at nine o'clock or eight?

MH: Oh, eight, I'd get there early. We had an old wood stove; I had to build a fire to keep the children warm.

CE: Any disciplinary problems?

MH: No, they were awfully good children, didn't have any problems. In fact, they brought me a boy from Nicasio. Remember Mr. Davidson, Mrs. Kent?

AK: The school man?

MH: Yes, school superintendent. They brought this tall young fellow from Nicasio and he was transferring and Mr. Davidson came up a week later. "How's he getting along?" "Fine." "No discipline problems? The teacher gave up on him. She couldn't handle him at all." "It's a good thing you didn't tell me." We got along fine. I had to be a little severe with him at first, you know, to learn the rules because he was a big fellow and I didn't want him to give the little children any ideas, you know, being rude.

CE: I think you're just a good teacher, don't you, Mrs. Kent?

AK: It sounds like it.

MH: Oh, I don't know. I'm the old-fashioned kind. I like my classroom quiet.

CE: What were some of the subjects that you covered?

MH: We taught everything: arithmetic, history, geography and --

CE: Geography, I love it. I'm sorry they ever changed the name of geography, but I understand they're going to take that name back.

MH: I hope they do. I think it should be -- Of course, they're combining -- Of course, I haven't taught for many years now, but they were combining social studies, you know, the history and geography and a little general science and a bit of everything.

CE: How long were you at the school, may I ask?

MH: Three years.

CE: Then did you continue your career?

MH: No, then I was married.

CE: Oh, it's there at the Nelson Hotel that you met your husband?

MH: Yes. He was with the PG&E by that time.

CE: But through the family and your staying there is how you met him?

MH: Yes.

CE: Were you married at the hotel?

MH: No, I was married in San Francisco in my aunt's home, or rather in a church there, and then a reception in my aunt's home. But it was interesting; our paycheck at school was called our warrants. I don't know whether they still are or not.

CE: Tell us about that.

MH: That was given to me and then I had to go around to the trustees to have them sign it before I could cash it. Walter Nelson would make out the warrant for me and then I had to go down to the Bloom Ranch, and across from them were the Gambonis and get those two ladies to sign my warrant.

CE: Was this a monthly affair or semi-annual?

MH: Monthly affair.

CE: What was the purpose behind that, do you think?

MH: I don't know. But it was they called a ten months school.

CE: To have these trustees look at you and see how you were doing, do you suppose?

MH: They all had families of their own, and they were farmers' wives. I suppose they didn't have time to visit the school. I very seldom had any visitors, but they probably looked me over when I first came, you know, see if I would do.

CE: What did you make a month?

MH: Ninety dollars a month.

CE: For ten months.

MH: Ten months and I'd stretch that over the year. We had six weeks vacation in winter time because the children all walked to school and the roads were muddy and hard to get over then.

CE: So instead of three months in the summer, you had two.

MH: Right. No, I think we had -- Wait a minute. I think it was about the same. As long as we got in our quota of days for the year. I can't remember what that was now. We had to teach so many days a year, you know, to get your state funds.

CE: Did the Superintendent of Schools visit?

MH: Yes, quite often. Mr. Davidson, he was Superintendent of Schools for many years.

CE: Mrs. Kent?

AK: I would like to know what the town was like. What we call Point Reyes Station now, I think you or someone told me that it was called Olema Station first. Was that the main town?

MH: I didn't know that.

AK: Was that the main town where you would go for fun or anything?

MH: Well, they used to have a weekly movie, I remember, at Point Reyes and the Nelson family all took me and we used to enjoy that. That's about all we had.

CE: This brings up a point. How many little businesses were there in Olema as late as 1920? You had the hotel, you had Martinelli's store, you had a butcher shop.

MH: Yes, on toward Point Reyes.

CE: Then what else?

MH: Right across the street from the old hotel was a bar there. It's now a restaurant. But I don't think there was anything else. It's just the same as it is now.

CE: Did you ever visit the Shafter property or hear about the Oaks?

MH: Once. I was there one time. It was closed when I was living there and then Payne Shafter came out and was living there for awhile. Dr. Shafter, I'd forgotten that. You asked me about steady boarders, he boarded at the hotel.

CE: Dr. Shafter?

MH: Yes. Payne Shafter's brother. He was almost blind.

CE: You mean Oscar?

MH: No, I think his name was James.

CE: James McMillan Shafter. We've heard that there was a race track out there where he bred horses. Did you ever see any evidence of it?

MH: No, I think that was before my time.

CE: That was gone. What about holidays like the Fourth of July? Did the school children get involved in any sort of public-spirited effort?

MH: It was summer then, vacation.

CE: Christmas: did they put on a school play?

MH: Yes, we used to have a little play.

CE: Did you teach them songs? Did you sing?

MH: Very little, very little. Didn't have much time. A strange thing, we had a little fund to pay for janitor service and the children wanted music. They wanted a Victrola. I said, "Well, if you all will help me with the school cleaning, let's buy a Victrola with that fund." So I talked to the trustees and the children were all willing to help, you know. We had it I think about two months, and it was stolen and, oh, we felt so badly. And you can guess who did most of the cleaning after that. The poor children had to get home to help with the milking or this or that, you know, so I'd stay and clean up. But they were good about cleaning the erasers and that sort of thing. After the school was sold, an artist bought it. You see, the country schools were consolidated. The children all go to Point Reyes now. They have for many years. This artist bought the --

CE: Do you remember his name?

MH: No, I don't. I could look it up and let you know.

CE: Did he use it as a residence and a studio?

MH: There was an article in the Independent about him. He used the old blackboards to sketch, you know, used them for work, left them in his home. I would love to have seen it and see what he did to it.

CE: Was it the typical one-room school house?

MH: Yes, one great big room.

CE: Like Rose Briones lives in what had been the school house down in Bolinas. You know where Woodville is and Dogtown? And it seems it's the same thing, isn't it? Sound like that to you, Mrs. Kent?

AK: Yes.

CE: She's 96 years old. She even pointed, "There's where I used to sit," when she was a child.

MH: By the way, now that you mention Dogtown, I believe John Nelson's wife, the grandmother, was a school teacher and she taught in Dogtown.

CE: What was her name? Maiden name?

MH: Melissa --

CE: Maybe you'll think of it.

MH: No, it's gone completely. But of course, my sister-in-law can tell you that.

CE: Well, tell us, describe your room in the hotel. What did you have in your room? Was there wallpaper on the -- Was it a simple bedstead?

MH: Iron bedstead, I remember. My closet was sort of a built-in cupboard closet, you know, how they used to have in those days. Instead of having a separate closet, they built these cupboard things just wide enough for a hanger right in the room. I remember my room was white and the cupboard was black. But I had a lovely view.

CE: Which was your window? Point to the photograph.

MH: This was it right here. It looked over the fields, beautiful.

CE: West. Did you have a stove in your room? How did you heat it?

MH: They didn't. I bought a little oil stove myself, a little coal oil, you know, one of those little burners.

CE: Oh, dear.

MH: The family was used to not having heat. It didn't mean anything to them.

CE: Did it have pine floors?

MH: I think so.

CE: The reason I'm interested, you know, there are some people that are restoring it, as you know, and we haven't met them as yet, but we've heard about them and we are going to talk to them. You might be very interested in meeting them someday, don't you think, Mrs. Kent?

AK: Yes.

CE: They're going to have an opening in June. But you lived in that hotel for three years?

MH: Yes, three years.

CE: Well, now, you'd get up in the morning. What time to be at school, eight?

MH: Yes. Well, school didn't start until nine.

CE: But you had to get there early so you'd get up when?

MH: Oh, heavens, I don't remember. About seven, I imagine.

CE: Then would you go downstairs in the dining room for breakfast?

MH: Yes.

CE: What did you have to pay, might I ask, for room and board?

MH: I remember it was \$50 then.

CE: So that only left you \$40 a month out of your --

MH: Yes.

CE: Fifty dollars. Did you have good meals?

MH: Oh, wonderful, marvelous food.

CE: Did you go home for lunch?

MH: I did for a while, and then the trustees decided that wasn't a good idea for the children. They wanted me there for the children. I worried about them because of that stove in there, you know, in the winter time, and I couldn't say, "You stay outside until I get back."

CE: Well, what would you do?

MH: So we talked it over and then the children took turns going down to the hotel and getting my lunch, and they loved to do that. They were always given cookies or something like that.

CE: And they'd bring it to you?

MH: And they'd bring it back to me, a little bowl of soup in a jar or -- And I was delighted because I had sandwiches all my life going to school and to have something fresh that way was a pleasure.

CE: Well, now, in the grades one to eight, did you do most of your correcting of papers there at the school or did you bring things home?

MH: Both. You had so many primary children, you know, you have a lot of correcting to do, and when you're working with the teenagers you have to give the little ones busy work, and that all has to be checked. Otherwise, it's useless.

CE: I think that would be the most amazing thing in the world to teach all those grades.

MH: Oh, it was very difficult.

CE: I imagine you were very tired at the end of the day.

MH: You know, I used to love to walk. There are so many beautiful walks. We used to walk up the gulch. Do you know what the gulch is? You go by Mr. Martinelli's house --

CE: Where was his house?

MH: Well, the store; he lived upstairs. There was a road in back of that and you followed the gulch right on up there and always beautiful with maidenhair and a little creek. I always loved that walk. So if I were tired, I'd -- Then I'd be all rested, have a nice walk and come home ready for dinner.

CE: Was dinner at a regular hour at the hotel?

MH: As I remember, yes.

CE: Probably six o'clock.

MH: Just like it is here.

CE: Then in the evenings you wouldn't go out, I presume?

MH: No, no place to go. They had a big family living room.

CE: That's downstairs, though.

MH: Downstairs.

CE: You could go down there and read or --

MH: Yes. They'd have the big old stove down there lighted and sometimes we'd play cards with the family, or --

CE: Did they have a fireplace in the hotel?

MH: No.

CE: Just a big old stove?

MH: Yes. It's a wonder they didn't.

AK: What about Camp Taylor?

CE: Did you ever go to Camp Taylor?

MH: There wasn't anything there when I came.

CE: That was gone, see. So your arrival there was sort of at the end of the hotel's busy period in its life and you saw a transition then. After you married your husband did the hotel stay in business some years?

AK: Would you go there and visit?

MH: Oh, yes. We used to come down. First year were married, we lived at the big power house in the mountains.

CE: Because he was with PG&E.

MH: Yes, that's where he started.
AK: Tell us about that.
MH: It was up above Marysville called Colgate.
CE: Colgate. And then you'd come down on holidays?
MH: Yes, to Olema and visit Olema. We loved to visit there.
CE: And the hotel ran until when?
MH: Well, the army took it over during the war, but I couldn't tell you the date.
CE: Tell us that experience. How come the army took it over?
MH: Well, they needed a place for the soldiers to board.
CE: Why were soldiers out there?
MH: Isn't that awful? I can't think of the -- My sister-in-law will have to tell you that.
CE: Well, I was just sort of curious.
MH: But the hotel had closed by that time.
CE: Oh, it had closed by the '40s?
MH: Yes.
CE: Was it sold, or was it just in the state of limbo?
MH: It was leased to the army. I think Edgar was gone by that time. There was just Walter and Lydia left.
CE: How much acreage does it take? Just the property where the hotel is sitting on?
MH: I don't really know. Just the property right there and across the street belonged to it. Now whether the man who has the hotel has any of that now, I don't know. It may belong to that restaurant across the street, the old apple orchard down there and where the barn was and so forth.
CE: Do you remember the apple orchard?
MH: Oh, yes, we used to go down and pick them.
CE: There are a few there, aren't there, Anne?
AK: I think so. There are quite a few nice things left there.
MH: The gardens used to be very lovely at Olema when I lived there. The uncles kept it up beautifully.
CE: Now when you say the uncles, you're talking about Edgar and Walter?
MH: Yes.
CE: And the gardens right on the hotel property?
MH: Yes.
CE: Where in the back or the front?
MH: In the back.
CE: Did they have a place where the guests could just go out and --
MH: Oh, yes. There was a lovely tennis court and croquet court and they could go out and sit around the garden. And they had a vegetable garden and berry patches and so forth.
CE: Did they have any other help, other than the cook? Did they have a housekeeper?
MH: Not after I went there. Not after my first year. The nieces all helped, and --
CE: Family effort.
MH: It was a family thing, yes.
CE: What color was the hotel outside, your earliest recollection? What color was it? Now they have it gray with kind of a blue trim. Do you recall what it might have been?

MH: I think it was sort of a yellow, a deep yellow, as I remember, with white trim.
CE: Yellow with white trim. That's interesting.
MH: I hope I'm right on that.
CE: Well, that's very interesting; yellow with white trim.
MH: It's so long ago.
CE: Only 50 years ago, 60.
MH: Almost 60 since I went there.
CE: You're right, 60.
AK: What about this life after you were married?
CE: Oh, you'd come down here, but your husband with the PG&E on all of these stations --
MH: He was in the mountains and then we were sent to Colusa, we lived in Colusa for three years.
CE: Was he an engineering type fellow?
MH: Yes. Electrician, really. He stayed with them 45 years.
CE: With the PG&E?
MH: With the PG&E. It's the only work he ever knew.
CE: How many places did you move with him? More than a dozen?
MH: That's all, from Colusa to San Rafael.
CE: Did you have any children?
MH: One daughter. The one I just talked to.
CE: And that was your call from New Jersey just a while ago.
MH: Yes.
CE: Now tell us again where you lived in San Rafael. Your home was near Gerstle Park?
MH: Yes, up on the hill, Gloria Drive.
CE: What year did you get that home?
MH: We built that home 30 years ago. We were the first ones on that hill.
CE: Were any of the Gerstle family still --
MH: No, but the old house was still there, you know. It was a recreational center at that time.
CE: We had the pleasure of interviewing Miriam Gerstle Wornum and she told us her family story about that.
MH: I didn't know she was still living.
CE: Yes, in San Francisco. That part of San Rafael must have been a beautiful part.
MH: I think so. Beautiful walks. I used to love to walk all over.
CE: You gave up teaching totally? You didn't teach after your marriage?
MH: Oh, I went back in 1949 and I was just going to do a little substituting. My daughter was in college and they needed teachers very badly then. Finally I took a position in Larkspur, and I stayed there five years and I loved it.
CE: What's your daughter's name?
MH: Marilyn Holloway.
CE: And she lives in New Jersey?
MH: New Jersey, Harrington Park.
CE: Tell us a little bit about your husband, Nelson Hall. I think it's interesting, too, that your maiden name was Nelson. Had that come in the courting days?

MH: Yes. It was confusing when I taught school there, you know, because with the Nelson Hotel, everybody thought because I boarded there, everyone thought that I was a relation, but I wasn't yet.

CE: Well, tell us about your husband, Nelson. He was born out there in West Marin somewhere, wasn't he?

MH: In Point Reyes, I understand, so his birth certificate says. His father at the time was running the old hotel up at Point Reyes, and Nelson was born there. He was the youngest. His brothers and sisters are older.

CE: What year was he born? What's his birth date?

MH: 1902, I see.

CE: What do you know about his early life and his schooling?

MH: Not much. He went to the little Olema School where I taught later and then he went to Tomales High School.

CE: And then the train I suppose you could take up there?

MH: He went by train from Point Reyes as I understand it.

CE: What happened then? He finished school and --

MH: It was war time then and he wanted to work. I believe he worked in the shipyards a little while, and then he got this job with the PG&E and he stayed with them 45 years.

CE: And what you were you -- You met him out there at the hotel.

MH: Yes.

CE: What year were you married again?

MH: 1923.

CE: And before you settled here in San Rafael, did you stay out in that part of Marin County for a while?

MH: I don't know quite what you mean.

CE: Well, your home was in San Rafael for so many years. Did you immediately live here, come to San Rafael?

MH: Yes. We lived in a little PG&E house. It was war time and they were trying to make the station automatic, so my husband had to be on 24 hour duty and we lived in that little PG&E house for 20 years until they made that station automatic and then we could leave and then we built our own home.

CE: You lived in a PG&E house.

MH: It was on Second Street, right at the plant there.

AK: It's still there, isn't it?

CE: Still there?

MH: No, the house isn't there, no, it was sold and moved several years ago.

CE: They've got the property and the newer equipment in there automated.

MH: Right. It's all been spread out much larger and more equipment than we even had when we were in that area.

CE: What does your husband like to do? Is he a gardener as you? Did he enjoy that or what were his hobbies?

MH: Yes, but I think he did a lot of gardening to please me more than anything. He loved his roses. But I think I enjoyed gardening more than he. Oh, his hobby was hunting and fishing and he loved the mountains. Every chance we had, we went camping up in the Sierras. My daughter enjoyed it, too. He liked all sports.

CE: Was he interested in the history of his family as a native son?

MH: Yes, I think so. We used to love to hear his family tell about old days, the days of horses and about the earthquake.

CE: Did you ride -- I forgot to ask you. Did you ride at all out there?

MH: No.

AK: Where were you the earthquake day?

MH: Where was I? I was in Seattle.

CE: You were still up north.

MH: I can remember my mother crying. Her mother and her brother and sister still lived in San Francisco, and finally she heard from them. In about three days they telephoned and I can still see her standing there by the old wall telephone so happy to hear from them. That was a dreadful time.

AK: And when your husband talked about the earthquake --

CE: Was he out there then, of course? Well, look what happened out at Olema. Did he ever talk about that?

MH: Oh, yes. We've heard the old story about the cow caught in the crack and over at Bear Valley Ranch was where the fault was, you know, went by there. You heard the story of the rose garden being moved and so forth, a few feet.

CE: Well, we did interview a woman who was a Shafter, Edna Shafter Crist Orr, now deceased, a 90-year-old woman who went over there the next day with her father to see the Shafter property and she saw that cow in that gully. She said, "That's a true story." And your husband probably corroborated it.

MH: He probably saw it. I don't remember him actually saying so. But I know they tell the story of the old hotel. Up in back was a huge water tank, storage water, and that thing broke and came right through the hotel. They said the poor Chinese cook was frightened to death and ran around screaming, talking, scared.

CE: You had a public phone at the hotel, I presume?

MH: Yes.

CE: Do you remember any bad storms or bad experiences or rather dramatic experiences the three years you lived there, Margaret?

MH: No.

CE: Pretty quiet. Did you ever go on picnics over to Bolinas or to the sea?

MH: Yes. And the family loved gathering berries, huckleberries and the salmonberries and all -- going on trips, you know, making a day of it when they were free, gathering these things. And I can remember they used to grind their own horseradish and all sorts of things I hadn't known about, you know, living in the city. It was all very interesting to me.

CE: Well, that was really an enriching experience for you?

MH: Yes, it was.

AK: No cow?

MH: No, not in my time.

CE: Well, the dairies were so near there.

MH: And the children were so interested that I was from the city and didn't know about the country, you know, and they loved telling me things, showing me things.

CE: That's a great thing. It's sharing both ways.

MH: I remember taking one little boy to the city with me, home for the weekend. He'd never been to San Francisco, never been on a train, and it was quite an experience for that little fellow, and it was fun watching him.

CE: Fascinating for you. Today in education, they're always concerned that the children are experiencing everything. That's so important, you know, they have to go out and see this and do that. Did you ever take the children on any kind of a jaunt?

MH: Not from up here, no.

CE: Time wouldn't permit it.

MH: We didn't have the transportation.

CE: But you would go over to Bolinas on occasion?

MH: Yes, with the family a few times. I remember one time going on a picnic. We used to hike out through Bear Valley and take our dinner, you know, and eat out there at sunset and then hike home. The old country club is still out there then, Mrs. Kent.

CE: And where was the country club in Bear Valley? I've got a photograph and we'll show it to you here. Where was that located roughly? Can you give us some idea? Like where the park headquarters are today? You know, the Point Reyes National Seashore, near there?

MH: Well, it must be. How far is it from there to the coast? Is it about five miles?

CE: Not very far. But was this inland a ways?

MH: Yes. It was out -- You go out through Bear Valley, and as I remember it, it was about halfway out.

AK: How about the lakes? Was it near enough to see any of the lakes from there?

MH: No, not that I know of.

CE: Did you climb up?

MH: Well, there was a little dirt road that wound out to Bear Valley.

CE: I know, but I mean you didn't go over the ridge? It was this side of the ridge?

MH: It went right out through, follow the little creek right on out to the coast.

CE: And it was a hunting club?

MH: Yes. San Francisco men.

CE: Come and go hunting there.

MH: Right.

CE: What kind of game would they be looking for, I wonder?

MH: Deer, ducks, quail.

CE: Elk?

MH: I don't think there were any elk there then, just deer.

CE: What would you do about church? Was church a part of the Nelson Sunday ritual?

MH: No. I think one main reason, perhaps, Sundays, weekends were their busiest days, you know.

CE: Up early getting prepared for -- the rooms prepared?

MH: And I often went home on the weekends to San Francisco and I'd go home on Friday night and then I had to come back Sunday morning. That was the only train running on Sunday morning, so I'd get back around noon.

CE: What was it? A two-hour run for you, more or less?

MH: Yes.

CE: Where was home in San Francisco, with your aunt, did you say?

MH: Yes.

CE: Where was that?

MH: She lived out on Washington Street.

CE: Do you consider yourself sort of a San Francisco gal?

MH: No, I never liked it.

CE: You're a Marin --

MH: Oh, very much so. I love being close to San Francisco so that we can go over, although I don't anymore like I used to, but I love being in Marin County. The climate's lovely, the people are wonderful, and it's so pretty. You appreciate it more when you're away and come back. Then you see how lovely it is.

CE: Let's talk about your daughter a moment. When was Marilyn born? When is her birthday?

MH: May 2, '24, I guess.

CE: Does she have children?

MH: Yes, she has two grown children. They're both married now; one graduated from Brown and the other graduated from William and Mary.

CE: Oh, wonderful, two fine schools. What sent her East? Her marriage, I presume?

MH: Her husband is in education, too, and she was a teacher. She taught in high school.

CE: Well, tell us a little about Marilyn. She was born here in San Rafael.

MH: Yes. High school here and then went to the University of California.

CE: San Rafael High?

MH: Yes.

CE: What were her main interests or subjects?

MH: English and History.

CE: Do you remember some of her teachers at San Rafael High School? The reason I ask is that we interviewed a woman who had taught there. I guess it was before your daughter's time, Eleanor Gillogly.

MH: I remember one teacher very well who was an inspiration to her, Miss -- She was Vivian Smith then, I mean Vivian Roberts.

CE: Now Vivian Smith.

MH: And now she is Vivian Smith. She just retired from the library. She was a marvelous teacher and she inspired my daughter.

CE: Then your daughter went on to the University of California?

MH: Right. Five years to teach high school.

CE: My sister also. What was her subject then, English?

MH: English and History.

CE: Where did she teach, then, when she got her credentials?

MH: She taught in Berkeley the first year and she was married then, too.

CE: High school level?

MH: Yes. Then her husband wanted to study a year in France, so they went to France, so she only taught that one year.

CE: Did she meet her husband at the University, by chance? Charles Holloway.

MH: Yes. In fact, she was there her fifth year and she stayed at --

CE: Well, she was at the campus before the terrible decade of dissent?
MH: Oh, my, yes. They felt very badly about it.
CE: Everybody who went to the University.
MH: She met her husband at International House. That's what I was trying to think of.
They were staying there in there in her fifth year.
CE: I bet you and your husband were very proud and pleased about her desire to go
there and achieve what she did?
MH: Yes.
AK: Where was his home?
CE: Where was Charles Holloway from?
MH: Well, he grew up in San Diego, I think, as a little boy. Part of his life was spent in
Illinois, but he finished school in San Diego.
CE: What year would that have been, they graduated?
MH: Well, it was after the war for him and he was doing post-graduate work. He'd
already graduated from college.
CE: The children born back east, I presume?
MH: Yes, sad to say.
CE: Well, Brown University is Rhode Island, isn't it? Providence?
MH: Yes, Providence.
AK: And what is the other one?
CE: William and Mary is in Virginia. Isn't that the second oldest university in the
United States or close to it?
MH: Yes. Very proud of them, of course.
CE: Just stop to think how life picks us up and takes us places. Here you are from
Seattle to Bakersfield to out teaching in a one-room school house in Olema,
boarding in a hotel and meeting your -- through the family, you know, and then
marrying and having a daughter who goes to the University of California, and
then she's way out there.
MH: And I felt so amused that I couldn't teach in San Francisco. I could have, I found
out afterwards that I --
CE: Oh, you could?
MH: Yes. But in the meantime, the tests were so severe I was sure I'd failed and that's
why I got the country school. I was sorry at first, you know, that I didn't stay in
San Francisco.
CE: But then --
MH: How my life changed; I would never have met my husband.
CE: How fate enters our lives.
MH: And we feel badly about things at the times, but they all work out for the best.
Isn't it strange?
CE: It is strange and it's wonderful.
MH: Yes, indeed it is.
AK: Why did the husband want to go to France? He was not a Frenchman, was he?
MH: No, he wanted to study French a little more.
AK: Isn't that nice?
CE: Do they come to see you on occasion?
MH: Oh, yes. A year or sometimes two years when the children were little.

CE: Do you go back there?
MH: Yes. Now that I'm alone, I've gone a number of times.
CE: Your husband died eight years ago?
MH: Right.
CE: Did he have a long illness, Margaret?
MH: Yes, two years. It was dreadful.
CE: Well, I notice looking around your lovely unit here, your apartment; it's like a home to me.
MH: I like it very much. I'm surprised that I contented myself so well here.
CE: So many tasteful things.
MH: Well, thank you very much. It's very hard closing up your home and deciding what to keep and what to dispose of. My dear daughter came out and helped me. I don't know what I would have done without her.
CE: Now you mentioned earlier you were Danish.
MH: Well, my grandparents were.
CE: Your grandparents. That's kind of interesting. We all have different backgrounds. What brought your grandparents to America? Did you ever hear?
MH: He was a sea captain.
CE: He was. Did he come to Seattle?
MH: No, San Francisco. My grandmother hated it. She took my father and went back to Denmark on a visit and she told him unless he gave up the sea, she wasn't coming back over here. She was so lonely. Children, alone, you know, and couldn't speak English. So he gave it up and of all things went into photography.
CE: He did?
MH: Yes. So then they settled at Bakersfield and they had three children then, my father one of three. But my father went to school in Denmark for two years until grandfather decided to give up the sea and they moved to San Francisco.
CE: How was this photography? Was it successful?
MH: Yes. He was good.
CE: Portrait studio?
MH: Yes. But it was a terrible struggle at first, I think, for him. Bakersfield was a little place, and people didn't have photographs taken very often.
CE: My thoughts are going in many directions and you must forgive me, but that brings me back to that little one-room school. Did you have any time for art? Did the children do anything?
MH: Some, but I wasn't very clever myself. So we were given a certain amount of things we must teach, you know.
CE: The minimal requirements.
MH: Right.
CE: As a woman of your age today, looking back upon your life and the way teaching was then, would you care to comment on the changes in the public education system in any way?
MH: Well, I've been out of it so long now, it isn't fair for me to say very much about it, but I like discipline and a nice quiet schoolroom.
CE: Don't you think children respond to discipline?
MH: I know they do.

CE: Why did we go, in your judgment, on this permissive tack?

MH: I really don't know. The results aren't as good, surely, so they tell us.

CE: The pendulum, I understand, is swinging back to the basics, would you agree?

MH: Oh, yes, I'm all for it. I did a lot of substituting after I left Larkspur and I saw some marvelous teaching and some very poor teaching – the results, you know. I disliked substituting very much. You don't stay long enough to see the results, and the first day you're so busy trying to make them settle down again. You know, having a substitute is a lark to a lot of them. You have little problems.

CE: That must have been a fascinating experience for you, 20 years after your marriage to go back into it?

MH: It was.

CE: What -- In the late '40s, did you say you did this?

MH: Yes.

CE: For three years?

MH: Five years.

CE: Where was that? The Corte Madera-Larkspur School?

MH: That's what it was then. Mr. Cummings, Neil Cummings, was the Superintendent and he was marvelous to work with. He was so understanding and just wonderful. I still hear from him. He lives in Arizona now.

CE: Don't they have a school named for him?

MH: Yes, the Neil Cummings School. It's in Corte Madera. I was so glad. I think it's wonderful to do that while they're still living. He was so appreciative. He was so thrilled by it.

AK: Yes, I'd love to hear -- When you write to him, tell him about this. He used to be very good with us in the garden center, the old garden center.

MH: His wife was such a dear, too, Wilma.

CE: Did you have time at all in either the period when you went back and taught school or during your married life to get involved in any other activities, Margaret, or were you mainly a homemaker?

MH: Socially or volunteer work?

CE: Anything.

MH: Well, I'm more now than I was then.

CE: What interests you today?

MH: I've been working for 20 years with cancer dressing station through Eastern Star. I didn't realize it was that long until a while back they gave us a pin. And then I'm interested in Tamalpais Center at Kentfield. I love that little club. I enjoy it so much.

CE: Have you been a member for quite a few years?

MH: Oh, about 16 years, I guess, something like that. And I enjoyed Eastern Star.

AK: How nice.

CE: That will please Mrs. Kent.

AK: I was president of that once.

MH: I think you talked down there a while back when I first joined.

AK: Yes, I should go back to them again. Those people there don't really know how wonderful it was to begin with. They don't really know.

CE: I think it's time that you gave a little talk and told them about -- We'll have to work on that.

AK: No, they won't like what I tell them because it was part of the old center, you know, and the old center for all people, all colors, all everyone, and the Tamalpais Center Woman's Club now has forgotten that. And they think that people should be voted in, and they have a little bit the wrong idea. It should be open to everybody.

MH: Well, they're not particular. They took me in.

AK: Oh, they loved to get you. But they really should let the people -- all the people -- know that they are welcome to come.

CE: Anne, do you have a copy of those original charter by-laws?

AK: I think I have almost everything that belongs to them. I have all the original -- no, I wouldn't say that. I have the original things on the center itself, and I have the talk that Mrs. Kent gave when the center was 25 years old. I have a copy of that talk and I would like to have it on -- I should put it on -- or somebody should put it, read it, on to tape.

CE: You should, Anne.

AK: But the Woman's Club itself has never really had a tape that tells the Woman's Club itself, and they were the most important section in the whole center, you know, and I told the people at the college the other day when we had a talk -- Carla gave a talk -- and I told them that they wouldn't have that lovely building where the gym is now or any of that property if it hadn't been for the okay of the Woman's Club. They were the ones who said, "We agree." Mr. Kent said if the Woman's Club would choose a piece of land and have their own little club which they want very much, then they will find out if the Woman's Club will okay the property for the college. It was junior college then or something else.

CE: Well, we must get on with this just a little bit. That was Anne Kent talking with Margaret about the beginnings of the Tamalpais Center, and I think you should follow through on that, Marge. Get together with Mrs. Kent. Because a lot of your membership perhaps are unaware of the history of the organization. Getting down towards that part of the county reminds me of the old railroad up to Mount Tamalpais. Did you have occasion to go on that at any time?

MH: I was never on it. I regret it very much.

CE: Were you a hiker at all over the mountains? No.

MH: Two or three times. From Mill Valley we'd hike up.

CE: How did you become acquainted with Aldersley? Were you involved with its beginnings, by any chance?

MH: My Danish grandmother visited me at least 40 years ago and she had an old Danish friend that lived here and I used to bring her over to see this Danish friend. The only thing that was here then was a big old white building.

CE: The white house.

MH: And she had lost all her family, this friend my grandmother visited, and she seemed so happy in her room. She had her little piano and all her books along and she was content. I remember saying at the time if I'm ever all alone and have to live someplace, that would be a nice place to go, never thinking that someday I might be here.

CE: Well, you know Mrs. Kent and I were very impressed, we went down to the Peninsula to talk to Chris Pederson, one of the men who started this, and I really think the Danes have been way ahead of everybody else about how to handle the problem of growing older, don't you?

MH: Right. I think it's wonderful the things they do for us here. Very interesting. At one time one had to be Danish or Danish background, you know, to get in here.

CE: That's no longer true now, I understand?

MH: No, it hasn't been for a few years now.

CE: I think your home here is so artistic, with the beam ceilings and, of course, your lovely furniture, your bric-a-brac.

MH: I like the beam ceilings. As I said before, I'm glad that I am content here. I was afraid I might not be, but I made up my mind when I came in, I was making the move and I'd have to make the best of it. You do miss your garden and I had a good-sized house to move around in, and I was afraid I'd feel cramped, but I don't seem to. I just resigned myself to it, and I was going to enjoy it, and I go a great deal, I'm very busy.

CE: I overheard you talking to your daughter. You're going on this trip down to San Simeon and where else?

MH: We're going down the coast to San Simeon and Hearst Castle and the little Danish town.

CE: Solvang. Oh, you can smell the bakeries about two miles away.

MH: We're going to stay there two nights and then spread out and see the country from there. There's an old mission there, too, I understand. I went there once, years ago, to Solvang, but they tell me it's so nice.

AK: It's just the right time of year you're going.

CE: Tell me, what do you think the Danes have to offer that's unique that other nationalities don't have?

MH: Well, I've only been here a year, but very friendly, very friendly, and very kind.

CE: The Danes I've known have been wonderful homemakers.

MH: Yes. I know my grandmother was.

CE: You're of Danish descent. And also very good with their hands and sewing, any kind of handwork. And frugal at times but always with a sense of humor.

MH: I think the Scandinavian people had to be frugal. I went with the senior citizens to the British Isles this last fall; first time I've ever been to Europe, and I was so thrilled. One of the guides in Scotland said we have a reputation of being stingy, but we're not -- We're frugal. We have to be. It's a rocky, hard country to make a living with. He said we never throw away anything like the Americans do. Consequently, he said, we have that reputation now of being stingy, but we're not.

CE: That's a lesson, I think, that we're going to have to learn in this country and maybe sooner than we think. We have been a throwaway country, haven't we?

AK: It's dreadful, the waste.

CE: It must interest you when you see your grandchildren. Of course, they're grown now but -- Are either of them married?

MH: They're both married.

CE: The grandchildren, they're both married? No.

MH: Oh, no. My two grandchildren are married, but I haven't any great-grandchildren.

CE: But your two grandchildren are married?

MH: Both of them are married.

CE: Did you notice a change in their attitude as young men today about ecology and conservation and --

MH: I don't really see them enough. My grandson lives in Colorado and my granddaughter lives in Pennsylvania, but I did see them last winter when they came home for Christmas.

CE: Well, the young people today seem to be sort of more like, I would say, my grandparents. They have a reverence and a respect sometimes for nature and open space that --

MH: In spite of what they say about young people, I think they're marvelous now. We hear about the minority that just don't behave themselves.

CE: Well, that's the fault of the media who, for some reason, think that's what they have to show on television or print.

MH: They're so much wiser than we ever were, so much better informed.

CE: That's what I'm reaching for. I want you to reach back 60 years when you were in that one-room school house.

MH: We didn't have television and we stayed put, you know. As they say, we used to make our own little pleasures and entertainments. We didn't go out.

CE: But the opportunities today for young people 60 years later are great. Now those people on the ranches in West Marin, very few of them got out of there, did they not? Am I not correct?

MH: Yes.

CE: They stayed there.

MH: The boy I spoke of had never been to San Francisco.

CE: Yes. And that can be a limiting experience; charming, but limiting. Whereas your grandchildren, think what they have been exposed to. Well, now, Mrs. Kent, what else shall we -- You have some lovely things in frames on your wall. One of them appears to be a quote from Walt Whitman. Who did that?

MH: William Wordsworth. No, my granddaughter did that.

CE: Would you read that?

MH: "A violet by a mossy stone, half hidden from the eye, fair as a star when only one is shining in the sky."

CE: Very good.

MH: She did this one while she was in high school.

CE: In conclusion, would you read that? That's a famous thing and you love the garden.

MH: "The kiss of the sun for pardon. The song of the birds for mirth. We're closer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth."

CE: Thank you, Margaret, it's a pleasure to have been with you this afternoon. Thank you so much.