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INTERVIEW WITH VERA SCHULTZ
by Carla Ehat
March 28, 1983

INTERVIEWEE: Vera Schultz (VS)
INTERVIEWER: Carla Ehat (C.E.)
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CE: Today is Monday, March the 28th, 1983. And continuing the Oral History program for the Anne Thompson Kent California Room, this is Carla Ehat and I am at the residence of Mrs. Jordan Martinelli. We are going to have the pleasure this afternoon of talking with an extraordinarily competent woman, Vera Lucille Schultz. And many of you may know her. Most of us know Vera Schultz as the person whose vision, tenacity and courage are chiefly responsible for the Frank Lloyd Wright Civic Center and for the advance of county government in Marin from the disarray of cracker barrel politics to democratic government and systematic public administration. Vera Schultz has well earned the title of Marin's First Lady. And her background in the League of Women Voters and her brilliant leadership qualities combine to make her political career one of outstanding public service as Mill Valley's first City Councilwoman and later the first woman to serve on the Marin County Board of Supervisors. These are just a few of her many accomplishments but I want to get into talking with her. It certainly is a pleasure to have you here today, Vera.

VS: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

CE: I think it's fascinating that you were born on a cattle ranch named Dutch Flat in Nevada, August the 31st, 1902, and somehow have arrived and benefited our wonderful

Marin County. Tell us how that came about. I understand you attended the University of Nevada.

VS: Yes, I did and also the University of California at Berkeley.

CE: Is it true you met your future husband there?

VS: No, I met my future husband in Reno.

CE: Oh, in Reno? Over the gaming tables?

VS: No, on the corner of Second and Virginia. We were on our way to a dance. He was with a sorority sister and I was with a fraternity brother of his and we met there.

CE: Is the University of Nevada one of the leading schools of mining in the United States?

VS: Yes. It was primarily a mining university. That was its chief emphasis, was a school of mines. It was endowed by Mackay, The Mackay School of Mines.

CE: Oh, part of the Comstock story.

VS: Yes.

CE: I had the pleasure once of meeting and knowing Bertha Neemeyer who was the first woman graduate of the University of Nevada. Did you ever know her?

VS: No, I didn't, I would have liked to.

CE: What did you hope to acquire at the University of Nevada? What was your major? English?

VS: Yes, my major was English. Although, while I was there the University opened its first class in journalism. And there were twenty-four of us who signed up for that first class in journalism and thereby I -- My life took quite a turn because I became very much interested in newspaper writing. And in fact, went down to Oakland in the summer while I was still a student there and got a summer job on the *Oakland Post Inquirer*.

CE: That was a Hearst paper wasn't it?

VS: That was a Hearst paper, yes. Then after I was graduated in 1924 from the University of Nevada, I won a teaching fellowship to Berkeley in English in the English Department. And I worked two years for a masters degree in English but all the while I was keeping up my association with Hearst newspaper there and I went to work there at the conclusion of the two years, working for my masters. I went to work for the paper again as the apostolic successor of Elsie Robinson who had been a writer on the *Oakland Tribune*.

But she also had started a Saturday children's page for the *Inquirer* called "Aunt Elsie." And so, I became "Aunt Elsie" but also I had a daily column on women's affairs and women's club activities. Then I did general reporting besides. So, you see, that first class at the University of Nevada led me directly into a journalistic career.

CE: And then that ultimately led you to California.

VS: Led me to California and to Mill Valley and to Marin.

CE: Alright Vera, then you come to Marin and you and your husband -- What, you just wanted a weekend place or what?

VS: We had been invited to a party in Mill Valley. It was in the spring and the forget-me-nots and wild iris and the fruit trees were in blossom and it was like paradise.

CE: You were hooked.

VS: Yes, I was. And I said to my husband when we went back to Berkeley that night, "Why don't we rent some little place in Mill Valley and just move over for the summer?" Because things always got very dull on the newspaper in the summer because all activities closed, PTAs closed and all the women's clubs closed and so on, so it was very dull. And I said I'll take a leave from the paper and you can commute just as easily from that side of the bay as from Berkeley. And he agreed he could. So, we went up to Molino Avenue. There's a lane there.

CE: That comes off Miller doesn't it?

VS: No, it's above Ethel Avenue. It's a level above; it's Molino. But there's a lane off of it called Hueter Lane and there was a little cottage there. A tiny little place that was for rent and we rented it and went back to Berkeley and closed our modern apartment over there, Casa de Manana and --

CE: Where was that?

VS: On Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley. And then we packed up our things to come to Mill Valley. And all that I brought was copy paper, because I intended to write that summer. All of us on the newspaper had been dabbling in short stories and submitting them and I had submitted one to *Harper's* magazine and had gotten back a letter along with a rejection slip in which the editor said, "I would like to see something else you've done." So, I had this great idea of writing, of spending the summer writing, and all I brought with us to Mill Valley was boxes of copy paper and my typewriter and our bedding and a few pots and pans and that was it. Well, when we got to Mill Valley, to go and take possession of this little cottage that we had rented, it was occupied.

CE: What? Mix up in the realtor or what?

VS: No, no, it had been a change in family needs. The people who had rented it to us had a daughter who had been in a sanitarium and she was released and could come home. And they didn't have room for her in their home and they wanted her in this cottage. So, because we had disconnected our telephone, you see, having gotten ready to move, they hadn't been able to reach us and notify us. So, we arrive and no place to sleep. And we -- There was no hotel in Mill Valley.

CE: What year was this again?

VS: This was 1928, yes, in the spring of 1928. So, we cruised around and as it began to grow dusk, we found a lot on Ethel Avenue that had a "for sale" sign on it and we made our bed on that lot. And it was so dark that we couldn't see very well and my husband made it on top of a mole and this thing--

CE: You literally camped that night.

VS: Yes, we camped out on that lot. And the mole kept me awake. The activity underneath was very distracting. So, long before daylight I was awake and saw the sun come up on this lot through and the oak trees and the madrones and the toyon. And I said to my husband, "As soon as we can, let's go and see the people who own the lot," whose names were on that sign.

CE: Were there neighbors nearby?

VS: No, there were no nearby neighbors.

CE: Just lots?

VS: This was just -- It was a lot of open land. And so we did that. When Ray finally wakened up, we went down to the old Swiss chalet-type station that was in Mill Valley at that time and cleaned up and we went to the bakery across the street and had some breakfast and then we called this number. And this was about 10 a.m. Mind you we had no place to stay; we had to do something that day. So, the lady said well come on out and we'll talk about it.

CE: Was it a private individual?

VS: It was a private individual on Corte Madera Avenue. And it turned out that she was a reporter on the *Chronicle* in San Francisco and we immediately had a --

CE: Rapport?

VS: Yes, so I told her that I was a refuge from the *Post Inquirer* and so she -- We really had a --

CE: You really hit it off.

VS: Yes, we had a delightful visit and we ended by paying her for the lot right then and there. And this is going to make everybody in Marin cry: two hundred and fifty dollars for a piece of property in Marin County.

GM: Two hundred and fifty.

CE: How big a piece of land was it?

VS: Well it really was a little blighted because it was a forty foot frontage at which there was a culvert which made it impossible for you to build a garage for your house, you see, because of the narrow frontage. But it fanned out to a very wide lot in the back. So half way up the lot we made a building site and we built Holly bush house there.

CE: Holly bush. So it was the high side of the road?

VS: Yes, it was the uphill side of the road. And to telescope a lot of time we subsequently bought four lots that were behind the Ethel Avenue lot and we divided them into three lots because even then we were the kind of conservationists who didn't like to see steep land cut into too small sites because it's not good. So we subdivided it into three and we built three subsequent houses up there.

CE: What an adventure. Did you get involved in the actual construction of this little house?

VS: Yes.

CE: Tell us a little bit.

VS: I'll tell you how it was. You see, we bought the lots, so then we returned to Berkeley.

CE: At least you knew you had something.

VS: We knew we had something and we thought we could build -- We were so optimistic we thought we could build a place in two weeks. And we went back to Berkeley and went to see Nick Kleinshoorel, who was a Dutch contractor and builder in Berkeley. And Ray and I had owned a house in Berkeley, which we had sold before we moved into Casa de Manana. And out in that area of Cragmont Avenue there were --

CE: I know it well.

VS: Nick had built a number of houses. And one day when we'd gone around to look at the houses, Nick was sitting in one hoping there would be a buyer come along, and we talked to him and liked his ideas about construction and so on, liked him. So, we sought out Nick. And he said, "Well, if you two will help me, we will build your one room, weekend cabin." That was our intention. And we came back and found a little house on Lovell Avenue and Nick came and lived in the woodshed.

CE: Of that house?

VS: Of that house. And every night around the table after dinner we revised the plans for our one room house and it ended as a five-room house. But it was a dollhouse, it really was.

CE: Wasn't that one of the most gratifying periods of your life?

VS: It was the most gratifying because I had never done anything in the way of --

CE: You weren't a lady carpenter?

VS: No, I wasn't a lady carpenter but I liked it. I did all the sub-flooring, all by myself, all the sub-flooring in that house. And Ray, bless him, dug out all the rock. There was an awful lot of rock and we used the rock in our construction process. We built a great big corner fireplace out of the rocks that came out of that site. It's still there.

CE: But you don't live there now?

VS: No, we sold it many years ago.

CE: Well, it took you that summer to build it, I presume?

VS: Well, it did, it took more than that. I don't know whether we ever really finished the last thing.

CE: When did you make the move, then? When it was sort of near completion?

VS: Well, you see at the end of my two months leave the house was not finished.

CE: And you had to make a decision?

VS: And I had to make a hard decision: go back to my job, which I loved, or finish this house. And so I said, "We have to finish the house; that's permanent." So, I notified my paper and I said I will have to extend my leave. And they said, "We can't do it." You know, the fall, everything was opening up, we have to have --

CE: Need somebody in that job.

VS: Yes. So I kissed my job goodbye.

CE: Just think how that turned your life around, though.

VS: Yes, it did.

CE: How that turned your life around. Brought you to Marin.

VS: That whole series you see of happenstance.

CE: Where was your husband's office? Was it in San Francisco, your husband's office?

VS: Where he was working?

CE: Yes.

VS: Yes

CE: So it made no difference if he commuted from the East Bay or Marin.

VS: No. It was in San Francisco down in the Financial District. He worked for a firm called the Retail Credit Corporation. And then later he established his own insurance business in Marin.

CE: Did you have children?

VS: One, but belatedly.

CE: And what is her name?

VS: Her name is Joyce Hestor and she lives in Texas now.

CE: She's married?

VS: Yes.

CE: Are you a grandmother?

VS: I'm a great-grandmother.

CE: Oh, my goodness. All right. Now you're living in the house there on Ethel Avenue. And what gets you involved in doing some of these early jobs I hear that you tackled. There was some involvement with a private elementary school, wasn't there?

VS: Yes, there was. And what got me involved, as soon as our house was habitable and we had moved in I looked around for something to do, an activity. And in the house next to the property that we had built upon was a family named Brown. And Mrs. Brown was the school nurse down at Old Mill School and she said to me, "You should go down and see the superintendent because he needs some help in the office." And she said, "I think you could find work there." So, I had teaching credentials, you see.

CE: Oh, you did!

VS: Oh yes, I had teaching credential.

CE: At Cal, you got those at University of California?

VS: At the University of Nevada, secondary teaching credentials.

CE: So you were sort of unfulfilled then, I mean you had been trained.

VS: I had been trained to teach.

CE: And you hadn't done yet.

VS: And I had defected into journalism. So, I went down to see the superintendent and went to work for him. And this was part of my early orientation in the County of Marin. At that time, the Mill Valley School District and the Sausalito School District shared a single superintendent. They couldn't either one afford a full time one singly, so they shared and his name was A.W. Ray. And so two days a week I went to Sausalito and worked there and then the other three days I worked in Mill Valley.

CE: What were your responsibilities?

VS: Well, I was his secretary and I took care of the books, the bookkeeping. I took the minutes of the school trustees and then I started with the students, *The Old Mill Wheel*, a little student newspaper. And this really pertains because the PTA was interested in the *Old Mill Wheel*. The children were very much interested and we had a successful little school newspaper, *The Old Mill Wheel*. And so the PTA came to me and asked me if I would go down to the Mill Valley City Council on their behalf and urge that they put water in a wading pool that the American Legion had built for the children of Mill Valley in Old Mill Park. And somehow the city government had never gotten around to putting any water in it.

CE: But at that early year it was a park?

VS: Oh, yes, it was a park. When we came it was a park.

CE: Why hadn't they done it? You wanted to find out why?

VS: Well, yes, I did. I went down to the City Council and asked them to put water in the wading pool and it didn't happen. It didn't happen. It didn't happen.

CE: You were wondering why?

VS: Yes. Any why? Why? So, the League of Women Voters, to which I had joined immediately when I found one in Marin, because I remembered how --

CE: Was there a branch that went back far, in the twenties, of the League of Women Voters in the County?

VS: They were just getting organized, down at the Outdoor Art Club. And they were having a series of forums on public affairs. So Iris Engeles and Fern Andrews were among the founders, Cora Bjornstrom of the-- It was then the Marin County League of Women Voters. Later it dispersed into branches and now it has coalesced again into the Marin County League of Women Voters. So, that's telescoping quite a bit of history. But anyhow --

CE: That's interesting though and I think it's more effective as a countywide force.

VS: Yes, so do I. The League of Women Voters started a "Know Your Town" study group. A "Know Your Town" study group to find out why it took so long to get a decision of the City Council, which was yes, by all means, put water in that pool.

CE: Or, no, we can't do it for whatever reasons.

VS: They said we will but it didn't happen. And it didn't happen because, you see, Mill Valley had five City Councilmen all of whom were busy men, each of whom was involved in his own business. And there was no city manager. There was a city clerk who was also the health officer, but it wasn't his job to go and put water in the pool. And it certainly wasn't the City Treasurer's job to go and put water in the pool.

CE: Were these volunteer jobs to be a member of the City Council?

VS: No, no they were all elected.

CE: They meet once a month?

VS: No, no, they met every week.

CE: Were there other things more pressing on the agenda that they didn't take action?

VS: Well, you see, it wasn't anybody's responsibility. They were policy makers. They were not the ones who went out and did it.

CE: This is what you discovered and you didn't like it.

VS: This is what I discovered and I said we must, we must do something about this.

CE: So, I gather you were somewhat the initiative force behind this effort to adopt a different form of government.

VS: Yes, but first of all we found out about our city government. Iris Engeles and I started this course at the Outdoor Art Club in the library called "Know Your Town." Now this is a function of the League of Women Voters. See, the women were still learning to be citizens and having only relatively recently gotten the right to vote. So, we embarked on the "Know Your Town" study and there were about forty women who came down to

the Outdoor Art Club to learn about it. And we brought in each member of the city council to address us and tell us his perspectives on city government and city problems, etc. We had the clerk come; we had the treasurer; we had every city employee come in and tell us their functions and then we got their budget and we --

CE: I think that's a wonderful idea.

VS: And we compiled it into a little publication called "Your City and Its Government." And we thought we could sell it. So we tried for five cents a copy. Of course it was just a mimeograph publication but it was full of honest information. And so when we couldn't sell it we gave it away. And the outcome of that effort, of the "Know Your Town," was that the women in that study group decided unanimously to ask the city council to call for the election of a board of freeholders, because we found out that if you don't like the kind of government you have, the law provides a way for you to change it. And it is by electing a board of freeholders of fifteen people and they have a year in which to study the local government and then they make a recommendation. They can write a charter and you can have your own charter form of government, or you can elect to stay under the Municipal Corporations Act, which the Legislature passed, and have America's contribution to the science of government, council manager government. And that was our goal. We wanted to see Mill Valley move into modern government and have the policy makers have somebody to carry out the policy they set. And so that's what happened next in Mill Valley was that there was a --

CE: That was a daring venture, wasn't it? How was it received?

VS: It was passed by the voters. They voted in an ordinance. You see the freeholders --

CE: I don't understand the term "freeholders." Could you explain a little bit?

VS: Yes. The word "freeholder" comes to us from ancient England where originally the property was all owned by royalty and anyone who worked on the land was a peasant and had no rights. So they established a method by which men could own property and they were called "freeholders" because they were not slaves.

CE: And this term has carried over to this country.

VS: The term has carried over to the United States, I guess in every county of our more than three thousand counties. We still have the term freeholder.

GM: Is it ever used anywhere?

VS: Yes it's got to be used if you are going to change your form of government. You have to elect a board of freeholders. And we did it here in Marin County when we elected a board of freeholders to write a charter for the County of Marin. And they did. And it was hailed by political scientists all over the country as one of the best county charters that had ever been produced. But it did not meet the approval of the voters and it was

rejected. And so we still are what's still called a "general law county." We still operate under the laws made by the legislature to govern the county.

CE: See, I never knew that, fascinating.

GE: I didn't, either.

CE: Was this publicized in the newspaper, this action that you were going to take, the citizens of Mill Valley? How did you publicize? How did you get the word around?

VS: Oh, there was a *Mill Valley Record* at that time. There was a weekly newspaper and the word went out in the newspaper and then the election was set. And so it seemed appropriate to me, having worked more than a year on that ordinance that we wanted to have voted on, to also be a candidate, to be a freeholder.

CE: You were.

VS: And so I was. There were many candidates.

CE: Equally men and women?

VS: No.

Tape 1, Side B

CE: Well, you three gals and the men then, what was the result of this effort upon the freeholders?

VS: The result of a year's study by the freeholders was that we presented to the city council an ordinance proposing the creation of council-manager government for Mill Valley by an ordinance voted upon by the people which gave it permanence and stability. And the city council acceded to this request by the freeholders. There was an election and then the city council reached out to fill the position. And they brought to Mill Valley a young man from Ludlow, Vermont who thought he was coming to a mill town.

CE: Oh! Mill Valley?

VS: Yes. The first -- The city council that had the selection of the first manager was thinking in terms of how badly our streets needed an engineer and they looked for an engineer and they got an engineer. And those of us who had spent a year studying county and city administration were disappointed because the benefits that we had promised the voters, they did not flow and so after about two years, two of us who had been freeholders, that was Don Sias and I, both threw our hats in the ring to be elected to the city council because we wanted to make the system work.

CE: And it wouldn't have, had it continued under that leadership?

VS: They were not using their city manager as a manager. They were using him as an office boy. Someone that they told to do this and to do that instead of saying here's our problem what do you recommend.

CE: Well it was an awkward position for the man to be in, then, too, wasn't it?

VS: Yes, it was.

CE: His hands were tied.

VS: It was frustrating for him and at that time Mill Valley was having some really serious problems of sewer disposal.

CE: What year are we about, thirty?

VS: We're in the year 1946.

CE: 1946. After the war.

VS: And the voters of Southern Marin had set up a Southern Marin Sanitation District to solve the problems of sanitary disposal for all the communities around Richardson Bay. And here was this city manager of Mill Valley who really had something to contribute if they'd given him a chance, but they weren't asking him.

CE: Was that through ignorance or political power or both?

VS: I think it was partly through a combination of conditions. Number one, the mayor of Mill Valley was himself an engineer.

CE: So his interest lay in that direction?

VS: Yes. And he got into a conflict with the engineer who had been hired by Southern Marin Sanitation District.

CE: To solve the problem?

VS: To solve the problem of sanitary disposal. And here's where again we get into the fact that the legislature has set up procedures by which voters can approach solutions to their problems. The legislature has given them the machinery and then when they try to use it, personality conflicts get into play. And in this case the conflict that developed between Charles Sloan of Mill Valley and Harry N. Jenks, the engineer of the Sanitation District brought things to a kind of impasse. And at that time, the law said that there were three people who ran the Sanitation District affairs. One had to be the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors. Now in that case, the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors was T. Fred Bagshaw who had been a mayor of Mill Valley and a City Councilman.

CE: And knew the terrain and everything and the problems.

VS: And knew the terrain and the people and everything. And then it also involved the Mayor of Sausalito and --

CE: The same sanitary district.

VS: And the Mayor of Mill Valley. So, here you had three elected individuals who by chance, you see, are involved in this setup and when it got into trouble, then the citizenry unfortunately reversed themselves and ended the district.

CE: They did?

VS: Yes. But here is the tragedy that came from that circumstance. The voters had had the wisdom to look at the sanitation problem regionally and they had created a regional body to solve it. And that was the thing that should have been done. And Harry Jenks who was the engineer for the Sanitation District had said, "We should take all of the sewage from Southern Marin, that would be Tiburon, Belvedere, Strawberry, which didn't exist at the time, Mill Valley, Sausalito, Marin City, which was also embryonic. It should all go out through Tennessee Valley to deep water, to the ocean." Now instead you have all these little sanitary districts rimming the bay and each one having horrendous expenses.

CE: It's strange to me, and I've only lived in the county thirty years, to observe those people that have limited vision. Now you, through your intelligence, you're perceptive, you seem to have the long view on things. And that must be very frustrating to try to be effectual in an area where people don't feel similarly about things. And you can only push and encourage and cajole so long and then you've just got to let them do what they will.

VS: Well, that's almost what happened over our beautiful Civic Center you know.

CE: We'll get to that. Well, anyway, you decide then you're going to run for the city council and you did, and you won.

VS: This will interest you. By that time -- You heard how I happened to come to Mill Valley and stay?

CE: Yes.

VS: By that time I had lived in Mill Valley for thirteen years and yet I was still thought of as a newcomer. And there were people who said I don't think it will do you any good to run for the city council because you're too new, you're too new in the city. But my experience on the Board of Freeholders and the League of Women Voters was such that I felt --

CE: You could make a contribution.

VS: Make a contribution, so I ran. What I did my first -- My first experience in politics other than the freeholder thing was I sat down and wrote a letter to the voters and I told them why I was a candidate. I told them about my experience on the freeholders, what we had discovered about our town, what its needs were, what our problems were and what I felt I could contribute towards solving those problems.

CE: How did you disseminate that wonderful letter? Fliers?

VS: I mailed it. Postage was cheap in those days.

CE: Mailed it to every registered voter or every property holder?

VS: Well, I mailed it to every registered voter in Mill Valley, but there were many fewer of them than there are now.

CE: What, are you talking about three hundred?

VS: Oh, no, we're talking about several thousand.

CE: I don't know. Ok.

VS: But at that time you could send two cents worth of mail to a great many people.

CE: That was a very perceptive thing for you to do.

VS: One of our problems in Mill Valley at that time was what was going to happen to the railroad, you see, that ran down the center of our little town.

CE: What was the response to that letter?

VS: Well, the response showed at the polls, because I won in every precinct and I got eighty six percent of all votes cast. Even though they'd never had a woman, you see, even though they'd never had a woman before.

CE: Well, you seem to have the ability to clarify issues, Vera. You seem to be able to get through all the intricacies of legislative language that the lay person isn't familiar with and get to the core of the thing.

VS: You know what I think did that for me?

CE: What?

VS: It was the two things I learned in college. One of them, as a reporter, was to get the kernel. Get the facts and get them succinctly. And then of course the other was the use of English. That's what college did for me.

CE: See? That's what college did for you. All right, so you now are on the town council.

VS: So now I'm on the town council.

CE: The only woman.

VS: The only woman.

CE: Were you greeted fairly cordially by your peers or would you rather not say?

VS: Well the first thing that happened was the city council members had decided to change the rules about who should be mayor because under the existing tradition the person who got the highest votes got to be mayor.

CE: And you got the highest votes?

VS: And I got the highest vote but they couldn't go that far.

CE: So what did they do, change the rules before you were there?

VS: They changed the rules before the first meeting of the Board. They'd already.

CE: How could they possibly, how could they possibly say -- What did they change the tenure? You had to be in office for so many years?

VS: No, they just decided among themselves that they would have a hold-over member of the Board would be the mayor, not a brand new member.

CE: Is that still true, do you think?

VS: Yes, they -- Well, there have been a number of policy changes. For instance, when Jean Barnard was on the Board, there was some difficulty about her being mayor. And they had arrived at some rotation type of tenure so that each member of the city council was a member for one year and everybody got a crack at it. But that was not the way it was done when I was elected. Under the structure of government under which we operated, the Board, all of whom are elected, merely select one of their members to be the chairman or the mayor. It's just an internal thing that happened. So one of the first challenges to me was, what do you do about this? They cheated you out of what was rightfully yours. Are you going to make a big fuss about it or what are you going to do?

CE: You didn't make a fuss.

VS: No, I didn't. I felt then that what I did then was going to set a tone for what other women would do in public office. Are we going to cry, are we going to --

CE: Complain.

VS: Yes. Are we going to throw tantrums? And that sort of --

CE: Well that's where your wisdom comes through--

VS: So, I very deliberately chose to be a lady and to be nice and to not make a fuss. And took my place on the Board and went to work on the problems that confronted Mill Valley and --

CE: And ultimately won them all over I can --

VS: I had four marvelous years on the City Council of Mill Valley.

CE: It is my understanding that after your years on the Mill Valley City Council you ran for the State Assembly. What reason provoked that? What did you want to do?

VS: I had gone to the State Legislature with Fern Andrews as the advocate for the California League of Women Voters. And we had visited Sacramento and gone to every session of the Legislature. And our job up there was to represent the public interest on bills of concern to the League of Women Voters. They every year selected certain legislative directions and wanted to influence them. So Fern and I were I believe the first resident lobbyist. We call them that; that's what everyone else called them, but we called ourselves advocates for the League of Women Voters. We lived there and our job was to see every one of those one hundred and twenty legislators on each of these bills that were --

CE: Personally? Meeting with them?

VS: Yes, personally, to make sure they understood the legislation and to make sure of the position of the League of Women Voters on that legislation to the effect of lobbying on the legislation. This was the hey day of Artie Samish.

CE: And that's what that dear Mrs. Baker worked so hard for.

VS: Yes.

CE: She'd go up there and lobby for the removal of signs on the California highways.

VS: Yes, and we all owe her a debt of thanks. Well, at any rate, I became so sickened by the corrosive effect of the third house, the lobbies, on legislation that that's what made me become a candidate for the assembly. I felt that --

CE: You had to do something.

VS: Someone had to tell the voters what was going on, how our government was being corroded by selfish interests.

CE: And it's going on today at the national level to extremes that are staggering.

VS: It still is. It still is. Yes, it is.

CE: And you weren't particularly interested in political life.

VS: No, no.

CE: I ascertain, but you felt --

VS: I had to.

CE: Somebody had to do it; nobody else wanted to step forward.

VS: I was really an idealist and that came from the time that Aurelia Henry Reinhardt came to Reno when I was a senior at Reno High School and told us the importance of what was about to happen, namely, that women were going to get the vote after all those years.

CE: She came up from Mills College?

VS: Yes.

CE: And told you ladies that.

VS: Told the senior class. She was the speaker. And I was very much impressed with her as a person. She was tall and regal and had that gorgeous braid of hair around her head and she was really, of course, recruiting students for Mills. But she inspired me with telling us how significant it was that we were coming into our maturity at a time when victory finally was ahead for this effort to give women the vote. Now we didn't have it yet. She was there in the spring; it didn't come until August. But believe me the date of August 20th.

CE: 1918?

VS: Let's see 19-- Yes, it was 1918.

CE: Because I know it was the year I was born.

VS: 1918 was significant because that was the end, the victorious end, of the suffrage effort to get votes for women. And so I started as a freshman at the University of Nevada just filled with the idealism. Here we got the vote and we're going to make it clean. We're going to clean up government.

CE: Expecting it was all going to take place in one year, perhaps?

VS: That's what they threatened, you know.

CE: Well, that was -- I suppose a politician would call you extremely naïve.

VS: Oh, unquestionably.

CE: You were probably called that many times throughout your political career.

VS: Many times, very naïve, especially to run against a tenured incumbent for the assembly; that was naïve.

CE: And who was your opponent?

VS: Richard McCollister. Richard McCollister had been a member of the Board of Freeholders with me and we rode back and forth to Sacramento from Mill Valley. He was very nice. He'd come up and pick me up and all the way to Sacramento we'd discuss legislation. But, the thing that was so disappointing to me was our legislator was one of --

CE: Cronies--

VS: Yes. And I --

CE: That was disillusionment?

VS: Well, it was, yes. And here --

CE: Why did he defeat you, do you think? This man.

VS: McCollister? Well, he -- I'm going to tell you why I think he defeated me. I was, I realized, jumping in where angels fear to tread because I'm not basically a politician.

CE: I know. You're very open and vulnerable, too.

VS: I'm a very practical, practically naïve idealist. I want to do something for my city; I want to do something constructive for my county and for my state.

CE: And if you're motivated that way, it's one direction only for you.

VS: That's right.

CE: You don't bend, you don't give, you don't.

VS: And you're not afraid.

CE: Or beholden to anybody.

VS: Because your motives are right. Your motives are to do something constructive for your country and so --

CE: That gives you strength. It gives you your inner strength and courage to do it.

VS: It really does. And so I felt that somebody -- You see, the incumbent assemblyman had been shown to have accepted bribes and this had been spread all over the newspapers and that sort of thing. And at that time politics in the state of California was very much in the hands of lobbyists because of what we called cross-filing, which was a device that made the two parties, the Republican and the Democratic party impotent. The two party system in California was appalling and it was the lobbyists who financed --

CE: Called the shots.

VS: Yes. And so when I decided to be a crusader I went on to the -- I had never been a partisan before that. I had been a non-partisan League of Women Voters. But in order to be a candidate for assembly I had to --

CE: Have a party affiliation.

VS: Get the nomination of either the Democratic or the Republican central committee.

CE: Were you a little in doubt as to which way to go?

VS: No. I had been a Democrat for all the years I had participated in various campaigns in Marin. However, I must say that when I first filed as a voter, Will Falley of Mill Valley had put me in the Republican Party.

CE: You had to disengage yourself.

VS: I had to disengage myself to support the Democratic candidate. Well, at any rate, so initially I had to go to the Democratic Central Committee and ask them if they had a candidate for that office.

CE: What did they say?

VS: And they said, "No." They had had very bad luck. Now, Sam Gardiner had been defeated the year before, he ran against McCollister. Leonard Thomas, also later a judge, had been defeated. They were defeated by this cross-filing device so that there never was Democratic candidate come November. It was always settled in June. And so --

CE: I wonder if that will ever be changed?

VS: It is changed.

CE: It is changed?

VS: We changed it two years later, The League.

CE: God bless the League.

VS: Yes, we repealed cross-filing.

CE: Okay.

VS: Well anyhow -- But you see, I was a victim of time and history because it wasn't repealed then. But I got the blessing of the Democratic Central Committee in Marin. Then I had to go to Sonoma to get the blessing of the Democratic Central Committee in Sonoma because --

CE: That's part of your assembly district.

VS: We shared an assemblyman at that time. And I didn't know anyone in Sonoma County.

CE: Who is this Vera Schultz?

VS: Yes. So, I just went to their meeting and I explained to them I had been up there, that I had been a lobbyist. That I had seen --

CE: With my own eyes what was going on --

VS: That I knew the game, the way it's played. And at that time, that was the time that *Colliers Magazine* came out with a big picture of Artie Samish with the capitol on his knee and he was lifting the lid of the capitol and saying, "I have more power than the Governor of California." So I used that. I used that to say, "This is why I want to be a candidate. I don't like to see our government corroded by selfish interests." So I got the willing participation of both because they didn't expect. They didn't expect any Democrat to come out of it with a nomination that he would be a candidate in November. For sixteen years no Democrat had gotten his own party nomination. For sixteen years! So, why wouldn't they say, "Go ahead little girl."

CE: Go ahead little girl; good luck.

VS: So I went ahead and what I did was to mobilize the women. I told them the story of how women had struggled to get the vote and how long it had taken. And how Abigail Adams had told John when he went, "John, remember the ladies." And it had stalled the deliberations of the constitutional convention for two weeks. They couldn't get over that. They would not give the women recognition. And so I just had coffee hours. I started the coffee hour.

CE: That was your creation?

VS: Yes.

CE Get a group of friends in and --

VS: And tell them. And tell them what you know and tell them why you're a candidate. Ask them to help, have them have a coffee, spread the word, and it worked. And by golly, I got the Democratic nomination. Yes. And then Artie Samish sent one of his lieutenants to my treasurer and said, "We are impressed with the way this candidate is conducting her campaign and we would like to help."

CE: Make a contribution.

VS: And my treasurer came to me and said we have an opportunity and believe me, we were selling little buttons, these little campaign buttons, for a dollar each, you know, to finance our campaign and we were very broke. In fact, that's where my husband was so marvelous; he financed that campaign, really. And we sent --

CE: So you turned the Samish lieutenant down?

VS: We said no.

CE: Thanks, but no thanks.

VS: I said, this is what I oppose. I do not think the members of the third house should elect the members of the assembly or the senate and then tell them what to do. Because what he said was, "She has to promise not to ax around in other peoples business." And, you see, this is the business of the people of California, not his business. And just as an aside, years later, years later, I brought Artie Samish to Marin to give a talk in Mill Valley for the American Association of University Women on what to do to reclaim the legislature from the third house.

CE: How daring of you.

VS: Yes, really.

Tape 2, Side A

CE: Well, then, Vera, you decide then perhaps you'll enter county politics and run for supervisor. How did that come about?

VS: You will really be interested in how that came about. I had just been through this campaign against Richard McCollister and he had won. And one day, I met him in the street in Mill Valley. Our relationship had always been cordial, notwithstanding I went after him with hammer and tongs, and --

CE: In other words he could divorce a personality; as people you got along.

VS: That's right. You differ but you don't differ unpleasantly. So, it was his idea that I should run for the Board of Supervisors. Now you may wonder why would Dick McCollister advocate that I should run for the Board of Supervisors. Well, because, in two years he had to run again and he didn't want me to run against him again two years later because I came too close. You see, a change of forty-five hundred votes and I would have won, out of sixty one thousand cast.

CE: He wanted you out of the way and kicked you upstairs then.

VS: Yes. So anyhow it was his idea.

CE: This sounds like an in-service like in the Navy. If you have somebody your vying for in command of a station, let's get him over here, put him over there.

VS: So, Dick McCollister had gone to the editor of the *Mill Valley Record* and Stan Wilson, and Stan had not supported me in the recent assembly campaign because I was a Democrat and he was a Republican and it's a partisan office. But, the county offices are non-partisan. You see, they don't bear a partisan label. And so Stan could come to me, as he did at my house, and he said, "Now, I didn't support you for the assembly but I will support you for the Board of Supervisors." He said, "You did a good job on the City Council." And he said --

CE: Respect your ability.

VS: And he said, "If you would run for that office the paper would be behind you." So, it had really grieved me that the *Mill Valley Record* hadn't endorsed my candidacy, because I felt I'd been a very good citizen in Mill Valley. But, that's politics and you do have to recognize the facts of life. So, at any rate, I -- You see, I'm unemployed now. I wasn't running for anything. I had all this background and knowledge and good health and vigor and what are you going to do. So, I threw my hat into the ring for election to the Board of Supervisors. Now, I was not running against an incumbent. I would not have run against Fred Bagshaw for whom I had great admiration and affection.

CE: Well, what was your competition? Who were your --

VS: Well, six men.

CE: Six?

VS: Yes, six men.

GE: Six!

CE: Well, I know of one; wasn't that Steve Balzan?

VS: Yes, Steve was one.

CE: Who were the others?

VS: You'll find those in *The Bridge and the Building*; they're all named there.

CE: Alright.

VS: At any rate --

CE: Was he of the same political persuasion or not?

VS: I don't know because, you see, we were running for a non-partisan office. I honestly don't know.

CE: Well usually it comes out. I just wondered.

VS: It's not supposed to.

CE: Did you talk this over with your husband at some length?

VS: Oh, indeed I did. And with my friends who had worked so hard for me in that campaign.

CE: You're talking about raising a lot more money to do this.

VS: Yes that's right. But still it was only in one district, not two counties.

CE: Oh, as the assembly seat was.

VS: Yes. So it looked as though it would be easy and it really didn't turn out that way because not only was there an expensive election but then there was a recount when I won it. And that turned out to be extremely expensive.

CE: This is all annotated in for the record, this book that was written in 1973 by Dr. Evelyn Morris Radford entitled *The Bridge and the Building* and I was quite surprised in reading that, all that you had to go through.

VS: Yes.

CE: Would you like to briefly recap just a little of that for the record in your own terminology?

VS: Well, very briefly, there were a couple of accidents. I felt they were accidents of time and place, that affected that election. My campaign for the Board of Supervisors had gone very smoothly and I felt very good about it because I knew county government. I had been an observer at county government, at the meetings of the Board of Supervisors for years and years for the League of Women Voters.

CE: Where you actually went up there?

VS: Oh, yes, every time they had a meeting. And it took the League women ten years to convince the Board of Supervisors to establish a Public Health Department in Marin County. And we had been going to the meetings.

CE: And you had to listen to all that agenda for ten years?

VS: Yes, for ten years.

CE: They should have given you a pin like they do these Pink Ladies in the hospital.

VS: Well, the League still does it that way, you know. They have observers at all the hearings and that's a wonderful way to become educated in you local government, is to go to the meetings, get the agenda follow what they decide and why and see how it's done.

CE: Better that way than taking a course at the college and learning it just academically.

VS: That's right. It's quite different in reality from the facts of life.

CE: Well, what were these differences in time and place? You said it ran smoothly initially.

VS: It did. And in June, in June, the June primary, as Dr. Radford points out there, about three hundred more votes and I would have won in June in a field of seven. So it had been going well. Now what happened? Well that was the year that Estes Kefauver had won the nomination for president in thirty-six states. And in California I was on his team because he had put Artie Samish behind bars. He had been the one. In his senatorial research on crime, they had nailed Artie Samish. They nailed him for income tax evasion and a few other things but they nailed him and no one else had ever been able to do that. So, I was just ready-made to support the senator that did it and I went on the ballot that June in two places. I was on the ballot as a non-partisan for election to the Board of Supervisors and I was on the partisan ballot as election for the Kefauver slate to the Democratic convention.

CE: Were you a delegate?

VS: I was a delegate. I was a delegate to the 1952 Democratic Convention in Chicago.

CE: Well, I'll be. Did this find displeasure with some people, do you think?

VS: Well, it's not a good idea to be running for a nonpartisan office while you're planning you partisan bag.

CE: But you felt you owed Kefauver something and you wanted to --

VS: I owed him a great debt.

CE: And you wanted to do that, and the state did, the county did, everybody did.

VS: Well, so there were two slates on the ballot. One was the favorite son slate which was Governor Pat Brown and then there was the slate of, I'll say nobodies, because we weren't, you know, the movers and shakers. And we were going for the guy that had already demonstrated in thirty-six states that they approved of him. So, we went to Chicago for Kefauver. And that was, the other circumstance that I had mentioned to you was that the *Ladies Home Journal* had selected me to be the subject of a feature story on that convention, namely delegate in a draft. This came out in the *Ladies Home Journal* in October just before the election. And so, I have always felt that if I hadn't gone to Chicago as a Kefauver delegate and wouldn't have had the *Ladies Home Journal* exposure that I would not have found the voters. Because this was a very Republican county. It shared with Orange County the distinction of being preponderantly Republican. So I felt that the combination of circumstances --

CE: Kind of eroded your position of strength?

VS: Yes. Because when the final vote came I did win but I had won by something like a hundred and forty-five votes or a hundred and sixty-five, something like that, where I almost won the whole thing in June. Something had happened. Something had happened. Well, but I did win. And so Ray and I went away for a little vacation and when we came back we found that the defeated candidate had called for a recount.

CE: Because it was that close?

GM: Was that Balzan?

VS: That was Balzan.

GM: Where did the money come from? He didn't have anything?

VS: No, it came, Gen --

GM: From George Jones?

VS: It came from George Jones and Steve had two Republican attorneys that didn't charge him a penny to bring that recount action. But I went out and hired Delger Trowbridge to --

CE: Oh, that Sausalito?

VS: No he was Kentfield.

GM: A very fine man.

VS: A very fine man. And I hired Delger to defend my election. And the very first day we started opening the ballot envelopes, they began to disqualify my votes. I mean, his two attorneys kept disqualifying Schultz ballots on the basis that they were a recognizable ballot. They had pin pricks in the corner or they were torn or -- And you see this is where the law, in its effort to protect the sanctity in our elections, has set down rules that can be used to detect dishonesty when there is dishonesty in the polling place. There were, unfortunately, and are still probably people who sell their votes, who say for so much I will vote for so and so, but they have to give some evidence that that's what they did.

GM: I never heard of this.

VS: Yes, this -- Your husband was the judge who overlooked all these. And he sat there and looked at all these ballots and these two lawyers pointed out, but don't you see you could distinguish that ballot because someone took the little rubber stamp, at that time we had a little rubber X, and has made a pattern so that you could distinguish my ballot. And so, they'd throw my vote out because it was a distinguishable ballot. And we didn't catch on. For the first two days we weren't disqualifying any of Steve Balzan's votes, it was just mine that were being thrown out. So then we did something constructive. And I will always be so grateful to Sam Gardiner for this because Sam saw that something was going on and Sam made a simple affidavit that was taken to the voters in three precincts. You see, all these extra, there were sixty extra votes for Steve Balzan that showed up the second day of the recount and none for me.

CE: Sixty?

VS: Sixty! And none for me. Sixty votes in twenty each in three precincts for Balzan and not one for me. And you see the unique thing about this circumstance was it upset the voting pattern of the whole United States because in those three precincts in Marin City more people voted for supervisor than voted for president and that was the year that Eisenhower was on the ballot. In fact, some of my votes were disallowed because they claimed that the person who voted for President Eisenhower, when he folded his ballot it put an "x" after my name and they didn't mean to vote for me; it was an accident.

CE: Oh, my goodness.

VS: Well, they finally wiped out my margin by disallowing ballots, my margin in the general election was wiped out and all that stood between me and really having the election taken away from me was the absentee. Now, all those had been counted in the County Clerk's office and so he proposed that we let them stand. And we said no. We would count those also. And then, you see, now that we saw where these twenty, twenty, twenty votes had been we also discovered that the ballots had not been brought to the County Clerk's office that night, they had, contrary to the requirement of law, been in the Marin City Firehouse until the next morning and then had been brought to the County Clerk. And you see, somebody had access to those. Well, when this oddity showed up that's when Sam Gardiner -- You know Sam don't you?

GM: Oh, very well.

VS: Sam said, "We'll go into the precinct with this little affidavit." It doesn't say, "For whom did you vote?" It just says, "Did you vote for supervisor?"

CE: And see how many counts you get.

VS: Yes. Did not vote. Well they had to be -- They had to have not voted in order for them to be stuffed. So, Libby ?, Alice Kent, a great many of my friends -- This was rainy like it is this year, terribly stormy time, in November, just before Christmas, plodded through the mud of Marin City to the houses there where the voters were registered with these affidavits.

GM: Oh, they were all black people?

VS: Not all, no. No, they were not all. And one after another they signed these affidavits saying, "I voted for neither candidate." They didn't. You see this was what -- This was what they hadn't reckoned with fate I guess because they should have put in a few for me and then it wouldn't have upset the voting pattern of the whole --

CE: It's a wonder they weren't criminally --

VS: Well, they should have been.

CE: They backed away then?

VS: No. We came to Judge Martinelli with several oddities about the envelopes. Number one, they hadn't been sealed with sealing wax, as the law requires; they were sealed with scotch tape. And Sam Gardiner had discovered that by putting a warm iron on the scotch tape it just lifts up and there is no evidence it has been tampered with. So we were building a case. And we took it to Judge Martinelli who was the judge in this case of the recount. And he immediately began to scrutinize every challenge much more carefully.

CE: Every aspect of it.

VS: Yes. So, and he was made aware that there had been an irregularity in the election. And so we, as a final comment at this stage of the story, we found that someone on George Jones' staff had, in counting the absentees, given twenty one of my votes to Mr. Balzan and so we emerged, at last, with the victory.

CE: It's surprising somebody didn't press criminal charges.

VS: Well, I was the one who should have and I just -- I didn't have the money. I mean it should have been followed through because --

CE: Because that would have aborted that whole group of people who were so inclined.

VS: Well.

CE: Well fate entered the picture. You were destined to get there.

VS: I was destined to do it the hard way and so then Mr. Jones wouldn't even swear me in on the Board, he swore me in out in the hall.

CE: Well, I'm delighted to know that fate finally put you in the right place at the right time, and that is on the Board of Supervisors. Tell us, the county offices were scattered all over, weren't they?

VS: Yes.

CE: At the time of your appointment? Your election rather?

VS: Yes. In fact, that was one of the planks in my platform as a candidate, was that we had a government scattered out in thirteen different areas of this county and that anyone who wanted to do business with the county had to run all over Marin to do it and that we should begin to think in terms of a civic center. We had outgrown the courthouse and we should acquire acreage somewhere for a civic center and draw county government together. So that was one plank, a civic center. The second one that I felt that we should pursue was that we too should move into the field of modern administration and have a county administrator rather than having such a hydra-headed monster as we had of so many independently elected department heads, each one doing his own purchasing from pens to paper clips, everything. And so I advocated centralized purchasing and that we should have a public works department. And that we should really gear ourselves for more efficient government.

CE: Were you somewhat alone in this perception amongst your fellow colleagues on the Board?

VS: No, I wouldn't say that I was. I was as far as the administrator was concerned but you see I had had the experience of the city manager forum and it paid off so handsomely.

CE: And you thought that the county level would be equally as affected?

VS: Would be equally effective if not more so. And there were members on the Board who recognized, who frankly recognized, the lack of efficiency in our scattered offices.

CE: Where did the Board meet during your first few years, at the courthouse?

VS: At the courthouse, yes.

CE: Did you meet every week?

VS: Not at first.

CE: Not at first.

VS: No, we would meet every two weeks.

CE: Every two weeks. I see. And who would create the agenda? Would you have a meeting with the other district supervisors as to what was coming up or how was-- I'm always curious, how does the agenda arrive?

VS: The agenda is prepared by the clerk. And the clerk is given the indication of what goes on the agenda by the chairman of the board and by the business that has gone before the Board at the previous meeting. So, the clerk prepares the minutes and the clerk prepares the agenda and then the chairman of the board conducts the meeting and that's the way it goes.

CE: Who was chairman of the board when you served your first year?

VS: Bill Fusselman was Chairman of the Board.

CE: We'll have to get to his name sometime; we might as well now. There were four of you, as I understand, who sort of felt similarly. Is that correct?

VS: Yes.

CE: You, Mr. Marshall from Western Marin, William Gness and Walter Castro.

VS: That's right.

CE: And there was the one man, Bill Fusselman, with George Jones hovering in the background, who sort of opposed your --

VS: Sort of?

CE: I'm being as nice as I can. Tell me this, how soon in your original responsibility as a supervisor did the discussion come up about working concretely for this Civic Center, the acquisition of the land and the determination of who would design it, etc. Was that in your first year? Did that come up?

VS: Not who would design it but the acquisition of the land came up. As a matter of fact, one of the earliest actions in which I participated on the Board of Supervisors was the appointment of a citizens' committee to seek a site. We were looking for two things. We were looking for a fair site, because at that time we were always having our fair at the Art and Garden Center.

CE: Yes, and you needed more space.

VS: And we were looking for a site then for administrative buildings too. So, we had these dual meetings and we appointed a citizens' committee to seek a solution and they came up with the idea of joining the two needs and buying a sufficiently large acreage that we could not only have a government center.

CE: And of these various choices, one was in Terra Linda, I hear, I understand one was in the Santa Venetia area which you ultimately picked and there was another place. I forget where it was. But this site of the Santa Venetia property belonged to Mr. Scettrini and when a hundred and forty acres, something like that was proposed, and at the time you could have bought it for a heck of a lot less money but dear Mr. Fusselman said no. So, eventually, when you did buy it, it cost a half a million dollars where you could have had it for a third or fourth of that.

VS: That's right. Mr. Fusselman wanted us to buy the San Rafael Military property and put it there.

CE: Okay. There is a sobriquet that is referred to all the time in *The Bridge and the Building*, that book about George Jones and his courthouse gang. The sobriquet means what; just those people who-sort of a small version of Artie Samish, that they wanted to control everything?

VS: Well.

CE: Or is that too strong a parallel?

VS: I think we have to look at the historical background of the courthouse gang. You see, George Jones had been in office for a great many years as was George Hall, as were --

CE: Hall was the County Assessor?

VS: Yes. A great many other public officials.

CE: Did they sort of get a proprietorship feeling about it?

VS: Well, naturally, naturally, they did. And they resisted change.

CE: Well just like the Guilds in the Marin Art and Garden Center have developed a proprietorship about it and they have to be reminded sometime and say, wait a minute you don't own the Octagon House or you don't own this. What do you mean, we started from scratch, this is our baby. And you wanted to move from that sort of atmosphere?

VS: Yes. I wanted us to have a trained administrator. I wanted to give him job security. That is, he could recommend without fear of being fired.

CE: Like in civil service and the political spoils after an election.

VS: Yes. So I advocated that we do it for the county in the same way we did it for the town of Mill Valley by way of an ordinance that then has to, if any change is made in it, it has to have public hearing.

CE: Well, how did you succeed in doing this? Did this have to be put before the voters?

VS: Not at the county level. It did at the city level.

CE: Not in the county level?

VS: No. At the county level it was merely an ordinance enacted by the Board of Supervisors. Which means that they can change it, too.

CE: Back if they wish to or any other way?

VS: That's right. And you see --

CE: Do you think that's a lot of power to be in the hands of so few people?

VS: Well, it's a lot of power, true, but in representative government you --

CE: That's right, you would trust somebody.

VS: You trust them, yes.

CE: You trust them with the responsibility to fulfill.

VS: That's right.

CE: Now, after this civic center site committee picked this land and that's where you were going to go another committee was formed was it not? The civic center committee to select an architect.

VS: That's right.

CE: This is where I want you to tell. How in the world did it come about that somebody had the imagination to call upon the talents of Frank Lloyd Wright?

VS: Well.

CE: Here's a girl from Nevada who probably never saw a Frank Lloyd building in your life, had you?

VS: Yes, I had.

CE: Where?

VS: I had admired Frank Lloyd Wright's style.

Tape 2, Side B

CE: All right, you say you had admired Frank Lloyd Wright work for a long time.

VS: Yes, I had had my husband take me to Carmel to see a house that Frank Lloyd Wright had designed there, looking out to the ocean.

CE: Oh, yes, the one with the turquoise roof at the southern end of the beach?

VS: Yes that's right. I also was a subscriber to *House Beautiful* whose editor was a fan of Frank Lloyd Wright and a copy of the *House Beautiful* came out with-- It was devoted to Frank Lloyd Wright.

CE: The whole issue?

VS: Yes, the whole issue. And I was looking at it on New Year's Day, in 1957. I had a few minutes rest and I was looking through that magazine. And I thought, "Why don't we reach to the top?" And I called up Mary Summers, who was our Planning Director, and Mary was on this committee to select an architect. And I talked with her and with her husband Harold, two-way connection, and I said, "Why can't we think about Frank Lloyd Wright?" And she said, "Why don't you write him a letter?" And so, I spent the rest of that day trying to draft him a letter. But you see, the difficulty is that I as an individual had no right to ask Frank Lloyd Wright to consider us. I am one of five people.

CE: So, you couldn't.

VS: Not appropriately. So --

CE: How about somebody on the committee?

VS: Well, that's what happened.

CE: Mary?

VS: Yes. Well what happened was, I called her up and said I don't know where to send it. I did draft a letter explaining the situation, that we had this acreage and so on, but I didn't know where to send it. And she said to me, "Well, call Aaron Green. He is his San Francisco representative." So, I made a telephone call to Aaron Green and Aaron said by chance Mr. Wright is coming to San Francisco. He is going to give the Bernard Maybeck lecture at UC Berkeley and if you'd like, he would arrange a meeting. So we arranged a meeting.

CE: That was fate again.

VS: And all four members of the Board went. Not Mr. Fusselman; he protested it. And all five members on the committee went. That was Lee Jordan our County Counsel, Mary Summers our Planning Director, Marvin Brigham, head of our Public Works Department, Leon DeLisle who was our auditor and has to keep us straight with our money. And let's see, have I named them all now?

CE: Yes, and yourself. No, you weren't on the committee.

VS: No, I wasn't on that. Oh, it was John Jensen the administrator, he was on it. So, those five and we four went to San Francisco and met with Mr. Wright.

CE: What was your impression?

VS: Well, as you know he was a very charming man. And we were so entranced with him that we all stayed over and went to the lecture that night. We went to the lecture in Berkeley and that sealed it. We were just enthusiastic about him.

CE: Correct me, interrupting you for a moment, is it true that he had never designed a building for government offices before?

VS: It is true that he had never -- A building designed by him had not been built.

CE: I see, okay.

VS: Now he had designed a civic center structure in Wisconsin on Lake Monona I think it is, but there was opposition very much like what developed in Marin.

CE: So did he withdraw from that?

VS: Well, it just wasn't successful. They didn't get to the point of building it, but he had designed it and --

CE: Well, when you saw him at this and heard his lecture and everything, then you, all of you or each of you must have been sufficiently enthused to ask him to come and make a presentation of some sort, right?

VS: That is correct.

CE: Did he do it?

VS: Yes, he did.

CE: Because he made several or two as I recall.

VS: Yes, he did. Well, he came to San Rafael and gave a lecture, a talk, at the High School in San Rafael. And it was packed, standing room only. The community really was interested in Frank Lloyd Wright.

CE: Well, then the complexion of the community has changed, getting back to Dr. Radford's book. There had been an influx of people into particularly Southern Marin, after the war, after the bridge was built. And in some cases they were a little more sophisticated, in some areas.

VS: Yes.

CE: Although they worked in San Francisco, they lived over here and they wanted to direct somewhat -- Am I reading it wrong? Somewhat the direction to that the county should go?

VS: Well, a more sophisticated electorate had developed in Marin County. The great leap forward for new residents came after the bridge was built because everything was more accessible and so it was no longer the little scattered communities that we had known prior to that. There was --

CE: And of course the natives, per se, the third, fourth, fifth generation families probably, as naturally would kind of resist this growth.

VS: Well, I know some of the nicest people I knew were public officials in the old Courthouse and they didn't want to leave the old courthouse. They didn't want to leave San Rafael. A great many of the employees in the courthouse were resentful of the thought of moving out of San Rafael because it was so easy to go shopping at noon whereas if you go out in the boondocks it won't be. Of course, it doesn't seem like the boondocks now because it's getting so crowded out there.

CE: Well now, tell me this, after Frank Lloyd Wright's initial presentation to the community, it wasn't all hearts and flowers or peaches and cream. There were some people who did not want this at all, I'm sure, right?

VS: Yes, unfortunately there were.

CE: Now tell me, there was the Marin County Taxpayers Association that came about too, didn't it?

VS: Yes, they were very vocal.

CE: Or did that come about on Frank Lloyd Wright's second visit where he presented the drawings and actually showed what his creation was going to be? That was quite a startling night I read?

VS: Yes, there were a number of traumatic episodes in the course of moving from having asked him to design the building and actually getting it under construction.

CE: The American Legion made their input and accused him of un-American activities in --

VS: I'll never forget that day.

CE: It must have been a tremendously traumatic experience for you and to your fellow colleagues and --

VS: It was, and --

CE: An embarrassment to some people in the audience who witnessed this abuse.

VS: Yes, because there sat Mr. Wright hearing himself criticized as un-American because he had written an article commendatory of Russia in a copy of the New Republic many years before.

CE: Yes, many years ago. Well, we know what the fifties period with McCarthy etc.

VS: Yes, don't we though?

CE: Well now, tell me, there was this Marin County Taxpayers Association. Alvin Schultz, no relation to you, son of the Greenbrae Company's founder isn't he? Wasn't that Alvin Schultz?

VS: Yes.

CE: And their stand was -- Going to cost too much money, or what? Didn't like the plan or what?

VS: They didn't feel that Marin County could justify paying Frank Lloyd Wright ten percent when local architects would charge six. However, what they were not looking at and maybe they weren't even aware was that the ten percent that was being charged by Frank Lloyd Wright included all of the exterior engineering and the interior design and a great many other facets of construction costs that would have --

CE: Been additionally added to the other.

VS: Been additionally added.

CE: Well, I understand that a slide show was gotten together called "Marin's Greatest Hour." Tell us about that.

VS: That's right. Well --

CE: And that was to counter Schultz's ploys?

VS: That's right. It was to offset the –

CE: Do you remember it, Gen?

GM: No, I don't.

VS: The adversity of the Legion and then those others who were saying that we can't afford this kind of architectural fee. "Marin's Greatest Hour" really was, to me, a shining example of democracy in action because it was all volunteer. It was citizens all over this county who came together behind a desire for excellence and who had been, in many cases, alarmed by the encroachment of bad design in developments throughout the county. And it was well known that those who opposed the hiring of Frank Lloyd Wright preferred architects who would reproduce here, San Francisco. And we felt we had something so unique in Marin.

CE: You didn't want a high-rise.

VS: We did not want high-rise buildings on our --

CE: So he took -- His design was a high-rise turned over, horizontally.

VS: That's right; that used to be one of Mr. Fusselman's --

CE: Well, they would take this slide show around and show people.

VS: Good design and --

CE: What you're talking about.

VS: That's right. Also explaining the economics of it. That it wasn't ten percent versus six percent. That it was ten percent in toto and would not amount to sixteen or maybe eighteen percent by the time you hired the additional services.

CE: Well, I know it's annotated in this book, *The Bridge and the Building*, some of the in-house fighting and I don't want you to go necessarily through that today.

VS: No, it's painful.

CE: It's painful for you. But, how did you finally do it? How did you finally solve this controversy?

VS: Well, let me see. I don't believe that I did it.

CE: Well, the Board of Supervisors.

VS: There was a four-to-one board there that was very cohesive.

CE: But you had this old politician, Bill Fusselman, you know, going against you plus George Jones.

VS: We had some very formidable opposition. But, the public, really it was the rank and file public that wanted that building and every time we had a hearing they were there.

CE: Did this go on the ballot ultimately?

VS: No, no, it never went on.

CE: Never went on the ballot. It was a decision made by the Board, ultimately.

VS: It was a decision made by the Board.

CE: Even as to how you were to fund it?

VS: No. Long before we even selected Frank Lloyd Wright or anybody we had put a tax on our annual revenue for construction of a civic center.

CE: So that was on-going?

VS: That was on-going. And the beauty of the Administration Building, and one which gives me great comfort, it was paid for before it was built.

CE: Oh wonderful.

VS: No bond expense at all.

CE: That's something.

VS: Now, later we did have a bond election to build the Hall of Justice.

CE: The Hall of Justice, which is the completion of the design.

VS: That's right.

CE: But meanwhile, Frank Lloyd Wright dies, doesn't he?

VS: Yes, he did, and that was a --

CE: He died April 9, 1959, the records indicate. What do you do then? Aaron Green take over?

VS: No. Then we had a crisis because Mr. Fusselman wanted us to cancel the whole thing at that point.

CE: Still on track, isn't he?

VS: Yes, cancel it. Because it no longer is Mr. Wright. But, we pointed out, Mr. Wright completed the plans. Mr. Wright had completed the --

CE: The whole building?

VS: Yes and they were his last great works; how terrible not to build it! And so, it took another fight on the Board but we were convinced, the four of us, that it was right to go on with Wright.

CE: So you did.

VS: So we did.

CE: Let's move on a bit. Now, groundbreaking day was February 15, 1960. Were you there then?

VS: I was there but I had been defeated.

CE: You were supervisor for eight years.

VS: Yes.

CE: And you were defeated.

VS: I was defeated in the November election of 1960.

CE: It's a parallel between Winston Churchill after winning the war for Great Britain. So you're in good company. We'll get into that a bit. I want to get this building sort of in one unit here. It was dedicated, I understand, on a rainy day, October the 13th, 1962.

VS: That's right.

CE: You were there of course?

VS: Yes, I was there.

CE: Did they honor you by your presence I would hope. Judge Jordan Martinelli was there and I understand he introduced everybody.

VS: Yes.

CE: I find it intriguing, particularly with this issue of the Marin County Library coming up as you know, that the ceremonies were held indoors.

GM: In the main library.

VS: That's right.

CE: On the fourth floor. Would you describe this event for us briefly? I understand Dr. Gill spoke for the San Francisco Theological Seminary and spoke beautifully. His speech is in this book.

VS: Oh, he did and oh, it was an inspiring talk. And it was such an unexpected kind of talk. Now, there had been controversy as to who would speak. There was controversy at every step of the way.

CE: Mainly by Mr. Fusselman, if I read the record.

VS: Yes, that's right. Well, someone had suggested that I be invited and Mr. Fusselman said if that were the case, he would not be there.

CE: Charming. Little minds, little men.

VS: Peter Behr rescued, you know --

CE: Did Peter Behr succeed you?

VS: Yes. Well, no. You see what happened was I was defeated in 1960 over the Civic Center, number one, but the main thing was over the property reappraisal.

CE: Oh, that's right!

VS: We had had a big property reappraisal.

CE: And who did they pick on but Mill Valley.

VS: Mill Valley, third district was the one where it went into effect first.

CE: I wonder who stirred that suggestion.

VS: Well, I just have to say in defense of Bert Broemmell, who was the Assessor then, Bert really had to do it that way because that's where most of the property was changing hands. And in honor he had to do it. Because many people protested to Bert and said, "Why did you do it down there knowing?"

CE: But you could understand the rational of it?

VS: I could indeed.

CE: You felt somewhat vindicated though, your dreams of having this building and Frank Lloyd Wright actually follow through and be built. That was enough for you.

VS: Yes. And it was under construction and so it was launched. Well, that was another case where George Jones had selected the candidate to oppose me. He had chosen J. Walter Blair. And I didn't know until I read Peggy's book that he had had that dinner in Sausalito where he had introduced J. Walter Blair as the successor to Vera Schultz. I learned that from Peggy. I didn't know that.

CE: Well, then what happened to Blair?

VS: They had a recall. They stopped work on the Civic Center. That's one of the first things that that new Board did. That was Ludy, Fusselman and Blair. They stopped work on the Civic Center.

CE: Just think what that cost.

VS: Yes, fourteen thousand dollars.

CE: So they reversed that thing then; something had to be done and he was recalled?

VS: This is again where the people of Marin rose and made the Board of Supervisors reverse themselves. They tried to do two things. Not only stop work on the Civic Center and they said convert it into a hospital but they also went after the administrator. And they told him that his days were numbered. So there were two things that mobilized the voters of Marin County and they did mobilize. One was to commence, to begin work on the Civic Center again and the second was to save the office of the administrator. And they came through with a referendum that had so many signatures on it that George Jones stopped counting. That was citizen action. That was a case where I just think I --

CE: Oh, you just got goose bumps over that one didn't you? Just thrilling.

VS: Yes.

CE: Oh, gosh. Well, where did Peter Beer come into the picture? Was that after the recall?

VS: The recall had to take place. And it could not take place until the man had been in office for six months. Now it's not that way anymore; they can do it immediately. But at that time you had to wait six months according to state law. So, the voters waited six months and almost everything that the wrecking crew, as they called them, did added fuel to the flame. So that at the end of six months there was the recall vote and Peter Behr was elected in place of Walter Blair. Peter Behr in place of Walter Blair. And Peter rescued the administrator and work was resumed on the great building we have out there.

CE: I was very impressed with him the other day at the hearing.

VS: Yes.

CE: Vera, you know you've lived through some extraordinarily fascinating activities and many of them generated by yourself. You've been disappointed a few times.

VS: Defeated.

CE: Defeated. Almost crucified to a degree by this opposition. In reviewing your political career, time does heal many of these wounds of your early struggles. I look at your face and I don't see any bitterness or any vindictiveness.

VS: No.

CE: And you've been a pioneer for women in an extraordinary sense for this county and everything you do here is certainly on record over there at Bancroft Library, what your contribution has been. To what do you attribute your directional drive and leadership? Support of the family you mentioned earlier, belief in your issues, and that wonderful idea, what is it that you have about our government?

VS: It's the democratic principle that each of us is responsible. It's our government; it's our government.

CE: I sometimes think the Board of Supervisors has got it backwards. Sometimes when you go to the sessions they sit up there in those black leather chairs on that dais and sort of dispense their largess to the peons there. But they are there to serve us, are they not?

VS: That's right, they are our representatives.

CE: And we should never be intimidated.

VS: And we should never be intimidated. And just as we reversed a decision they were about to make last week on the library --

CE: It shows you the force of a little activity.

VS: It shows you the fact that when a citizen does stand up and --

CE: They must listen.

VS: They must listen because they are our servants, not our masters, and that's the glory of our system.

CE: Well, now, before we conclude, I know you're still very concerned about a lot of things going on and always involved in Marin's needs. Now there are a couple of areas

here I wish you'd explain briefly. Are you still President of the Marin Senior Coordinating Council, or one of the officers?

VS: No. I am an officer.

CE: What's the purpose of this council? You're interested in gerontology obviously?

VS: Yes. And this dates back to my earliest days on the Board of Supervisors at the old courthouse. In passing the benches on the courthouse grounds everyday, I saw them occupied by idle old people.

CE: Sunning themselves?

VS: Yes. And I often stopped and talked to them. And I found that our county was very much in arrears in making any kind of provision for the housing, the recreation, the --

CE: Well, isn't this social consciousness sort of late everywhere and it came about kind of quickly overnight throughout our country, didn't it?

VS: Yes, it came about because of the 1961 White House conference on aging, actually. Actually that was the beginning. But, this was before that; this was 1953.

CE: 1953, yes.

VS: And I must say, that I felt a deep grief for the fact that there was nothing for the old folks to do in Marin but sit on a bench idly. So, I participated with club women. I called a meeting in my home of the presidents of the women's clubs of Marin and asked them to give thought to what we could do to provide a senior center. That was our original goal, was to provide a senior center much like the Little House down in Menlo Park.

CE: Did they come up with ideas?

VS: They, of course, were all willing to take it back to their respective clubs but you know how it is with --

CE: Committees?

VS: Committees, yes. So what happened immediately was the Outdoor Art Club offered us their space for a public meeting. And we called a public meeting and had a very fine panel of speakers.

CE: Countywide public meeting?

VS: It was a countywide.

CE: Just happened to be in Mill Valley.

VS: But it was in Mill Valley because the club was offered to us free. Well, we had an excellent panel of speakers that day. The County Health Officer, Dr. Dufficy was there. There were spokesmen from our Welfare Department telling what the problems of being old in Marin were.

CE: And what came out of this meeting?

VS: Well I'll leap over again and say that as private individuals put up our money to rent a house and open the first Marin Senior Center.

CE: Where was that?

VS: It was on Fourth Street where the Pancake House now is. It was an old residence but it was on the pipeline.

CE: Oh, remember that, Gen?

GM: Yes.

VS: And we opened it without any kind of government assistance.

CE: Well, tell me Vera, eventually did this good work result in what we now know today as that converted bus depot in downtown San Rafael and the Whistlestop?

VS: The Whistlestop? It did.

CE: From that effort.

VS: Yes, from that effort, from that first volunteer effort where we rented a house and opened a center.

CE: Well, now, aren't there several places, four or five dining centers where you serve people?

VS: Fourteen.

CE: Fourteen now? Where you serve one good meal a day?

VS: Serve meals, yes.

CE: How is this subsidized?

VS: Well it's partly -- It comes from about thirteen different sources of funds, but it is primarily federal funds.

CE: Okay, we are coming to the close of our meeting today, Vera, but in conclusion I wish you'd give some thought to this question. Would you give us your perceptions of the status of county government over the past twenty years, since the completion of the Frank Lloyd Wright Civic Center. Has good government prevailed in your judgment and are our county officials continually aware of the object of their trusteeship?

VS: I believe that the adoption by Marin County of the manager principle of government has definitely led to a permanent improvement in the administration of county government. Now, we do not have the best form of manager government because we still elect many independent department heads and as long as you do that you don't get the unified benefits of having one trained administrator who carries out the policies of your elected Board of Supervisors. However, even without having the perfection of the best, we have had good government in Marin County.