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MARIE MORAES FILIPPI

An Interview conducted by
Harlan Soeten on august 15, 1983

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*note: There is no corresponding
tape for this oral history*

MARIE MORAES FILIPPI

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NOTE: Largely about early dairies in southern Marin. Marie's father owned a dairy in the area now known as Enchanted Knowles. The street of Roque Moraes was named for her father. Also much about the Portuguese community.

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MARIE MORAES FILIPPI

Today is August 15, 1983. I, Harlan Soeten, am in the home of Mrs. Marie Filippi.

Harlan Soeten: What is your maiden name?

Marie Filippi: Moraes

HS: You must be somehow related to the street.

MF: Roque Moraes. That was the name of my father.

HS: Did he develop that area?

MF: No.

HS: Well, let me start out this way. We are primarily interested today in dairies of yours and others that you might remember. But, before we do that, let's talk just a bit about yourself. You say you are a native. You were born in Mill Valley?

MF: Ross. I was born in Ross. I lived with my father and mother on the dairy that is Scott Valley today. It used to belong to the Tom Deffebach family and my dad leased it for about 36 years.

HS: Where did your father come from?

MF: My father came from the Azores. The original dairy people came to Marin from the Azores.

HS: How did he get into the dairy business?

MF: Dad came to his oldest brother who had an orchard in San Jose, and Dad also worked in Crockett, in the sugar refinery, but he did not like it. He knew some people over in Tomales. He came down here to the dairy of the Deffebach people in Scott Valley. He joined other partners and they had the dairy there. Gradually he bought them out and had the business to himself.

HS: Do you know if he had previous experience as a dairyman?

MF: His father was a well-to-do man and he owned dairylands up in the hills on the Island of Pico in the Azores. The little settlements were near the water, but if anyone had land it would be up on the hill. My father was the one of his family that helped his father take care of the land.

HS: Have you ever been to the Azores?

MF: No, not yet, but some day. We almost made it a couple of years ago. The day before we were ready to leave the Airline

went on strike so that took care of that.

HS: My nephew, a year or two ago, married an Azores Island girl, who was born in the Azores, but had settled with her family in Montreal.

MF: Yes, up in Canada. My mother has a great niece that lives in Canada. Yes, I think that many of the Portuguese went from the Azores to Canada about thirty years ago, and they have quite a nice settlement up there.

HS: What was the name of your father's dairy? Did he have a name, or was he in a co-op?

MF: No, my father was one of the original stockholders of Marin-Dell Milk Company.

HS: So all of his milk went to---

MF: To Marin-Dell in San Francisco where so many of the dairies around here used to send their milk.

HS: What happened to Marin-Dell?

MF: It was bought out by Foremost.

HS: What was the procedure?

MF: They used to put the milk in these big cans. They would load the cans onto the train. The train would go down to Sausalito and they put the cans on the ferry and over to San Francisco. Then later by truck and trailer which you see today.

HS: You just delivered the raw milk? You didn't pasteurize?

MF: They did. They had a pasteurizer in the dairy. My dad was the first around here, I think, that had milking machines.

HS: What was the geographical location of the dairy?

MF: Do you know where Scott Valley is? Azalea Street? That is the original entrance to where the dairy was.

HS: How does that relate to the shopping area?

MF: You know where Red Cart is? It's above there.

HS: How did they do the pasteurizing?

MF: Semi-sterilize the milk and put it in large cans.

HS: Where would the location of the creamery building be now in relation to Red Cart?

MF: When you go down Azalea, it would be to the left. My mother

has a picture. Walter took a small picture of the building and I gave a copy to the library.

HS: So the library now has those pictures?

MF: Yes. Some years later my dad bought out his partners' interest, and as time went on he had his brother and my mother's brother. They bought a little part into it, and then they worked it. My father always wanted to own his own dairy, so the opportunity presented itself and he bought from Mr. Wilkins the property that is known today as Enchanted Knolls.

HS: What year would that be?

MF: In the early 40's.

HS: Was it a dairy on what is Enchanted Knolls?

MF: Yes. Where the clover leaf of the freeway is now is where all the barns were.

HS: The clover leaf is at the bottom?

MF: Yes, where you go to Strawberry or get on 101.

HS: When I first moved to Marin County was in the 1960's and I looked at homes there to buy. It is hard for me to imagine that it was only so few years previous to that that it was a dairy.

MF: In fact, there were three dairies around that area.

HS: What were the others?

MF: Where the Alto School used to be, behind there there used to be one called the Tunnel Ranch. That was the Azevedo dairy, later Cunha. Then the dairy that my dad bought later used to be leased by another Moraes.

HS: Where did the name Tunnel ranch come from?

MF: I guess where the train used to come from San Rafael.

HS: These dairies were not competing with your dad so they were all part of the---

MF: Marin-Dell

HS: Were there any other dairies in other parts of Mill Valley, do you know?

MF: One of the earliest ones was the Freitas Dairy up on Throckmorton.

HS: They're all gone now. I guess it pretty much has followed the same pattern. In the 40's and 50's, civilization,

if we call it that, progressed and---

MF: More homes started coming in.

HS: Like they ate up the orange groves in Pasadena--when I was a kid.

MF: Right. When you asked me about this, I was thinking back, and I thought, "There was such beautiful dairy land all throughout Marin County owned by these early Portuguese from the Azores. Now they're gradually disappearing, and it's all filling up with homes.

HS: In some cases with \$500,000 homes---out on Strawberry Point.

MF: That's right. My husband, Walter, remembered hearing his uncle saying if somebody is going to build a home the choice area would be Strawberry Point. You know the story now---how expensive they are.

HS: Just a matter of a few years ago the place was nothing but beautiful oaks and grass and bay trees.

MF: Now, it's full of homes.

HS: Full of homes that you can't afford to live in.

MF: Of course not, and then, again, too, through Tennessee Valley there were a number of dairies out there.

HS: Yes, there were some of those, there was at least one or two fairly recently there. That is, in my time. Let's see---that land---I'm sure it's gone through several hands---the Dean Witter people owned a big hunk of it fifteen years or so ago---

MF: Well before that there were J. C. Pimental and Cunha. Then the Sequeira family and Martin and Bettencourt. Martin and Bettencourt had the end of Tennessee, just before getting to the coast. I remember their homes were opposite each other and they had a gate. If you wanted to go to the seaside, you had to ask them to get permission to go down there.

HS: Well, there was a gate there up until recently. I used to go out there, well, I went out there several times exploring what was left of the steamer Tennessee---This would be fifteen years ago---And there was a dairy ranch there; there were cows, at least, and two gates that I had to go through. One, I got permission locally, and the other, I had to call Dean Witter's people, and they made arrangements with their ranchhand or somebody.

MF: They're more recent; this was before.

HS: It was about ten years ago when the great battle of Marincello was underway. Now that property was a dairy ranch.

Silva? Was that it? Do you recall that?

MF: Yes, Silva.

HS: That's the land that's in the area from Wolfback Grade. It's in back of Sausalito and went on out to Rodeo Lagoon---out by the National Seashore.

MF: By the forts? You'd have to go along there to get in to---

HS: You'd go through the tunnel?

MF: Yes.

HS: What do you know of them, other than the name?

MF: He had partners. In fact, the father of one of my best friends was a partner out there---Borba. It's all sort of before my time. When you're a child you don't pay attention. I just happen to remember there were some partners, but that Mr. Silva apparently had the most.

HS: I have some knowledge of it because I was somewhat involved in that political hassle, and then all I knew of Silva was that it was referred to as the Silva Ranch. At that time the property was owned by Gulf Oil Company. They sold it with lease arrangements to build this new city out there.

MF: Oh, yes, it's coming back--And then, along the Point Reyes National Seashore there were a number of dairies. I have some of their names. I'm just hesitant because I don't want to leave anybody out.

HS: There are probably descendants of those families that you vaguely remember--Who do you know that is still around?

MF: Like around my age group?

HS: Yes

MF: Jim Dias had a dairy on the Shoreline Highway.

HS: I understand there was some lady whose life was involved with the dairies down in the Redwood Retirement home.

MF: That's Mae Silva. Her father had a dairy going to Mt. Tam and it was later called the Horse Ranch. Her father was John Bernard.

HS: Her married name is Silva?

MF: Yes, Mae Silva. And then there were all those dairies along...

HS: You say on the way to Mt. Tam? Are you talking about in

the valley? Where's on the way to Mt. Tam?

MF: I don't know if they still have horses up there, but it used to be called the horse ranch. You go up through Old Mill Park. You know how you go up that road?

HS: Yes, that's where I live, above Old Mill Park.

MF: Okay, just keep going up that way on the way to Mt. Tam. There was a dairy up there, and then later it became the horse ranch. I can more or less visualize it.

HS: I was up on Mt. Tam last week. Skyline, no, they don't call it Skyline. What do they call it? There's another section, and one road goes up Mt. Tam and one goes down to Muir Beach.

MF: Well, this is before you make those turns. It's up, right on top and it's more recently called the horse ranch but I don't know if that's changed, too. And then, along Muir Beach, from Muir Beach to Muir Woods, that road along there, there were a number of dairies in there. There were Manuel and Tony Brazil, they had a dairy there. There was another family by the name of Santos that had a dairy there. Another family, Machado, Ponti, Lopes, Sousa brothers, *Joe* and Manuel.

HS: How do you remember all these names? Did you attend the get-togethers or...

MF: Yes, the early Portuguese had their own fraternal organizations and they also had, where there was a large settlement of them, like they have in Sausalito, a Portuguese hall. That's one of their fraternal organizations, I.D.E.S.T. These families would get together and they would have their once a year traditional religious occasion of the Holy Ghost celebration, and then they would have other socials through the year and we would all go with our parents and we'd get to know each other. They'd have dances and things like this, and it was really very nice.

HS: I presume most of them were Catholics?

MF: Yes

HS: You have a particular Portuguese Catholic Church?

MF: Yes, there is the National Church. There was one in San Jose. They used to have one in Oakland, but apparently that one isn't there anymore because that area has changed a lot. Different places in California did have National Churches, but gradually they were able to use their church for their special occasions because the local priest knew about it, and knew it was a religious celebration.

HS: My wife is Greek, and the Greek Orthodox church is, from my observation, as much a place for national get-togethers of the

Greek Community as it is a religious experience. That's the way the Greek Community keeps together.

MF: These organizations still exist, and they are pretty successful with many of the descendants around California. They say that wherever there is a group of Portuguese you have the Holy Ghost celebration. The celebration goes back to the fourteenth or fifteenth century in Portugal. So they will always have that.

Getting back to the dairies, there was, from Muir Beach going to Stinson the Slide ranch, owned first by a family by the name of Viera, and then later the Leal family had it.

HS: If I take a map of Southern Marin and just put in a few of the highways and geographical locations, could you write in the names? I'll send it to you.

MF: This family named Borges, they had one of the first dairies here near the old cemetery that is on the road going out to Tennessee. He would have been grandfather to Mae Silva who lives at the Redwoods.

HS: What's the name?

MF: Borges.

HS: I am sure that there was a great variance in numbers, but it sounds like these were relatively small dairies as I think about them today. What did you have, about fifty cows do you think?

MF: Maybe, or more.

HS: Would the size of your dad's farm be about typical?

MF: Well, yes. Of course, going along Muir Beach to Muir Woods, maybe those dairies would be a little more acreage that way. In Tennessee it was pretty much condensed. They had a lot of cattle for the size of the area.

HS: You had to bring the feed.

MF: Oh, yes. You could graze out there. When my father first had the dairy where Scott Valley is today, that was right after the early 1920's. The dairy came up to where my mother lives on Mountain View Avenue. Cattle were pastured where the Golf Course is. It was all dairies. You could see cattle all around there about 1910 - 1915, something like that. My dad remembered. He was still with many partners because that was just the beginning when he came to Alto. He remembered going up in the hills and seeing the San Francisco fire in 1906. He could see it from up in the hills. I remember him saying that.

HS: In California it doesn't take many generations to get back to the beginning of our history.

MF: No--the changes I have seen right here in Mill Valley!

HS: I so often think (I have daughters who live in the East Bay, Contra Costa, Clayton, and beyond there), and as I drive over there and in the evening around here, I just think what old John Reed or whoever of the original landgrant owners, how different it was in their time and our time and what a short lapse of time that is.

Janet Filippi: Really. Well let's consider Enchanted Knolls itself. I am only 32, but I can still remember when it was undeveloped and just to think of what has happened even now where Red Cart is. Now all the area has just developed within the last four or five years.

NOTE: THE ORIGINAL INTERVIEW TAPE IS IN THE CARE OF
MARIE M. FILIPPI.