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**INTERVIEW WITH VALERIE ANSEL**

by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent  
July 12, 1976

**INTERVIEWEE:** Valerie Ansel (VA)

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

**DATE OF INTERVIEW:** July 12, 1976

CE: Today is Monday, July 12, 1976. Continuing the Oral History Program of the California Room at the Marin County Library at the Civic Center, this is Carla Ehat and joining me today is Mrs. Thomas Kent. We have the pleasure of visiting this morning with Miss Valerie Ansel, who resides at 245 A Crescent Road in San Anselmo, California. Miss Ansel was born in Alameda on January 1, 1892 and has resided in San Anselmo since 1914. Is that correct Valerie?

VA: Yes, that is correct.

CE: She has been, for 46 years a teacher in the Marin County Schools, forty-five years I believe in San Anselmo alone, as teacher, principal. She has served as Chairman of the San Anselmo Library Board and we're here today at her charming residence to have her tell us her story about her extraordinary career. Now Valerie, how did it all begin that you entered the field of education? You were born in Alameda. What prompted you to go, to attend the San Francisco Normal School and have this vocation?

VA: I had always been interested in small children. I liked to be with the little people and in my neighborhood there were several youngsters who looked up to me. I was a bit older, of course, and I think so often little folks look up to the older generation as I call it. In our home, where we lived at the time on the corner of Chestnut and Encinal we had a remarkable room at the top of the house. It would have been known, I suppose, as an attic and my father had it so arranged that it became a big playroom. We had a little stage there and we had desks and so forth and the children in the neighborhood gathered in our home. It was a regular center. My brother's friends and my sister's friends came too. However, I was the oldest and my little group was not the group that was interested in the

other members of the family. The children, so many of them, seemed so eager to want to learn and I just began to take on little folks and --

CE: Just took hold?

VA: Took hold, and we had a little classroom from time to time, you know, and we would do certain things. We used to do little plays and so forth and so on, you know. And in fact one girl, a woman who has recently passed away, became a very, very well known educator in Sonoma County. She became a Supervisor of Education and did a remarkable job.

CE: Do you recall her name, Valerie?

VA: I can't think of her married name. I should but I don't remember just this minute but her first name was Anna. She was a child of older parents. The mother and father could have been her grandparents. But this little girl had the keenest mind and she loved to be with me and with our little group and she always said, "I'm going to be a teacher." And I used to say to her, "And Anna I believe I'm going to be a teacher too." My mother had been a kindergarten teacher in Alameda when she first moved there. They had a German kindergarten.

CE: German?

VA: Yes, German kindergarten.

CE: For teaching the German children families?

VA: Yes, Alameda was -- had many pioneers among the Germans.

CE: I didn't know that.

VA: Yes, yes, yes.

CE: Because I have German in my background. My mother was a product of a German settlement in Chicago. For instance they had their Turnverein and they spoke German et cetera, but I never knew that existed in Alameda.

VA: Oh yes. My mother was born in San Francisco and her people --

CE: How did they come?

VA: Well my grandmother, her mother, came from Europe through Panama, that way.

CE: And crossed the Isthmus and came up by vessel?

VA: Yes, that's right. My grandfather came around the Horn, I believe, her father.

CE: Did they ever tell you why they settled in Alameda? Was that after they were married to raise you or --

VA: My grandparents lived in San Francisco for many years and when my grandfather passed away, why, my mother and her sisters and so forth thought that it would be much better to go over to Alameda, which was a small community and --

CE: Raise a family.

VA: The German friends all there and that's where my mother met my father. But in the meantime she had this little kindergarten in her home and her little pupils were these sons and daughters of the German friends.

CE: And how appropriate because kindergarten is a German word.

VA: Yes it is. And then --

CE: Well that must have influenced you a little bit.

VA: I think so. And then when I was growing up, down there in that neighborhood there where my mother and father lived, I used to go to the Fraulein's Kindergarten and she had quite an interesting school. It was in her home. Her niece was Olga Fondelietz, Doctor Fondelietz's sister, and she was the influence of my life. She had a great influence

on me; we just loved Miss Olga. She was a charming person. In the meantime I neglected to tell you that I spoke nothing but German until I was six or seven years old. I spoke German in the home always; and Miss Olga really taught me English, you see, and I stayed in the Fraulein School until I was about eight and then I went into the public schools.

CE: I see.

VA: But I was ready to go then because I could speak English. But in the meantime we spoke German a great deal too, you know.

CE: I think it's very important to hang onto your heritage and the language and the music. Would you not agree?

VA: Oh yes, definitely.

CE: My warmest memories of my grandmother are the German songs she taught us when we were children, the Lieder and --

VA: Oh yes, the Lieder, oh yes.

CE: And they have stayed with me all my life. Do you still speak German?

VA: Yes, yes. I'm not as conversant as I was because one has to speak --

CE: Use, use the tools.

VA: Yes. But my sister and I on our trip last year in Europe --

CE: Did you visit?

VA: We went to my father's birthplace in France. He was Alsatian.

CE: So where was he from? Strasbourg?

VA: Near Colmar.

CE: Colmar.

VA: Yeah, near Colmar. But we went to Strasbourg since that was our focal point, then we'd go out into the country, you see. But went right to my father's home, where he was --

CE: Wasn't that exciting. Was this your first visit there?

VA: My first visit there, yes.

CE: To his birthplace?

VA: Yes, my sister's second.

CE: Were you able to do any historical or genealogical research on your family when you were there?

VA: No, but when my sister was there about ten years ago, she did and found the records and so forth.

CE: You're indeed fortunate.

VA: Yes. It was interesting indeed for her and then of course she passed that on to all of us. But then going back to the school I was in, and public school, and graduated from Alameda High School. Then I knew, oh, I knew long before that, the thing I wanted to do was teach, and so a group of us used to commute every day to the Normal School and I am really delighted that I had that opportunity, because Doctor Frederick Burke was the head of the Normal and he was a very outstanding educator. And I just feel if some of the young people today could have had his instruction and could have been under his regime there'd be many more dedicated teachers -- because dedication was the by-word.

CE: I know it's difficult for you to say but I would like to ask you to comment.

Haven't you seen an erosion of dedication in our school system?

VA: Oh much to my --

CE: Horror.

VA: Great horror.

AK: Too bad.

CE: My sister has spent thirty years as a teacher of French and she has noticed that and she is so grateful to have taught in a period where the discipline and dedication were still high. When you were -- Going back just a moment to Alameda High School, what is your judgment in retrospect of the education you were given at that time? Going to Alameda School, was it good?

VA: Very good, very good. A remarkable group of educators on the faculty. Oh, I can, I look back on them. In fact my friendship with one of them, a lovely one during my life, she was the botany teacher, a Miss Sue Dyer, who was, incidentally, Mrs. Hoover's great friend, and Miss Dyer used to visit the Hoovers in the White House and so forth and she had a fine influence on my life. And also I mustn't neglect to tell you about my eighth grade teacher, Gertrude Trainer.

CE: Gertrude Trainer?

VA: Gertrude Trainer, whose niece is Helen Putnam who was the Mayor of Petaluma, and I knew Helen when she was a wee one. And her aunt was -- oh I think influenced more, she was a regular Ruby Scott of Alameda. This Ruby Scott who used to be of course Mrs. Candid Tamalpais with whom I had a lovely visit, she used to be in Berkeley. Miss Trainer molded many, many lives I can tell you. In fact I know the teachers in my life really had more influence on me than my parents did. Really did.

CE: Well tell me, Valerie, you took the Ferry from Alameda to the terminal, then how would you -- Where was the Normal School then?

VA: Waller and Buchanan. And then we took the Haight Street car. Got right off the corner and there we were.

CE: Now how old were you when you went to that school? I'm trying to figure this in with the earthquake and fire. You were about fourteen when the --

VA: About thirteen I think.

VA: Fire and earthquake, yes, in 1906.

CE: So it was four or five years after that, I presume?

VA: Oh yes and then I graduated in -- And then I didn't attend the Normal when I first graduated; I went back to the high school for six months because I wanted to take a post graduate course in a particular area of English and all, so for six months I didn't go. Then the group that was behind me and all of us went together. We were all pals you know.

CE: All right, during those years, what was the time required of you to attend the Normal School prior to getting your credentials to teach?

VA: Two years.

CE: Two years.

VA: Yes.

CE: All right. Now, what, who made the decision for you to come to Marin County? Did you put out certain requests of areas you would like to teach? Were they more or less honored by young teachers?

VA: Doctor Burke would give us listings of vacancies in our area or in the state of California. Anyway, he would expect you to accept --

CE: Wherever --

VA: Wherever, he was --

CE: That's the way it should be.

VA: Oh certainly.

CE: They should have control of it.

VA: Certainly, and he was really very adamant about a teacher taking a country school for at least a year, and I think that is the greatest experience any teacher can have, the so-called country school, and thank goodness I had that experience. I taught in Tomales my first year.

CE: How did that happen? You got word -- this vacancy?

VA: No, I had a whole list you know of vacancies. I can remember Rio Vista and all kinds and my father was so disgruntled with me because he wanted me to teach in Alameda. He knew everybody there and everybody knew us, you know, and he wanted to use a little influence, which he had, and I said no. I'd been so impressed with Doctor Burke's great professionalism and he frowned upon anything like that. "Oh," he said, "don't let the judge or the doctor get you to --" Oh I would feel that I was a sinner if I had done anything like that, but as I say my father was very disgruntled. However among my friends at the Normal whom I met was a darling girl and she said to me one day, she said, "I want you to go up to Tomales (she was reared there) and I want you to go see my uncle. He's the trustee of the elementary school. There's going to be a vacancy. Nobody is supposed to know it but I know it." And she said, "I think they'd like you." And she --

CE: Could you tell us who that woman was?

VA: Yes her name was Hazel Bailey.

CE: Hazel Bailey.

VA: Yes Hazel Bailey and her family were old pioneers. Well that was her mother's married name but her mother was a Guldager and the Guldagers were pioneers of Tomales.

CE: Oh yes. Well how did you get up there?

VA: I went on a train, a little narrow gauge train.

CE: Tell us how you got there. You took the Ferry to San Francisco --

VA: Oh yes.

CE: Then to Sausalito --

VA: To Sausalito which I did for one year then afterwards I can see myself running for that train. But anyway, the woman who was the principal of the school, it was a two room school, was a Mrs. Daisy Lawton. Also a remarkable educator. I was just so lucky in these people in my life. These truly fine educators and Mrs. Lawton met me and she had a little buggy and horse, you know, and she drove me to the different ranches because with the exception of one trustee, these man were ranchers. In fact they were cattlemen. And I went to see each one of them.

CE: Do you recall some of those names?

VA: Oh I certainly do, I'll never forget them.

CE: Could you share them with us?

VA: Yes. One of them was Mr. Mitchell, Mr. William Mitchell, and one of them was this Mr. Gulgader, Hazel's uncle. And then one of them was Ed Cornett, he had the big merchandise store, and he looked like Abraham Lincoln. Oh what a wonderful man he was. And then there was Matt Clark and his daughter, a widow, who was incidentally, in my first grade and a darling little girl and beautiful child and a very remarkable pupil she

was. She is a widow and she married into the old Maggetti family and she lives in the family home now in Tomales and never had any children.

CE: Were any of the Marshalls --

VA: The Marshalls.

CE: Name sound familiar to you?

VA: The Marshalls, yes, one of them was -- Let's see, one of them was Grace, Grace Marshall. She was I think a Darwington and then yes a Marshall. And then of course --

CE: Burbank?

VA: Oh yes the Burbanks, and they were out at -- near Fallon.

CE: Fallon, yes.

VA: Oh yes.

CE: David Burgess Burbank is one gentleman we've interviewed.

VA: Oh have you? Yes I knew him. I don't know whether he'd remember me or not.

CE: Of course he would.

VA: Oh I don't know.

CE: He told us about his Uncle Luther Burbank living on the ranch for a year before he went to Santa Rosa.

VA: Oh really? Oh that was fascinating.

CE: This woman took you around in her rig and introduced you to the ranchers.

VA: Yes. And I can see Mr. Mitchell's wife, oh she was -- Several of them from the north of Ireland and they were very good Presbyterians and they were just -- oh they were darling. I can see Mrs. Mitchell, a dainty little woman, and she came in on the interview, when I was presented to Mr. Mitchell, and believe me her voice was the law with Papa. He was this big, big six footer and here was this little woman and she was rocking in this chair, back and forth and back and forth, and taking me in, you know. And often when he'd ask me a question then she'd have something to say too, you know, and if I'd answer then she'd ask me a question.

CE: Would they serve tea, coffee or anything? Or do you recall?

VA: I have an idea. It seems to me everywhere we went we were offered something.

CE: Offered something.

VA: Yes, always. Very hospitable.

CE: That's what we've discovered in going out to West Marin. Wherever Mrs. Kent and I go they just give you homemade pies or cakes or something and coffee.

VA: Oh yes.

CE: You can't refuse; it's so delicious.

VA: No you can't. And so when we were ready to leave she looked at her husband and she said, "I like that girl. I know that she'll do a good job."

CE: She placed her endorsement.

VA: Yes, right away. So the fact of the matter is I did receive the appointment. I can remember the first day of school. I had the first four grades in the lower part. It was an old fashioned school house which isn't there now with the downstairs and the upstairs and the bell in the belfry.

CE: Oh yes. Well tell me Valerie, how many students would there be in that school?

VA: I had about -- there were seventy or so there.

CE: And you were responsible for the first four grades.

VA: First four grades, yes. And Mr. Davidson, God love him, was the County Superintendent, a remarkable, remarkable gentleman and he used to really supervise us too.

CE: All right now, back up just a moment Valerie. Give us the year when you started, in the fall?

VA: August. We started in August. We didn't have three months vacation because of the climate and because many of the children helped in the fields and the dairy.

CE: Dairy?

VA: In the fields and the dairy. You used to know exactly. We had one month in -- I think we had July off and we had December off, something --

CE: Something like that.

VA: Yes.

CE: And what was the year, do you recall?

VA: Yes I do. It was 1913 to the summer of 1914. And then in the fall of 1914 I came to San Anselmo.

CE: I see. What were the subjects you taught in those first four grades?

VA: Reading writing and arithmetic, geography per se, not social studies, and history and all of those basics. And we had a lovely time with our music. And we used to do musical games in those days. Mrs. Lawton and I would put on two performances I think while I was there for the townspeople and the town hall you know and so forth and so on. And as I say, I was so fortunate to be under that remarkable woman. During my year there Mrs. Lawton became very ill and needed surgery and so the trustees said to her, "Would you recommend Miss Ansel's taking your position in the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades and having her, or we will obtain a substitute and letting her run the school." And Mrs. Lawton said, "Yes I would trust her implicitly." Now think of that for my first year!

CE: For your first year. And when did this happen, half way through your term?

VA: Yes, half way through.

CE: That would be around Christmas time?

VA: Yes. It was quite an experience. However if I look back I know it was the thing that made my future in San Anselmo. But everyone was so helpful. And I roomed with a very wonderful girl, Grace Morton, my good friend.

CE: Grace Morton?

VA: Grace Morton, yes.

CE: In other words you stayed there, in Tomales --

VA: Yes we stayed there. We roomed with one woman and then we had to go to the Pint House for our meals.

CE: Was that a restaurant?

VA: A hotel that had a restaurant. And this woman was such a gracious Swiss who ran it, a Mrs. Piezzi, and what a good friend she was to the teachers. And she was so good to us --

AK: What was her name?

VA: Piezzi, P-I-E-Z-Z-I, just a wonderful woman. And so the thing was, Grace was teaching out at Dillon's Beach; she walked to that school every day.

CE: From Tomales?

VA: From Tomales, three miles out and three miles back. Oh yes, oh yes. And so she had all her plans and so forth because she had eight grades, you know, and so we worked every night and she worked with me and so we planned -- and Mrs. Lawton left everything so wonderfully, you know. It was a wonderful experience but a task that really kept me on my toes every minute.

CE: Would the youngsters in those early days of the 1900s, would they be involved with homework to the extent of many hours that goes on today?

VA: Not many hours but --

CE: But they did --

VA: They did and there was no fussing about it because they did it.

CE: They did it.

VA: Yes they did it, absolutely.

CE: Why has history as a subject seem to have eroded out of present day teaching? It's a most important thing, one of the most important subjects for a youngster to learn. To learn about the other cultures of the world, learn about our own history, our own beginning.

VA: Especially about honoring and loving this wonderful country of ours, oh gracious.

CE: And geography, why did geography distort itself into social studies?

VA: Well, through some of these college professors who, as people know as a rule have not -- this is one of my theories anyway.

CE: Yes.

VA: But who have not earned too much money as teachers in their profession, those men, especially the men, would often write books in order to receive extra royalties, you know.

CE: Oh, publish or perish idea, of this school.

VA: And so just as this new math came into being, some professor needed, I think, extra money and devised this very ridiculous method which is being more or less cast off by many, many schools.

CE: Well the same as teaching language in the language laboratory, you had this elaborate machine system. There's no shortcut to learning a language. You have to stick with it, learn the verbs --

VA: Exactly, and you have to know your English grammar.

CE: Well I understand that McGuffey Reader is having a revival in some of the schools, particularly in the central states.

VA: I had a set of those and I gave them to Virginia Keating.

CE: Oh, did you?

VA: Yes and I guess that they're -- I hope that they're reposed in the --

CE: California Room, perhaps.

VA: I hope so.

CE: I think they're in a locked case, the locked case of the California Room.

VA: I hope so.

CE: We're going to the library this afternoon; we'll check that.

AK: You know that Three R School uses them entirely.

CE: Well don't you think they're still good?

VA: Oh wonderful, I certainly do.

CE: Don't you feel it's still paramount for a youngster to be able to write an essay, express himself, be able to do fractions, simple arithmetic?

VA: I'm with you 100 percent and more.

AK: Yes, yes.

VA: But the thing was -- and I do believe that somebody thought that combining geography and history, I don't know how anybody could think you could do that, but this business of doing that and calling it social studies and units of work and so forth. But anyway it came into being and some of the superintendents and we went to a big institute, a convention once a year, which is held --

CE: And they bought the package.

VA: And they bought the package. That's just exactly what happened.

CE: And then once it gets indoors all of the schools are saddled with it; they have to go through with it.

VA: And ask any child, "Where is Vladivostok?" and he looks at you in blank amazement, he hasn't the slightest idea.

CE: For history I read in the *Saturday Review of Literature* the other week, that this young boy was asked to do an essay on one of our presidents, Hoover. He went into the library and was looking up the F.B.I. Hoover! He hadn't even known who Hoover was. Now that is --

VA: That is pathetic, you see.

CE: This is a twelve year old youngster!

VA: Yes, exactly, yes.

CE: Well, Valerie, you weathered the added responsibility obviously of Miss Lewis' absence and you concluded your contract --

VA: Mrs. Lawton.

CE: I beg your pardon, Mrs. Lawton. And you concluded, fulfilled your contract and what happened then?

VA: At the end -- towards the end of the year, Daisy Lawton said to me, she said, "I'm going to make -- I want to have a little talk with you." She said, "You're doing a very good job for us and I'm most pleased and satisfied with your work and the parents are also very much pleased. But if you stay here you're just always going to stay here and you'll probably marry one of the local boys and so forth." And she said, "I want you to do more than that." And she said, "You're particularly gifted in teaching phonics." And of course phonics was the big word of the day.

CE: Explain what that is.

VA: The idea of learning to read through this method of sounds and breaking up words into the smaller words and so forth.

CE: Mrs. Kent, I notice, is nodding approval.

VA: See, that's another one of the things that never should have been given up.

AK: Yeah.

VA: However, that too is coming back little by little.

CE: Isn't it strange and then they rediscover it as if it were something new. Why does this happen in so many fields in life? You go to an extreme and then you come 180 degrees back and full circle.

VA: And that reminds me of my beloved Mr. Thomas, who was the District Superintendent under whom I came when I came to San Anselmo, and you'd be in a

meeting and something would be bothering or something and he'd look at you in that calm way. You knew Mr. Thomas?

AK: Yes.

VA: Oh, what a wonderful man. And he'd say, "Always remember the pendulum swings back and forth so don't get too upset." I've often thought of that, you know, many, many times.

CE: Is it because each succeeding generation has to try it their way?

VA: I think it's possibly -- it's part of the American adventure, you know. I really do.

CE: Desire to improve, to expedite, to cut corners if possible?

VA: Yes.

CE: But there are certain basic things that --

VA: So she said, "Mr. Thomas in San Anselmo is looking for a primary teacher and he wants someone who understands and will teach phonics." And she said, "I'd like you to apply for that position because she said I've talked to him about you" and so forth and so on and before you knew it that position was mine. And I have often thought because you know I'm on the stout side, I wasn't as stout then as I am now, but anyway I've often thought if Mr. Thomas had seen me and interviewed me I never would have gotten the position because he didn't like fat girls. So --

CE: Valerie I must ask you for future historians' benefit to share with us the amount of money you were paid as a contract for teaching in those days. Because all the teachers today are so concerned they are not getting paid enough.

VA: I received in Tomales that first year, I received \$75 a month and that was for the months I taught.

CE: Yes.

VA: Not \$75 for the year.

CE: Not July or December when you were off.

VA: Yes. Then when I came to San Anselmo I think I was to receive \$85.

CE: Well tell me out of that \$75, when you were living in Tomales, you were able to support yourself?

VA: Yes, yes.

CE: Did you have any extra money to buy any clothes or was this just bare existence? Could you --

VA: You see when I started out I was well clad. My mother had seen to that, you know. It doesn't seem to me that I had to buy many things and in Tomales a simple little -- I wore the little cottons, the little summer dresses and so forth and so on. The people of the town gave me a very lovely going away party as it were, presented me with the loveliest pin which I'm sorry to tell you, and I loved it so, it was stolen.

CE: Oh my gosh.

VA: A pin, a lovely pearl pin. It was such exquisite taste and I just loved it. Yes it was stolen on a ferry boat by the way.

CE: Would you go home often on weekends?

VA: Oh yes.

CE: Every weekend you went home?

VA: Oh not every but often yes. Because I was invited to go to the different ranches for the weekend and so forth and so on you know. And the woman who was the postmaster there was a very wonderful woman.

CE: What was her name?

VA: Mrs. Dickinson. And they were pioneers of Tomales. You remember the Dickinsons don't you?

AK: Yes I do.

VA: Oh yes and she was a Mills graduate and she was just -- Oh and I used to spend a great deal of time with her and they had a lovely old home filled with antiques and I used to stay all night. She used to have me to dinner and so forth --

CE: Well you weren't living in a cultural void at all, were you?

VA: Oh no I should say not because there were so many, not so many but a number of these people that made you welcome and with whom you could fraternize.

CE: Was this the Dickinson family, the one who had the son Bray who became a railroad enthusiast?

VA: Exactly and Bray used to take me out, you know, take me to dinner, you know. In fact, Bray -- It was supposed at one time that Bray and Hazel Bailey were supposed to, well, they did go together but something happened. I don't know but they were supposed to --

CE: They didn't get married?

VA: They were supposed to be married but they remained good friends always. And so Bray was very good to me and we remained friends always until his death and I used to go up and visit him and his wife when he finally married. I used to stay there.

CE: During your tenure there, had any of your neighboring ranchers, had any of those men been on the Board of Supervisors at that time? I know James Marshall was at one period --

VA: Henry Darby was the great supervisor. He built a very modern lovely bungalow in Tomales for himself and wife. Oh what a wonderful couple. And I used to sit on that porch with him. I'd pass maybe on a Saturday morning and then he'd hail me, and then he'd tell me so many interesting things about this county and so forth and it was just wonderful. And he was a north of Irelander and what that marvelous accent that they have and we just -- people worshiped him, just worshiped him; he was wonderful.

CE: Don't you think Tomales and the area and the bay and what is now the Point Reyes National Seashore, that beautiful view. It's a beautiful part of the country.

VA: Yes, very lovely. And Henry Darby used to say, "You know Miss Ansel, it would be wise for you to stay around here. You know the people here are very healthy." And they were, you know.

AK: That's right.

VA: And I'll tell you somebody too who was my great friend, my guardian, was Hazel's grandmother, Mrs. Guldager. Oh did I love that woman.

CE: Guldager.

VA: Guldager, G-U-L-D-A-G-E-R, and her son was my school trustee, you see.

CE: I see.

VA: And what a darling woman and she had such a charming cottage and she had me to dinner a great deal and she was one of the people in the town who had a bathtub.

CE: Uh oh.

VA: There were many pianos in the town but few bath tubs. So I used to take my bath --

CE: Down there.

VA: At Mrs. Guldager's, yes.

CE: When they would have the Board of Trustees meeting in the school district, would you be present?

VA: No.

CE: No. Can you recall any problems that came up or concerns that reflected itself in whatever you taught?

VA: Yes I can. I don't know, not about what I taught but one of the children in my class, we'll have him nameless because he might be living now, was a spoiled momma's boy. A little boy that was, oh I can see him yet, he was a pale -- and these other children so rugged and all -- and he was a pale little fellow and his mother just had a grip on him. But nobody else could tell this youngster what to do in any terms you knew, and I dared to discipline him. And --

CE: Word got back --

VA: Oh she was just -- She was going to have me fired. She went to Ed Cornett and she went all around and she was going to have me fired. I can remember the first day of school, Miss Ansel walking to school with Mr. Cornett, her wonderful trustee, and the children following us. You'd think it were the Pied Piper of Hamelin you know and on the way, and I hear his voice yet, he said, "Miss Ansel these kids are wild and there is a shillelagh in your room and do not hesitate to use it." How do you like that? And so discipline was required because it happened that some of the teachers didn't feel about discipline the way we did but we brought everything in to -- Mrs. Lawton was a fine disciplinarian, so it worked very beautifully and it was --

CE: Well anyway, when this spoiled darling's mother came and reported this action to the board, they supported you.

VA: Oh yes, they supported me. And when it was time for me to leave, believe it or not, this woman headed a group of citizens and they got out a petition for me to stay and they would raise my salary \$10.00.

CE: And you continued your same treatment of this little youngster and it probably did him some good.

VA: Oh yes, because I felt that I was being fair and square.

AK: I bet he was a good friend of yours before you left.

VA: Yes he was.

CE: Did you ever follow his career? Did he develop in --

VA: No I never did.

CE: Stay in the community?

VA: I never knew what became of him. Some day when I go up to Tomales, which I do occasionally, I'll find somebody that maybe the Parks can tell me. Roy Parks is, was Mr. Guldager's grandson and Roy is a great gentleman. He has a lovely ranch out there and he and his wife are the nicest people you ever knew. Some day I'm going up to stay at the ranch for a couple of days and I'll get caught up again.

CE: Well these are wonderful tales. Now let's get to San Anselmo then. Wade Thomas didn't see you. You were hired without his observation.

VA: And so --

CE: How many teachers would there be in a school the size of San Anselmo?

VA: We had six then.

CE: Six?

VA: By the time I left, of course, there were new buildings because that building has long since been destroyed and newer ones built. That little school that is there now, is the third one.

CE: But you taught in the original school?

VA: Yes.

CE: I've seen photographs of it, wooden.

VA: Yes, wooden, two story, yes.

CE: And that was torn down mainly because they thought it was a fire hazard, was that not true?

VA: No, I don't think so. I think it was because they -- We needed more room. There were more children. They needed more teachers. We had ten teachers by the time I left and we had manual training and, you know, that kind of thing.

CE: What were the subjects you taught then, when you went to the new school?

VA: The new school I -- The strange thing --

CE: The San Anselmo school, I mean.

VA: This is something strange too. The woman whom I was to succeed chose all of a sudden not to retire, not to resign. She was to go to Oakland to teach and she was a wonderful teacher. And so what to do with me, they didn't know. So the District to this day still owes me a month's salary because I was dunked. And I forget I think I helped the other teachers and went into the other rooms or something because Mr. Thomas was quite embarrassed at the time. She finally did leave and so -- Then I took over this -- It was a mixed class of, I think, there were some high third graders and fourth and oh, you know, there was no saying, "If I have more than twenty-five I can't teach," you know. Oh I think I had at least forty children in my class. And I can remember that fourth grade so well because some of the youngsters whom I had in that class grew up and married, you know. I had several of that kind of thing, children meeting in my school and then growing up and --

CE: Is that right?

VA: For instance Virginia Stewart who was our librarian down here, she was Virginia Richwagen and she and Coulter Stewart met in my eighth grade and they went to high school and they married, and I have several of those. And in my fourth grade little Edna Wessel, I can see her yet with the big red bows on her head, and her husband Bill Wessel or Anselm, because his name was A-N-S-E-L-M and my name was Ansel and he went home the first day and said to his mother, "Oh you know I have the best teacher, she's my cousin." And his mother said, "What do you mean she's your cousin, we don't have any cousin who is a teacher." "Oh yes," he said, "her name is just like mine." And so to this day he always calls me his cousin, you know.

CE: Was Donald C. Perry one of your students?

VA: Not at that moment because he was in an upper grade, you know. But I used to go into the upper grades too sometimes. One of the teachers would teach music in a certain class and then I'd relieve her and do literature or something like that. But I did have his brother later on in school, the one, Malcolm, who's dead now, and I taught his sister Esther too. In fact the year that I retired, seventeen years ago, I registered my third generation of papers.

CE: Did you?

VA: Yes.

CE: Isn't that wonderful? Well, we had the pleasure of interviewing him and two of his living cousins, all of whom are great grandsons of James Ross who was the --

VA: Oh yes and I taught all the Beales children.

CE: Did you?

VA: Oh yes.

CE: John Thomas Beales.

VA: Yes, and I wish to tell you that their mother, that Mrs. Worn --

CE: Louise?

VA: Oh what a -- Her mother, Louise was Mrs. Beales, but her mother Mrs. Worn who had a charming house where those apartment houses are --

CE: 39 Ross Avenue, what a wonderful --

VA: Oh and was she an inspiration to me. I used to go and have tea with her after school. Things were much more leisurely of course in those days. John was her beloved grandson; she loved John.

CE: Really?

VA: Yes and he was in my class. We had a fine rapport, that child and I.

CE: Are we talking about John Thomas Beales?

VA: Yes, who lives in Oakland.

CE: He lives in Piedmont Bay. We interviewed him also and you know what he's done, which will interest you Valerie, since his retirement from the telephone company he has been doing the research on his family. He is very historically minded. And he has spent days and weeks in the Recorder's Office for this reason. He was curious to know what happened to the 8,800 plus acreage that his great grandfather acquired, the Rancho Punta de Quentin. How come 100 years later there's not one piece left? So he has done a great thing and he's written the saga of the Rancho Punta de Quentin.

VA: Oh isn't that something?

CE: And he gave us a lecture --

VA: Oh yes, and I knew her mother too.

AK: Did you? Oh you do. We're going to get her story one of these days.

VA: Her mother isn't living any more.

AK: No but she'll have to tell us herself.

VA: She'll tell you and give her my love,. Oh I just love that girl.

AK: Yes.

CE: Well now, there were, naturally, quite a few homes in San Anselmo but not to the extent today. One of the big edifices of course was the San Francisco Theological Seminary.

VA: Right.

CE: You have perhaps seen early photos of San Anselmo, have you not? The California Historical Society has a large collection of them and recently I heard from the librarian at the San Francisco Library, Miss Pallow I believe her name is and Jackie Mollenkopf. They are trying to get copies and have them blown up and put in the library to show early photographs of this area.

VA: Yes that's right, yes. And I know they've asked me to hang onto my old class pictures because -- And I have them down in the garage.

CE: Yes. You do have those?

VA: Many of them and I am going to give those to them.

CE: That would be wonderful.

VA: Yes.

CE: Do you have any identification of the students? Is that possible that you could --

VA: Yes I've written on many of the backs of them.

CE: That is so important Valerie, if you could do that.

VA: Yes, yes they're there. The children wrote their names themselves.

CE: We've interviewed Dolly Jenkins who was Dolly Cushing.

VA: Oh that was the most -- Was that your interview in the newspaper?

CE: No, that was one that Jack Mason did.

VA: I just loved that --

CE: Dolly is a wonderful gal.

VA: Oh of course she is.

CE: She lent us a photograph last week of the entire class of San Rafael High School in 1905. There were eighty-four people in the photograph. She can identify every one of them.

VA: She's a remarkable person.

AK: Even though she was there only a short time?

CE: Yes. She's an extraordinary woman.

VA: You know Mrs. Papawood?

AK: Yes.

VA: Well Vera is a very intimate friend of mine.

AK: We have to do her too.

VA: Oh she's a love. Oh yes, you must do her.

CE: Where does she live dear?

VA: She lives at 845 Belle Avenue, San Rafael.

CE: Mrs. Kent, make a note of that.

AK: Yes.

CE: Well let's get back to you Valerie. Now in school I understand that you were terribly interested in music and you wanted to have your students acquire a music appreciation. How did you deliver this? How did you go about creating this sort of climate for them?

VA: Through records.

CE: Through records.

VA: Yes, through records. And I have them all.

CE: Did you encourage their participation in symphonies, concerts? Tell us about this.

VA: Oh, yes. I took the children, after preparation however.

CE: You would first study a piece of music and the composer, listen to the record?

VA: Oh yes, for weeks on end, I would. And Mr. Thomas loved music.

CE: It seems to me you were way ahead of yourself in this area. It's more acceptable now but that was quite an innovative thing.

VA: We had a budget of course and people would be gracious enough to donate lovely records and all. I can remember Beth Kaufman sending us some of the most beautiful records. I had her youngsters in school. Well you interviewed Beth Kaufman, didn't you Mrs. Kent?

AK: No, we didn't. We ought to but we didn't.

VA: Oh yes, she lives down in Greenbrae. But anyway, yes, Beth should be interviewed.

CE: Put that down, Mrs. --

VA: And we prepared this kind of thing. Alice Seckles who was a -- what would I call her? In San Francisco she brought many of the finer --

CE: Impresario?

VA: Yes, I would say.

CE: She arranged concerts too and bring people --

VA: Yes, yes because I remember hearing Yehudi Menuhin as her guest. He was a child that she practically promoted you know and I can remember that. She would get the tickets for me and I would take these youngsters; I would take as many as fifty. Nobody else with me, none of the mothers or anybody --

CE: Fifty?

VA: Fifty youngsters. We'd go over on the ferry --

CE: Go on the train and over to the city --

VA: On the train and on the ferry and get to the terminal and then I'd say to the starter, "I have a group of fifty children and we're going up to the Curran or wherever, where the concert was being held and --"

CE: Would this be on a weekend?

VA: A week day, school day.

CE: A week day. That was the project for the day.

VA: Oh yes, a project. "And could we please have a car?" And he'd arrange it all and we'd get in that car --

CE: Take the entire car?

VA: The entire car and these youngsters in it and I never had to worry about the discipline or anything like that because we had talked things over and I said, "Of course if anybody doesn't enjoy it he needn't go next time or if he is out of line in any way then I will say he may not go. Now it's up to you if you like it we'll always do it and we did grand opera too that way." We went to grand opera.

CE: You did?

VA: Oh yes, oh yes.

CE: Where was the Opera House then, on Mission?

VA: No. Where was -- Where did we have grand opera? Not in the new Opera House --

CE: That was built in about 19 -- early 30s, but I was wondering --

VA: Now where did we go?

AK: Don't look at me, I don't remember either.

CE: Well the old Opera House was on Mission around the corner from the Palace Hotel but that was too early.

VA: Yes, but that wasn't the one. No I'm trying --

CE: Well it'll come to you.

VA: I wonder if it wasn't in the Civic Auditorium.

CE: Could be, could be.

VA: Yes and of course we would always prepare for that too. And I didn't invite them to hear Wagner because we took care of that through "The Barber of Seville" and "Carmen." The things that were flashy and had --

CE: More melodious.

VA: Oh yes, more melodious and much action. We did "Aida." Oh they loved "Aida" all of that kind of -- and then led them into it gradually.

CE: Wagner would be too slow moving.

VA: And they'd hate it and they never ever want to go again.

CE: Very smart, gave them a taste of the palatable operas.

VA: Yes, yes.

CE: Oh that's wonderful. Did any of your musical -- Did any of the students as a result of your exposing them to music follow music as a career to your knowledge?

VA: I don't think I could exactly say that.

CE: Exactly say that.

VA: There were so many children.

CE: But you certainly enriched their lives by this wonderful exposure.

VA: Yes and I'm pleased to tell you sometimes on my cards now, at Christmas time, and usually the boys. It's the strangest thing this thing reached the boys, much more than it did the girls. I mean their reaction, even to this day that I get will be from the boys rather than the girls.

CE: Well of course we're on a property that belonged to the Heckscher family, how did that come about? And the son is still playing at the Fairmont Hotel, his wonderful orchestra. Did you know Mrs. Heckscher quite well?

VA: Oh did I know her, that's how I happened to come here because she wanted me to. There's a lovely picture of her incidentally.

CE: Where, dear?

VA: This photo right here, this snapshot.

CE: Oh yes.

VA: Marvelous, marvelous woman.

CE: Well she has a beautiful estate here, right next to the Robeson Park.

VA: Yes. And on November 1, I will have been here 33 years.

CE: Did you walk from here to school every day?

VA: Oh yes, just down there.

CE: Just down there.

VA: And frequently stopped in at Beth Kaufman's because I'd go early in the morning because I had reports to do and so forth and then she'd knock on the window, come in and have a cup of coffee before you go to your office, and so we did.

CE: Those were happy days weren't they Valerie?

VA: Oh lovely, lovely.

AK: My Tom knew Mrs. Heckscher very well. I don't know whether --

VA: Yes.

AK: Or why --

VA: Oh yes she had all her insurance with him.

AK: Yes and oh they got along.

VA: Oh yes I should say so. But I do feel that this music appreciation gave the children much joy really did.

CE: Well it enriched their lives.

VA: Yes, I think so.

CE: Well tell us Valerie how did it come about that you stayed so long? You evidently enjoyed the entire arrangement didn't you? And you remained at that school forty-five years?

VA: Forty five years. And oh I must tell you also, just before I signed my contract to accept the position in San Anselmo our good friend and my good friend and, and a fine educator, Charlie Dufore, the Superintendent of the Alameda City Schools sent word that he had a position for me.

CE: Uh oh, you were tempted.

VA: No, I wasn't. I loved Marin County, I loved the environment and you see that year had given me just enough of the adventure that I wasn't sure that I wanted to live at home.

CE: You didn't want to go back in the nest.

VA: Yes.

CE: During the year did you have an opportunity to explore Marin, go up Tam or --

VA: Oh yes, yes.

CE: Meet any of the Germans in the Alpine Club?

VA: No.

CE: But you explored it and you loved it.

VA: You remember the Schmidts, Mrs. Kent? Benjamin and Trix?

AK: Ben Schmidt? Trix?

VA: Well of course Trix Schmidt was one of my most intimate friends and they lived across the street from us in Alameda and she knew me when I was knee high to a grasshopper.

AK: She was darling.

VA: And she was a darling and she and Ben lived here. Incidentally you know Ben became one of my school trustees and then he became mayor too in this town.

AK: That's right.

VA: And I used to come sometimes weekends and stay with them and of course when she heard that I was going to have the opportunity to come to San Anselmo, she made life so gracious for me and introduced me to Mrs. Stratford and all these people you know and so forth and --

CE: Go ahead, conclude your thought and then we'll stop.

VA: And then which made me feel born here you see, so of course my father was just delighted, you know, that I was going to teach in Alameda, and so I had to go to see Mrs. Dufore.

End Tape 1, side B

CE: Well now tell me, Valerie, that kind of put you in the spot, what did you do, follow your father's wishes and go over?

VA: I went to his office and I -- We had a very nice chat, or course he knew me growing up and so forth, and I said, in the course of conversation, he said, "What do you feel you should do?" He said, "Because I have the preference whenever a city --" In those days I don't know whether it was some unwritten law whether there was really some kind of agreement that the large city or town should have preference over the country school I don't know. But he said, he more or less said to me, "I can break your contract if, you know, because that's my prerogative since I am the superintendent of a large area." and he looked at me, and I said, "Mr. Dufore I promised that I would go to

San Anselmo and I would like to keep that promise. I would like to at least go into San Anselmo and be there for a year.” And he said, “I’m proud of you. I hoped that would be what you’d say.” He said, “You will go there with my blessings,” but he said, and he took this card, my file card that had been the first one in the draw, and he put it at the back and he said, “Now whenever you are ready this card will come back to the pile.”

AK: Isn’t that nice?

VA: “And a position is here for you.” I never did.

AK: San Anselmo won.

CE: San Anselmo won out.

VA: Yes.

AK: That’s great.

VA: Yes and I never regretted it.

CE: Well now during this extraordinary tenure that you fulfilled, forty-five years, in this particular school, were you changing classes?

VA: Oh yes, ever yes.

CE: Tell us a little bit how the complexion changed.

VA: Well certain teachers would leave, you know --

CE: And you would fill in?

VA: And Mr. Thomas would ask that maybe one teacher that he would feel should go into that grade, and he’d say, “Would you take this grade?” and so forth and so on.

Incidentally one of my colleagues was Mabel Boick who became Mrs. Fred Crisp, who in turn --

CE: Mabel --

VA: B-O -- Mrs. Landon’s sister.

CE: Oh yes. Ethel Landon’s sister.

VA: Yes and Mabel later married Fred Crisp who later became one of my school trustees, you know, and whose children I taught.

VA: Yes right in Ross Avenue. And yes, so anyway, I went to their wedding and so forth and it was very pleasant. That association has been all my life that family; I’ve had a wonderful association. Then I went into the fifth and sixth and then I went into the seventh and then finally into the eighth and then for a time we had what we called departmentalized work, which I loved. One teacher --

CE: Explain that.

VA: One teacher took the arithmetic through the sixth, seventh and eighth, another one did the history and geography, as we had per se before it went to social studies. And then the literary arts I had which included the spelling and the grammar. Then as a special program I had the music appreciation in those classes, you see. And that was very enjoyable.

CE: Was music appreciation an elective or was it --

VA: No you took it, I mean --

CE: It was required.

VA: It was required, yes. And if you didn’t enjoy, why, you got something out of it.

CE: Well obviously music has been very dear to you in your life. Did you get involved in putting on programs and contributing towards the musical part of the programs as the years went by?

VA: Oh, not particularly I would say because we had wonderful women who had our school orchestras you know. We had Berta Conward, remember? And we had this wonderful Kathleen Small, who is incidentally one of my good friends. And they had the orchestras and they would usually take care of that part of it.

CE: I see.

VA: We put on a number of performances for our parents during the year but not necessarily that music was stressed.

CE: Now you were teaching, Valerie, in this school when our country entered World War I. What was the attitude of the youngsters then? Patriotism wasn't a dirty word, was it?

VA: Oh, I should say not.

CE: As it has been within the last decade.

VA: Oh no.

CE: Did the school become involved in any way, helping in the war effort? Could you describe some of those activities?

VA: Oh yes. I'll tell you one of the things that was a great event. Do you remember Madame Milton?

CE: Certainly do, taught French at Branson's School.

VA: Oh yes, oh yes, wonderful. Well, Madame Milton and I were great friends and she did a gorgeous piece of work, as you know, during that war especially with some of the orphan children and so forth. She came to me one day and said, with Mr. Thomas' permission, that she would like to organize a sort of auxiliary Red Cross in our school and involve the children to the extent that they would feel they could contribute such as canned goods and so forth and so on and that we would send our gifts to these children and so forth. That became one of the greatest things that you could ever imagine. The children --

CE: Really responded.

VA: Oh responded beautifully and at that time I had in my class, in my eighth grade, one of Doctor Oxtoby's boys, brilliant children. By the way, I see the Oxtobys too. I have a lovely --

AK: There was something in the paper the other day --

CE: This is the dean from the Seminary?

VA: Oh yes, Seminary. And this boy's grandfather had been President of the Seminary but his father was one of the professors: Professor of Hebrew, Greek, and so forth. And I had the three children, Gerdon's three children. And Gerdon, incidentally, was also a graduate from our school, so was his sister, so was his brother. I had John too. I taught John and then had this second generation. However, this young Oxtoby, a brilliant boy. In fact now he is an outstanding professor in the University of Toronto and he's done Sea Scroll work and all that kind of thing.

CE: The Dead Sea Scrolls?

VA: Yes, the Dead Sea Scrolls.

AK: Oh you know he came with Betty Bechtel when Betty gave us the talk at Moya Library on the Dead Sea Scrolls.

VA: Oh did he?

AK: Yes.

VA: Oh wonderful.

AK: In fact she let him do most of the talking.

VA: Oh yes.

AK: That really was something.

VA: This youngster put his whole heart and soul into this project. And he took care of packaging when the children brought things and he printed all the addresses and he weighed everything and he went to the post office and he made out all the little slips that had to be attached and so forth, you know, because of the foreign entry and so on. And the whole town became interested more or less through these children but they never let it lag until we were not called on to do any more, but it was a wonderful project. And then, of course, when the tires were rationed and everything was rationed, my school became one of the centers and that was a very -- a town effort. And the P.T.A., I must say, helped me wonderfully, and we had to schedule different women at different times all during the time to be on duty to take the numbers and to assign and that was -- The teachers took part, the populace, and if we had to be open some nights, the men and the fathers came in to help and we had a regular efficient goings on there.

CE: Was the Parent Teachers Association very cooperative and active when you were there?

VA: Very, very.

CE: Did they support the teachers?

VA: They supported the teachers and there was no interference; there was no heckling or pettiness at all. They were very remarkable women in it.

CE: Today counselors seem to perform some sort of a function in schools. In your lifetime of teaching were counselors, as such, separate people who guided the careers of youngsters?

VA: In the high school area, yes.

CE: But not in the elementary?

VA: No, no. And we had no mother aides or teacher aides. However we did welcome young women who were doing their practice teaching -- as it was called in those days -- it's called interning now, and we were happy to see them.

CE: Oh you had practice teachers?

VA: Oh yes, we had practice teachers coming in, yes. And helped them that way because everybody has to get experience.

CE: That's true.

AK: That's right.

CE: I remember at the University of California my sister took her fifth year to get her teaching credential and then went to University High School in Oakland and did her practice teaching.

VA: Yes.

CE: It separates you right then. Some can't make it.

VA: That's right.

CE: Would it be difficult, Valerie, to quickly run through a typical day as a young teacher, say one of those first years in San Anselmo? When would you arrive at school for instance, when did school begin?

VA: At first I was not the principal.

CE: No, no, as a teacher. When would class begin?

VA: The class began at nine.

CE: And when would you get there?  
VA: Before I was principal, I used to get there between eight and eight thirty.  
CE: Get your room ready?  
VA: Get the room ready and get the work on the board and all.  
CE: Did you remain in that room for your teaching day or did you have to float around?  
VA: No, I remained, except when I was on yard duty. Each teacher had so many days, so many hours of yard duty, you know.  
CE: What was the attitude of your students towards punctuality? I mean, did they have to be --  
VA: They had to be there on time or a written excuse from the parent had to come. That was demanded and the parents knew that and they responded to it. You know that don't you, Mrs. Kent?  
AK: Oh, indeed, yes.  
CE: There was a minimum of truancy, I presume.  
VA: Oh absolutely.  
CE: None of that.  
VA: No, none. And of course Mr. Thomas happened to have his office in my building always and --  
CE: And he was in the Superintendent of Schools.  
VA: Yes, he had Kentfield --  
CE: Oh and his office was in the --  
VA: Yes our school. Yes there was none of this hiring all these fancy places for these men and he balanced his budget I can tell you that. He was never in the red, never. But Wade Thomas was highly respected, he was a small man but he was a man of few words.  
AK: Yes.  
CE: Describe him to us, if you would. Small in physique?  
VA: Small in physique and a very serious type of person but when he smiled his face lighted tremendously. He was -- He rode a bicycle in those days and delivered books to the different teachers and all before he obtained his funny little Chevrolet that he bought from Jim Leach, incidentally. Did you interview Jim Leach?  
AK: Not yet. He promises, then doesn't keep it.  
VA: Oh then doesn't keep it. Oh he's a dear, dear person. But anyway, then the school let out about --  
CE: Well did you have a recess.  
VA: Oh recess, yes.  
CE: Well for instance, you start at nine; you give a forty minute or an hour's class --  
VA: Well in those days when we first started we didn't have a recess every hour. Afterwards, when we moved to the new building, we had a ten minute recess every hour. But in those days we taught for an hour and a half or so and then had a half hour and then went on 'til noon. And then you had from twelve to one for lunch period and then about half past two you had a short recess.  
CE: Was there a cafeteria as such in the old days?  
VA: No.  
CE: You brought your lunch?  
VA: Yes.

CE: You too?

VA: Oh yes.

CE: Would you eat your lunch at the desk normally or would you go out and eat?

VA: No, the teachers usually ate together; eat in some teacher's room or something. I can see Mabel Boick and I eating together so frequently. And there was a small room, as I remember you could make a cup of tea or coffee and so forth. But sometimes the teachers did stay in their own rooms; some of them had things to do and all. I can remember one teacher who commuted from San Francisco.

CE: Ooh.

AK: Ooh.

VA: Yes.

CE: That was a chore. All right then you'd have lunch and you'd commence class at one --

VA: Yes.

CE: And it would run until three, perhaps?

VA: Oh more than that. We got out later than that.

CE: Now would you remain at school and do some of your preparation for the next day or would you immediately --

VA: Oh yes, oh yes, and probably have some children after school for one reason or another, maybe for disciplinary reasons or maybe to help them.

CE: I see, and you would stay until that obligation had been fulfilled.

VA: Oh yes, oh yes. And when we went into the new building and I was in the upper grades I frequently stayed until five or five thirty. Oh yes, yes. And of course we didn't have any buses then; there were no buses in the first place --

CE: Yes, that's true.

VA: And the children walked and many of them came from the Lansdale School which ended at the sixth grade and came to us in the seventh and eighth and those children walked or had bicycles. And mommas didn't have all the automobiles they have now you know and so that was all part of the day too, this walking.

AK: How about the May Day. They did take part in this?

VA: Oh yes.

CE: Mrs. Kent and I are very interested in that, as you know, because of her family's contribution of that land. Tell us your memories of May Day.

VA: I can remember one year, I think that was the war year, each school was assigned to participate as a country. And I can remember one year, that year, we had -- We were to be Belgium. And I know the Beales children were in school at that time and Mrs. Beales and the Worn sisters were so wonderful with flowers and Louise Beales took me and we went -- She used to drive the wagon and we'd go out to Bolinas and that area and we -- I forget how --

CE: Drive the wagon? A horse and wagon?

VA: Oh yes, a horse and wagon to bring in plants or shrubs or wild flowers or whatever. But she suggested, when we had a meeting, that we would have one of your little girls as our lovely Queen of the Belgians, who was so beloved at that time, and her favorite flower, I believe, was the forget-me-not. And we had a regular daisy chain, and Mrs. Beales made it, of these forget-me-nots and then all of the youngsters in our school were dressed to portray the Belgian just in a simple way you know and then we had our

little Queen in the middle and then they surrounded her with this daisy chain of forget-me-nots.

CE: Well we recently saw some photographs of -- Was it Jessie Hanna, Mrs. Kent?

AK: Yes.

VA: Oh Jessie, she died.

AK: Yes, she died. She died, believe it or not, in a very roundabout way. All the things that she had saved from the old Tamalpais Center, especially the May Day things, have come now to the Civic Center Library.

CE: California Room.

AK: We've got them in the California Room.

VA: How did you do it?

AK: Well we know --

VA: Because I corresponded with her. In fact she was gone and I was still writing to her and it happened through a mutual friend. She lived in Channing House, in Palo Alto, and I used to see her there, not too frequently since I don't drive, but whenever I was in that area I always saw Jessie. But just through a friend, her nephew apparently wrote to this mutual friend and after two months I found out that she was gone.

CE: Well this one book of photographs is all about the May Day.

VA: Yes.

CE: And it shows the various schools gathering --

VA: Yes.

CE: Gathering their little groups, with their teachers, and probably you're in one of these photographs.

AK: And not only that, Valerie, but she had saved all sorts of things including every program beginning way back in 1909.

VA: Oh how wonderful.

AK: So we have those showing the people who advertised in them, showing the Bon Aire Hotel opening that year in May and the beautiful picture of --

CE: And the gifts that were contributed Anne?

AK: Every detail of the whole programs, of all the gifts that were given as prizes.

Everything, even down to three legged races, potato races, and girls doing such and such.

VA: That's where the building of the college, the new building is.

AK: Yes, now the college has the -- where the gym is.

VA: Where the gym is, yes.

AK: And we have also an entire book of minutes from the old Centre because Mr.

Webb was the Secretary and some of these days we're going to put one great program all together and include all of those things.

VA: Oh I hope I'll be there.

CE: Won't that be something?

VA: Oh yes, that's wonderful.

AK: Very, very good.

VA: Oh, wonderful, yes.

CE: Well you know, Valerie, Mrs. Kent of all the members of her family, in my judgment, she's really trying to do something concrete to preserve --

VA: Well she always does that.

CE: This wonderful story.

AK: Well people don't even know what the Centre was.

VA: No.

AK: It's so sad and when they just burned it down because they wanted to build something of their own, not one soul said a word about it.

CE: Or stepped forward.

AK: And I always thought that they probably thought the Kent family did it. I don't know what they could have thought but anyway now at least we have good pictures and anybody who has anything can give it to the California Room up there at the library and it's going to be known as another generation anyway, very good.

CE: Well we need people to fight for things. To speak up, not to remain silent. And I must say this, Mrs. Kent might be embarrassed but the other afternoon we were at the Board of Supervisors' meeting. The budget was being presented and they wanted to close the library, Civic Center, Fairfax, Novato, and Corte Madera, one day a week to save money. You should have heard Mrs. Kent get on her feet, very quietly but strongly say to these people, "I'm perhaps the oldest woman in this room. I wonder if you have any idea of how difficult it was to get a County Library system established in 1925, '26 and '27. How we fought for it. And here we are supposed to be the most affluent county in the state of California and you want to close one of our greatest resources?" Well after she got her little speech through you should have heard them all clap, including the Board of Supervisors, and they didn't close the library.

VA: Oh thank heavens.

CE: But you've got to be there.

AK: We just happened in.

CE: Just by a fluke.

AK: We didn't know what was going on, we just happened to be going out to --

VA: But they put themselves up for a wonderful raise in salary, haven't they?

AK: Yes, they did that. But that wasn't the saddest part. The saddest part was that Mill Valley, which is a fine library but is a town library, was asking in this same budget, they were asking for a great deal of money.

CE: Thousands of dollars.

AK: Yes, because they said that they took care of some of the people who really should be taken care of by the County Library.

CE: You know, Tam Valley and the unincorporated --

AK: Which was probably true but they didn't need to.

CE: Well there was a taxpayer's advocate there, Mr. Kelly, and he said, "Well don't service them if it costs you so much. Tell them to go to the County."

AK: They belong in the County.

CE: But they want that money.

AK: Yes. But just the same they did get theirs and I don't begrudge them.

CE: But they didn't get as much.

AK: No.

CE: Thanks to your presentation.

VA: That's good.

AK: It's all right to give it to them but not to take it out of the pocket of --

CE: The County Library.

VA: No, no.

AK: That was all we wanted.

VA: Right.

CE: Speaking of libraries, Valerie, you have been Chairman of the San Anselmo Library.

VA: For forty-seven years.

CE: Forty-seven years?

VA: I wasn't the Chairman all that time but I was on the Board; but I was the Chairman for years and years.

CE: Well you very recently acquired a very talented member, Jacqueline Mollenkopf. Have you met her?

VA: Oh yes.

CE: She is a wonderful girl and she has been a great asset to us.

AK: Because she worked for the County Library --

CE: She was the main reference person at the County Library, you know.

AK: Yes and we needed her so badly.

VA: Yes, charming lady.

CE: Well, she still helps us. I go knock on her door in the morning before the Library is opened around nine and she lets me in.

VA: When Lucy retires I know she'll be our Head Librarian.

CE: Oh yes, she's very clever.

VA: I'd go for it too, believe me.

CE: Yes. Lucy Posell. Is that her name?

VA: Yes.

CE: I've met her.

VA: Yes.

CE: Well you know what I like about Jacqueline? We've shared with her any information we get. This is a little off, aside, but the California Historical Society has a vast reservoir of photographs, as you know, and I spent a few days over there recently turning up some outstanding ones on San Anselmo. And I told Jackie about it and she took the negative numbers down and she's ordered some and they're going to have them in the Library. They're knockouts, beautiful photographs.

VA: Oh good. Oh wonderful, wonderful.

AK: Isn't it wonderful the way it all worked out?

CE: And she's history oriented. We all helped each other.

AK: Everybody helped together. It's good.

CE: All right now, let's move on a little bit, Valerie. You told us you -- When did you become principal? How did that come about? You taught for all those years and -- Before we get to the principal part, were you able to travel or do anything for yourself personally in the summer?

VA: No because -- not very much in the summer.

CE: Why?

VA: Because I wanted to -- I was anxious to get my junior high certificate and I was anxious to get my administrator's certificate and I took work from Stanford and U.C. professors and so forth until I acquired both of those.

CE: So you were continually --

VA: Studying.

CE: And prepared yourself for --

VA: And of course again I must tell you in those days we did not have three months vacation either, you know. We didn't have that length of time. That just has come -- Well of course it did before I retired but I mean that --

CE: That's a recent thing that evolved --

VA: That evolved gradually, yes. And so in that regard I had my nose to the grindstone.

CE: Well, what year did you become principal then? How did that come about? Who was the principal for those many years? Do you recall some of their names?

VA: Oh yes. My first principal was Mary Cooney. And incidentally her brother Jack became my brother-in-law. A very, very wonderful man and she was --

CE: Did he have other sisters?

VA: I have one sister.

CE: No, did he have other sisters?

VA: Oh yes, oh yes.

CE: It seems that name is so familiar.

VA: Oh well it's kind of -- It's now as common as Smith but it's not very rare.

CE: No.

VA: Yes, his one sister, Katherine, in San Francisco was Dean of Girls for many years in one of the schools and another sister, Alice, taught high school in Booneville because they were Mendocino families, these Cooney's. And then the other sister did not teach, there were four sisters and about four brothers and there's just the younger sister left of all the family now. However this Mary Cooney, she was as bright as a dollar and made a very fine administrator.

CE: Was she a product of the San Francisco Normal School, do you know, to your knowledge?

VA: Yes, she was. But she had --

CE: Before you --

VA: Yes, but she took work too at Cal and Stanford and so forth. Then she went in to -- In those days a written examination and an oral one both were required to enter the San Francisco schools. I don't know whether they do that now with the way things are. However she passed on a very high scale and so she went over to San Francisco and then became principal of Pacific Heights School, so she left.

CE: Oh, I see.

VA: Yes, she left.

CE: And who succeeded her?

VA: Louise Chapin. And she was principal there for quite some time and then Mr. Thomas' wife's niece, Miss Bowler.

CE: Bowler?

VA: Bowler, Merle Bowler, B-O-W-L-E-R. She lives, I think, at Chico. She's married however. And she wasn't in very good health. So many times I took over for her and so when her position was to be vacated she was leaving. Mrs. Jones -- Jones' mother was one of my trustees in those days.

AK: Doctor Jones.

VA: Yes. Doctor Jones' mother, and she was a wonderful person. And she -- I think I was up at Russian River with a friend of mine for a few days and she wrote and said that

she -- that the trustees had met and they wished me to take over the principalship. Oh, that just knocked me over. Oh, no not again. And I refused it and she wrote and said, "You just can't refuse it." She said, "You do everything for the school. You practically run it now." And she said, "Why not get a little bit of money for doing it?"

CE: Why did you hesitate, Valerie? You just didn't want that total --

VA: I didn't want that. You have to teach and be principal. That's a pretty hard thing you see, because I was a teaching principal for many years before I became a supervising principal. Last five years I was a supervising principal.

CE: But in your heart you were really a teacher?

VA: Oh, yes, that's right.

CE: Administration was secondary.

VA: That's right.

CE: But you gave it second thought, I guess.

VA: And so I -- and this friend of mine said to me, she said, "Oh Val don't be a fool," she said, "You'll probably get somebody in there that's unfamiliar with the school and you'll only have to coach him or her anyway." And so she said, "Why don't you -- "

CE: And you get a little more money, give you \$10.00 more a month?

VA: Yes, it was a very nice raise, yes, I was raised to \$125.00.

CE: \$125.00.

VA: But in the meantime I think we had gone up a few bits all along from my \$85.00. But anyway so I telephoned her and I said, "Yes, I would do it," and she was thrilled to pieces. At one time in my eighth grade I had all my trustees' children. I can see them yet. I had the Reeds' girl --

CE: Well just a moment, let's go into that in just a moment.

End, Side A

CE: Would you repeat the names again for us, Valerie?

VA: At one time in the eighth grade I had my trustees' -- practically all of them at one time. I had Charles Jones, whose mother was my trustee. I had my boss, the Superintendent's son, Wade Thomas Jr., he was in my class, and I had Evelyn Reed's and then I had -- there were one or two other. Now let me think if I can -- I remember that but I can remember I put it down in one of my notebooks because it was such --

CE: An unusual thing.

VA: Unusual thing, yes, to have had all of them.

AK: Such nice people.

CE: Of course they brought back home direct reports of --

VA: Oh, did they!

CE: How Miss Ansel was doing.

VA: Oh, well, and sometimes they didn't like what she was doing either. And I remember Mrs. Jones would say when young Charles would come home, "Well how did things go today Charles?" Because Charles was very slow and methodical, a very wonderful character. I taught Emily too, the daughter, and Ottiwell was graduated from our school but he was in the eighth grade. I didn't have him at that -- Well he was in the old school. But Charles would say, "Well the war was on today; the French and the German war was on." Because you see I had that French background and the German and if I was in he thought a cross mood and was very much the disciplinarian, then the war was on, and that's what he'd tell his mother.

CE: Did they teach at that time any foreign languages in the elementary grades as they do today?

VA: No.

CE: No.

VA: I'm just trying to think of -- Why didn't I remember my other trustees? Because Betty Schmidt went to Branson's; she didn't come to our public school.

AK: Did Mabel Seamert, Mabel Jones?

VA: Mabel Jones was teaching also; she was up at the Lansdale; an old friend of mine. Did you interview her?

CE: Yes, just briefly, but we have to do her in depth.

VA: Yes.

CE: Well, tell us, Valerie, what was some of your relations with the other schools? You mentioned Branson's a moment ago. Would you and Miss Branson ever get together on mutual problems or events or affairs?

VA: Oh yes. They were very, very kind to us. Oh, of course, I adored that Miss Branson. She's a remarkable woman. She's still living.

CE: Yes, we saw her last year.

VA: Did you?

CE: We visited her in Carmel.

VA: I think she's wonderful.

CE: Well what would she do for you? What would the school do?

VA: Well, I mean, some of my graduates would go into Branson's School from the eighth grade, you see, and so we had conferences together and I knew some of her faculty very well.

CE: Can you think of some of those names?

VA: Well huh --

CE: Well there was Madame Knowlton.

VA: Oh Madame Knowlton and I were very, very close. And who was that darling little lady that did so much good and she got me to contribute to the Piney Woods School, which I do to this day. Oh what darling little --And then Miss, taught the Latin. What was her name?

CE: Hideman?

VA: Yes, Miss Hideman, I knew her too.

CE: What is the Piney Woods School if I may ask?

VA: It's a remarkable school for colored children down in Piney Woods, Mississippi. And this man, who was the founder, who died just last year, who was way, way in his nineties, and she knew him and knew of his work and she used to --She had many of join to send contributions ever so often.

CE: So the school would continue.

VA: Yes, continue, and it's become a remarkable school. And that darling little Miss - - Oh I can't say her name and I just love her and I used to see her too.

CE: What was the subject she taught? Maybe we can help you.

AK: It wasn't Martha was it?

CE: Do you remember what subject?

VA: Howie?

AK: Howie"

VA: I knew her but she wasn't one of my very close friends but this was a little bird-like woman, she was just wonderful.

CE: Well then you had contact with the Branson's --

VA: And then we had this parochial school come into being you know.

AK: Oh.

VA: The Catholic school.

CE: Oh yes.

VA: And I had very, very fine rapport with those nuns.

CE: What Order is that?

VA: Holy --

CE: Name.

VA: Names. Holy Names, yes. And oh those nuns. I still --

CE: Oh, we've had the pleasure of interviewing Sister Patrick who had been president of Dominican --

VA: Oh, oh do I know Sister Patrick. Oh what a doll.

CE: And I think the contribution these women make is extraordinary.

VA: Oh that Sister Patrick she's somebody else and also Sister Maurice who for nineteen years was Principal of the High School area, Sister Patrick was the college.

CE: The college, yes.

VA: Oh yes, and my girls, some of them, would be eligible and would be accepted to Dominican. They felt that they were well-prepared and so I had very nice contact with -- used to be invited to tea at the convent up at the --

CE: At the Mother House.

VA: The Mother House, yes, and so forth.

CE: Are there any students that you'd care to share with us that have gone through your hands that you are extremely pleased with or happy -- with all of them I suppose.

VA: Well, yes. Howard Brodie, for one, the artist.

CE: Is he a graduate of your school?

VA: Yes, and then he went to Tam, of course. But oh he's a darling and such a wonderful, wonderful man.

CE: Well what was the choice, either go to Tam or to San Rafael for high school?

VA: You had to be especially accepted at Tam because --

CE: At Tam?

VA: No at San Rafael because then the schools were district, were placed into districts and you did not go over the border unless the doctors thought it was better for you.

CE: So the high school for your district was Tam?

VA: Was Tam, yes, exactly. And then after Mrs. Jones -- Charles graduated and she had no more children, she ran for trustee of Tamalpais High School and she made it, she was trustee down there.

AK: Yes, she was.

CE: Well, is this districting still true today to your knowledge, Valerie?

VAL: Yes but we had --

CE: We have Drake High School now.

VA: Yeah, Drake is the one these children go to.

CE: I see.

VA: And also we had what was called a confederated district, which was really in theory only, but that's what it was called. And Mr. Thomas had Fairfax, as I told you, at San Anselmo and Kentfield and then that, some years ago, was broken up and each is -- has his own area, his own district and has his own Superintendent.

CE: Are there any things that you have done over the many years teaching that were considered innovative other than music appreciation? At the time you were able to --

VA: I don't know about it being innovative but --

CE: I think it was at that time --

VA: I mean this next subject I'm going to mention but I taught English grammar and I taught it per se. I had great success in that the youngsters going to high school were much --

CE: Better prepared.

VA: They were prepared to do their Latin and their languages much more easily. That's how I became such a great friend of Miss Ruby Scott, who was a wonderful woman down at Tam; wonderful, just adored her.

CE: Did you ever utilize diagramming of sentences?

VA: That's the thing I did.

CE: That's the way I was taught, and I think there is no substitute. Would you agree, Mrs. Kent?

VA: Yes.

CE: Diagramming the sentence.

AK: Oh yes.

VA: And to this day, I had a girl recently who lives near Disneyland and she wrote and said, "I can't find my grammar book. I wish you would, if you have one, you'd send one." Every so often I get requests for that book because we had a workbook, each one had this, and as the lesson was presented there was a certain rule that was supposed to be observed particularly in that sentence and all, then you wrote your sentence then you wrote the rule and did your diagramming so that it was your reference, you see. They were like little bibles.

CE: And they stayed with you. That information stays with you all your life.

VA: And many of them have these books to this day believe it or not.

CE: Do you have any still in your library, Valerie?

VA: I think I have one here.

CE: We might look a little later, all right.

VA: Let me see if I can find it.

CE: Valerie has found two of these early grammar books and I can see what you mean. They are, first of all, so beautifully annotated. They look as if they used rulers to diagram. Is that true, Valerie?

VA: That's exactly true.

CE: And in the beginning of the composition book, you have basic grammar rules. "A verb shows action or asserts. Some verbs are run, jump, talk, is and was." And then we go ahead and you see the beginnings of --"

VA: Excuse me, may I interrupt?

CE: Yes.

VA: When you talk about verbs, and I think you'll be interested in this, some of these rules I required memorized.

CE: Oh really?

VA: Yes. Some of them we memorized. And for instance, the rule about the verb that never takes an object complement, am, is are, was, were, be, being, been, appear, become, and see never take an object complement. When Jane Crisp, that's Mabel's daughter -- When Jean Crisp was having her first baby, my Doctor Harris, my great friend Mary Harris who unfortunately has gone into the hereafter but was nearly 100 when she did, was the anesthetist. She heard this thing going on and on about am, is, are, and blah, blah and here was Jane, under the anesthetic, saying this am, is, are, was, were, be, being, been, appear, become and see never take an object complement.

CE: Well you know I can remember in German class when I was going to high school this "aus, bei, mit, nach, seit, von zu take the dative, how about you?"

VA: Yes, that's right.

CE: And you'd write, "How about you?" You'd make up little rhymes.

VA: Yes.

CE: And those stick with you.

VA: Yes, that's right. Well, that was one of that kind, exactly.

AK: That's good.

CE: Well this particular grammar book that I was looking at is "Charles Davis," is that correct?

VA: Yes.

CE: Charles Davis. What happened to him?

VA: Well he probably left it and I probably just -- you know he may have said to me --

AK: I wonder where he is now.

VA: I don't know I just haven't the faintest idea.

AK: He used to live on Upper Road, I think. I don't know what became of him either. It would be interesting to know.

VA: Yes, wouldn't it?

AK: Yes.

CE: Well here it shows "Example 17, The cat was in a sound sleep," and see how beautifully that sentence is diagrammed, Mrs. Kent.

AK: Yes, isn't that nice?

CE: Beautiful, beautiful. Valerie, I noticed when we went over to the bookcase to fetch these that you had one of the rare copies of Maude Faye Symington's memoirs *Living in Awe*. How did that come about? How did you know her? Through your music appreciation?

VA: Yes, because she was instituting, as it were, and founding our wonderful Marin Music Chest, you know. And she gathered among, oh to her home or wherever, you were there too, Mrs. Kent.

AK: Yes, I was.

VA: She gathered people from various parts of the county to help her formulate this great idea she had to put it into being. And because of the music appreciation she knew that I would interest the children, which I did. So I took it upon myself to take that area, you know, and we used to let the children pay five cents or a dime, even, to belong and I know my whole school, I had hundreds of them that would bring little nickels and they'd get the little tickets.

CE: Well that's what she wanted, the most music to the most people at the smallest price.

VA: Yes, exactly.

AK: That's right.

VA: And so we became, through that, very good friends and you know the strange thing is this, when I was growing up -- of course my father loved music and he had a fine tenor voice --

CE: Most Germans do.

VA: And he belonged to a mannerchor.

CE: Mannerchor.

VA: And so living near Oakland and living near that famous MacDonald Theater, that had very fine acoustics and many of the good artists in those days who came went there to present --

CE: To perform.

VA: The performance. And whenever Maude Faye came, my father always took me to hear her, believe that or not. And I was just in my young teens and even before I was in my teens, I know. And I would go with my father and sometimes it would even be at night, I can remember he'd go along in the car, they had trolley cars in those days from Alameda to Oakland, and I just loved to hear this woman sing. And it just seemed like a dream come true to think that I could meet her.

CE: Well her repertoire was largely German because she had sung in the Munich Royal Opera for years prior to World War I and then of course with the war situation she had to return to this country. And then interestingly enough the Met didn't want her to sing German; it was verboten.

VA: I know, isn't that funny?

CE: What are your memories of her voice? Was it quite outstanding, as a child?

VA: Oh, as a child I thought it was gorgeous. Probably it wasn't, you know, but I thought it was lovely.

CE: Well the Marin Music Chest is a success because of her; she created it.

VA: Oh yes, oh yes. And I used to enjoy so going down to her home in Kentfield, the Top Hat.

AK: Yeah.

VA: And would go down there for dinner.

CE: You know that house is still there on Faye Lane.

VA: Yes, thank goodness.

CE: Off of Laurel Grove.

VA: I think that they sold it, didn't they?

CE: Yes.

AK: The old house is gone though.

CE: No, but her house, the one she built --

VA: Top Hat.

CE: Top Hat is there.

VA: And then it was so wonderful to be with her then. You know she might have been a singer but she certainly was an actress.

AK: Oh yes.

VA: And that I loved and she'd tell me all kinds of things.

CE: Well I think we are indeed fortunate to her nephew Marshall Dill Jr. who obviously adored her --

VA: Yes.

CE: Because he edited and published her memoirs.

VA: Now he still teaches, doesn't he?

CE: He's the Professor of European History at Dominican and he is the author of many books.

VA: I know that.

CE: *Paris in Time, History of Modern German*

VA: He must think I am just the crudest kind of person because, as I said, I haven't written. The book was left for me by him to the Skewes Coxes, his friends, who moved recently to San Rafael Avenue.

VA: And they said, "Don't bother writing him because we're having him in for cocktails and we're having you and then you two can have a nice talk" and so on, and it's never come about. And then I've tried to reach him at his home in San Francisco many times but I apparently just don't reach him at the right time.

CE: Well we'll have to see that you get together.

VA: Oh I must see him, yes.

CE: We gave a reception in May for all the people we had interviewed, approximately 100 people.

VA: Yes, and was he there?

CE: And he came.

VA: Oh sure.

CE: And he came mainly -- He said he'd never seen Civic Center since it had been built and he was a little embarrassed about it and he wanted also to see the California Room. So he and Virginia Borland, the County Librarian, are fellow students at Stanford. They were in the same class.

VA: Oh, how interesting.

CE: So that was a very nice reunion.

VA: Yes. Well I haven't seen him since he was a young boy up at Mrs. Symington's you know.

CE: Well Mrs. Kent, how about you? Aren't there some things you'd like to discuss with Valerie before we conclude our visit?

AK: Because I've known you so many, many years but I never dreamed that you were as fine in so many ways as you are, have given to so many, many children.

VA: Thank you.

AK: This really is something all San Anselmo and Marin should know about.

CE: Well, they'll know about it now in a tangible form.

AK: It really is.

CE: Well I think it's heart warming. I've lived with my sister all my life who's been a teacher and it does my heart good to see the cards and letters come from all over the world, and she's taught hundreds of them.

VA: That's right.

CE: And you have perhaps thousands as you look back

VA: Yes.

CE: Forty-six years.

VA: Yes.

AK: Yes, it's really, really wonderful.

CE: Weren't your parents proud of you when you stayed here and you came here on your own and you left the nest and --

VA: I don't know if I can say that because you know my mother was born in San Francisco but I think people of European background are inwardly sentimental, of course about much, but I don't think they're very articulate when it comes to -- I can't ever remember my mother --

CA: Saying so.

VA: You know saying, "Oh I think this is wonderful that you --"

AK: Oh well that didn't make her any less proud of you.

VA: Oh no I'm sure of that. That's why I say, not for just telling you, they just kind of expect that you know the right thing to do and you do it.

AK: But they must have been just a little bit sorry that you didn't want to come to Alameda.

VA: Oh I'm sure, yes.

CE: What was your father's vocation?

VA: He had a meat market, a big one like the Frank Keeney market.

CE: Oh gosh, wonderful.

VA: In Alameda. A very fine -- He had all the fine --

CE: Trade.

VA: Oh yes, very, very fine. It was there for years, you know. That's a picture of him when he was a young man.

AK: Great.

CE: Well, I certainly want to thank you, Valerie, for being so generous with your time today. I didn't mean to exhaust you by this long performance but you're very sweet to share with us these reminiscences.

VA: I feel I've been so lucky.

CE: Don't you?

VA: I just feel I've been so lucky.

CE: You know it's rare, your whole manner is indicative that you have fulfilled what you have wanted to do in life. You've done what you've wanted to do. Not many people can say that.

VA: I guess you're right.

CE: And look at you've been fortunate to stay in this lovely setting.

VA: And of course the friendships I've made through my teaching, that's something, oh, money couldn't buy. Some of these people that I've had in my life for so many years. For instance when I was the supervising principal for the last five years, I was allowed to have a secretary because really -- you know --

CE: The paper work.

VA: The paper work. Because now they'd done away with a good deal of their -- the teachers I don't think even keep their registers any more and I think that's too bad because it made you know just where you stood with the children and you watched their attendance and so forth. I mean it has a bearing on a child --

CE: Oh, our attic is full of my sister's twenty-five year books.

VA: I bet.

CE: And I said, why don't we do something? Oh they represent my whole life.

VA: Well, of course.

CE: And she can pick any of them up and immediately that youngster comes to life.

VA: Oh, is that so? Yes. And so I had two or three secretaries during my years of having them. Wonderful little women as a whole but the last one was a prize indeed. Her name is Mary Hewitt and her husband, Ed Hewitt, is connected with the Viacom in a way and he deals in selling packaged movies to various stations after they have been -- from television and so forth. And he belongs to the Bohemian Club and is an outstanding singer himself and quite an actor. And they have just been so wonderful to me and one reason I retired the year I did, the trustees asked me to stay another year but he wanted her to retire because he just felt that she had done her part and so we both did the retiring together. But they are ever in my life and they just do the loveliest things for me and I go places with them and so forth and share with them and it's just very, very wonderful.

AK: Oh that's unusually wonderful.

CE: Do you remember your retirement day, Valerie?

VA: Oh do I. That was the most wonderful thing.

CE: Would you describe it for us?

VA: That was seventeen years ago, out at Bermuda Palms. And Ada Fusselman was alive then and this group, this committee, did a "This is Your Life" on me.

It was simply --

CE: All these people came in from the wings and --

VA: My dear, they came from far and near, that was one of the greatest things. There never was a teacher that had a finer send off than I had. Oh gracious sakes. I think during the day, because the P.T.A. had a reception first and they served cookies and punch and so forth, but they came in, they flew in, they came from all areas but during the day there were over 600 people that attended that event.

CE: Good heavens, what a tribute.

VA: Then we had dinner, those who wanted to stay. Oh it was wonderful, just wonderful. And Aunt Let was living then and my Doctor Harris was living then and they were there on that stage and my whole family was in on it.

CE: Was it a surprise?

VA: Surprise, definitely, to me. They presented me with a wonderful scroll which was in the form of a diploma and a check for \$1400.00.

AK: Isn't that wonderful?

VA: Just think of it. And I have the book with everybody's name and I have all the telegrams and all the cards and messages and I've heard from people I haven't heard from for ages.

AK: That's wonderful.

VA: And the people from Tomales came; they were represented, too. It was just something, just something.

CE: I don't think anybody retiring today would get such a tribute because they don't stay with things as long, they don't give of themselves as unselfishly as you have. It's an extraordinary career. Now, in closing Valerie, I want you to share with us. You obviously were on the right track in education. You got results from your students. What's happened, other than as you said originally a little too much permissiveness in the

attitude of the teachers; they have to publish or perish. What can we do to bring education around?

VA: It has to come through the parents.

CE: It has to come through the parents.

VA: Oh, yes.

CE: They, through their PTA and the trustees, must insist upon the higher standards.

VA: That's the idea exactly.

CE: There are no short cuts.

VA: Oh, no short cuts, no. And of course, I do believe that the institutions of learning, I mean the ones who prepare teachers for this career, have got to change some of their ideas. They've been far too radical, far too radical. And after all --

CE: Why can't they admit they've made a mistake?

VA: Oh they know.

CE: You know much of it was experimental. It didn't work. Just say, "All right it didn't work. Let's go back to the basic things."

VA: Of course. Just the same as this new math that emanated from the college area, of course, and it certainly has not worked in many places and they have actually thrown it out.

CE: Well we certainly want to thank you for allowing us to come today.

VA: Well, I hope I can see you again.

CE: It's done us a world of good and I feel inspired by meeting you today.

VA: Thank you.

CE: We will see you soon.

VA: Do you live in Marin County?

CE: Yes, I do. And auf wiedersehen. Erstreckt, zu, lehr ich kennen, zu, lehr.

VA: Auf wiedersehen and thank you so much, very nice.