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**PHYLLIS FABER**

**An Oral History Interview  
Conducted by Stella Perone in 2013**

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TITLE: Oral History of Phyllis Faber  
INTERVIEWER: Stella Perone  
DESCRIPTION: Transcript, 17 pages  
INTERVIEW DATE: September 9<sup>th</sup> and October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Phyllis Faber grew up in the Eastern United States, hearing stories about Sonoma, Marin, and the Sierras from her father, who had lived in the Bay Area as a youth. She first moved to Mill Valley in 1962 with her husband and children, then left due to her husband's job transfers, later returning in 1970. In this oral history, Phyllis discusses her happy times in Mill Valley neighborhoods, becoming friends with various families, including the families of Jack Hemingway and Peter Behr. She also discusses her interest in biology, and how she came to study and advocate for wetlands preservation. Phyllis describes her involvement in the first Earth Day (1970), the creation of the California Coastal Commission, and incidents during her 10 years of service on the Commission. Phyllis also explains how she came to co-found the Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT).

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## Oral History of Phyllis Faber

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**Oral History of Phyllis Faber**  
**September 9<sup>th</sup> and October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013**

**Editor's note:** This transcript differs in ways from the audio recording. It was reviewed and corrections, clarifications, and additions were made.

**Stella Perone:** This is Stella Perone interviewing Phyllis Faber on September 9<sup>th</sup> in the morning. Phyllis, tell me about your parents or your family.

**Phyllis Faber:** Well, my father was born in Oakland, California. His father, my grandfather, had immigrated from Scotland to Oakland. There was a large group of Scottish people that lived in Oakland at that time. I think my grandfather's parents always hosted a big party at Christmas time, Hogmanay Day. So anyway, he grew up in Oakland. His father died shortly after the earthquake. I remember tales of having to move the stove out of the house because of the earthquake and surround it with cardboard on the street in Oakland so that they could cook outside. His father died fairly soon after that.

When he was growing up, his mother had a friend in Oakland. She would send my father to their ranch in Sonoma County in the summertime so that he could become manly, there would be manly things going on the ranch and that would be a good thing for my father. Amazingly, in later life, I met the man who owns that ranch, Crawford Cooley, and he has become a very dear friend of mine, so it is a wonderful rounding of the circle.

Anyway, my father married my mother who came from the East Coast. They lived in Oakland for some time, a short number of years. He went back East for his business career but always told us when we were children tales of California and camping up in the Sierra and these wonderful, wonderful tales. Our lives were filled with the beauties of the Sierra and summers camping. And during the Second World War, the son of the best man at my parents' wedding came east from Oakland to go the European theater and met my sister and after the war when he came back, they were married. They corresponded during the war. So my sister came out to San Francisco in 1946 and has lived out here through the end of her life. Her name is Pat de Fremery and she has lived in Mill Valley since 1950 up on Lovell Avenue.

My parents, when they retired in '59, they bought the house from Tom Stone down on Cascade and lived in that for the rest of their lives. They both died in that house. The house 130 Cascade had belonged to Tom Stone. I think the year after my father died, in 1981, I think that house was 100 years old. He was looking forward to celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that house, 130 Cascade. So it was sad for all of us that he died before that celebration.

**Stella Perone:** Who was Tom Stone?

**Phyllis Faber:** Tom Stone was a physician here in Mill Valley, a well-known physician. He lived here for many, many years. I'm not quite sure why he sold the house. It needed a lot of repairs and he just wanted something newer, I think. He had had, I think, his wife, Virginia Stone, who was a botanist, she died sometime after, she died in the early '70s. Tom made a donation to the California Native Plant Society to provide botany books for the Mill Valley Library. They have some books in that library that were purchased on behalf of Virginia Stone.

**Stella Perone:** Phyllis, what was your parents' names? Faber is your —

**Phyllis Faber:** It's my name, yeah. Paul and Marjorie Kydd. And my sister's name is Pat de Fremery.

**Stella Perone:** Where was the Cooley Ranch?

**Phyllis Faber:** The Cooley Ranch is up in Sonoma and Mendocino. It is a very large ranch. At one time, it was 22,000 acres. There have been additions to it as it has been developed. It was owned by the Cooley family. When my father was sent there, it was managed by Charlie Cooley who later died. His brother really owned it. His brother was a lawyer for Mayor Rolph in San Francisco so they put this ranch together over the years. The latest addition to the ranch was the result of the construction of the Warm Springs Dam up in Sonoma. They had to condemn quite a bit of the acreage of the Cooley Ranch in order to create that reservoir. So the Cooley Ranch was expanded at that time. It's just a very, very beautiful ranch. Interesting how the owner of it and I became friends at a much, much later time.

**Stella Perone:** Just coincidentally you became friends?

**Phyllis Faber:** Well, we became friends because he was the first addition to the newly established and functioning MALT<sup>1</sup> board. We needed to expand the board, and someone proposed somebody named Crawford Cooley. So when he joined our board, I said to him, "Do you know of a ranch in Sonoma, a Cooley Ranch?" He said, "Well, I have one." So it turns out that that indeed was the very ranch that my father was sent to as a boy. I was absolutely blown away by meeting the man. He took me up to see the ranch. At that time, I was eagerly learning all of the names of all the wildflowers in California. He has always been interested in the flowers, so for the next several years, we made a plant list for that ranch and spent a long time each spring. Even to this day, he sees something that isn't on the list and he will bring me down a specimen of the plant to make sure it's on the plant list. So it has been a lot of fun for me, for both of us, really.

**Stella Perone:** Did he remember your father?

**Phyllis Faber:** No, he didn't. He wouldn't have been at the ranch in the years that my father was there. He did come to try to meet him but it was when my father was dying and he happened to come on a bad day, so he didn't get a chance to meet him. I was always sorry about that. But what a remarkable coincidence and sort of closing of a circle.

**Stella Perone:** How old is Crawford today, roughly?

**Phyllis Faber:** He's two years older than I am. He's 87, yeah.

**Stella Perone:** Great. Hey, tell me about 130 Cascade after your parents moved on.

**Phyllis Faber:** Well, when my mother died, we obviously needed to do something about that house.

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<sup>1</sup> Marin Agricultural Land Trust

**Stella Perone:** What year was this?

**Phyllis Faber:** This was in 1984. So we spent close to a year repainting and fixing the house up in order to put it onto the market. The family that really wanted the house, they said they just wanted the house so badly. So we thought they are the family that should have the house and in many ways, I am glad because they have as a family enjoyed it. But what is interesting and disappointing is that my sister and I had decided we would not put it under historic overlay. The kitchen really needed to be remodeled and we were afraid that it would inhibit whoever bought the house about remodeling the kitchen so we declined doing that. After we sold this family the house, they really didn't have enough money to support the house so they lifted the house up off the ground and put a rental unit under the house and they destroyed the architectural design of the house. I have so regretted that. I felt that it was unfair to the house to have done it. They also — my mother had a wonderful garden. They cared nothing about gardens and they drove their cars into the yard and parked the cars on the redwood trees. I have worried, I have asked them to do something about it and I have asked them not to, but I don't own the house anymore. They have put stones on the ground so it isn't quite as severe, but I do worry about parking on redwoods, I think it's not healthy for the redwood trees. So I have had some anxieties about them. What I am happy about is that it is a family and they have raised their children there and that's wonderful.

**Stella Perone:** Phyllis, when did you come back to Mill Valley?

**Phyllis Faber:** We came to Mill Valley the first time in, my parents came here in '59. My sister came in '50. We came in I think '62 or '63.

**Stella Perone:** “We” is?

**Phyllis Faber:** Husband and two children, two boys. Edward, my husband, worked for Xerox. We had been moved around a tremendous amount. At that time, we were living in Rochester, New York in the home office of Xerox. We were asked if we wanted to go to Washington, D.C. or to San Francisco. There was zero choice in that, we were thrilled to come to San Francisco. So we moved to Mill Valley in 1962 or '63 and bought a house at the end of the golf course of Vista Linda. We were there for three years.

**Stella Perone:** Do you remember the number?

**Phyllis Faber:** I don't think I do. It's the first house when you go through the redwood trees and around the end of the golf course. It's the first house, I just don't remember the number, it's on the right. But that was the most wonderful neighborhood I think I have ever lived in in my whole life. We just became such good friends of everybody there. I still see them to this day.

**Stella Perone:** Who were they?

**Phyllis Faber:** Well, they were the Jordans, Francie Jordan lived right up the hill, Francie and Larry Jordan and their children that were friends of my children. The Hemingways, Jack and

Puck Hemingway,<sup>2</sup> were across the street. The Goldfines were right up the street for us. We still see the Jordans and the Goldfines. It was a very happy time for us, living in that house, it was wonderful. Xerox again moved us in 1966, they moved us back in New York to the headquarters. Ed became the head of their education division. So we bought a house where my cousin lived in Rowayton, Connecticut and that was another really happy time for us. We were there for four years. I finished my degree at Yale. Then we came back in 1970. Ed left Xerox and we came back to Mill Valley in 1970 and lived at John and Betty Goerke's house, whom we had known when we lived in Mill Valley before and they were away in Holland for the year.

**Stella Perone:** Is their house up in Morrow?

**Phyllis Faber:** Yeah. So we lived in that house for a year, we rented it. Then we bought Peter Bayer's house at 212 and have been there ever since, which is now 43 years. It's been a wonderful time in Mill Valley.

**Stella Perone:** So you lived across the street from the Hemingways on Vista Linda.

**Phyllis Faber:** I did. Their house was across the street instead of up and a hill. Jack and Puck, they had two children — three children. was the youngest and she was exactly son Charlie's age, so they played. I have a marvelous picture of them at a birthday party together. Then Margaux was older, she was in the fourth and fifth grade when we lived there. I absolutely adored Margaux Hemingway, she was such fun. I'd take the kids over to the beach and Margaux would come with us. She was so spirited. I always remember her opening the window when we were passing a deer and hooting out the window, she was just full of spirit, full of life. We never locked our door. Because we were at the bottom of the hill, we were sort of the neighborhood, everybody would roll down the hill and into our place. Margaux would come in on a Saturday morning. I would wake up Saturday morning and Margaux would be standing there staring at me, willing me to wake up in the morning.

**Stella Perone:** She was in fourth grade, you said?

**Phyllis Faber:** Fourth or fifth grade. I adored her. I think of all the children I have known, she was one of my favorite children. She was so full of life, so full of spirit, she was just a remarkable child. Jack and Puck were lots of fun. Puck was a fabulous cook, so it was always a treat to go to their house for dinner. It was always intimidating to have them come to our house for dinner.

**Stella Perone:** Were Jack and Puck about your age?

**Phyllis Faber:** Yeah, something on the order.

**Stella Perone:** And Jack was the author's son?

**Phyllis Faber:** Jack is the oldest son. Puck had gone to Cordon Bleu School in Paris with Julia Child. She was that type of cook, which was very intimidating for me, but great treat to go up

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<sup>2</sup> Byra "Puck" Louise Hemingway

there for dinner. Jack was always fun. Jack, I think, I think in his own personal life, I think Jack was troubled. He had difficulties, I remember hearing things, he would come home late at night sometimes and Puck would be hard on him. I think he was suffering to some extent. When they had a chance, they moved back to Idaho, which was probably a better place for them than the business he was in here. I think that didn't suit him wonderfully well.

But there were a lot of wonderful times. There were times when his brothers would come. The *Moveable Feast* was published soon before or after we came to that house and got to know them. One of the funny things was that they were planning to have a book signing party because Patrick, one of the younger sons, a different mother than Jack's, could imitate his father's handwriting. So they were going to have a post-something book signing of Ernest Hemingway's new book. There were really lots of fun times like that. Patrick spent a lot of time in Africa. I remember walking around our area with him and his describing how the grasses in Africa looked a lot like the grasses in Marin County. Some years later when I got to Africa and saw those grasses I thought, "god, I don't agree with that at all, they are just an entirely coarser, more difficult kind of grass." But it was fun talking to him about what Africa was like and all that.

**Stella Perone:** Did you ever meet Ernest?

**Phyllis Faber:** No, he had died. No, he died before we came.

**Stella Perone:** Oh okay, sorry. So you rented the house in Vista Linda.

**Phyllis Faber:** We bought it, we owned it.

**Stella Perone:** You owned it, oh, okay.

**Phyllis Faber:** Yeah. And also another person that was a neighbor, Gloria Melbastat, the Melabstats lived just beyond the gold mines. So she has always been and is to this day a very dear friend of mine. We shared an au pair for a couple of years. Gloria has always been a great friend of mine. It was just a fabulous neighborhood to live in. While we were living on Vista Linda, we had two little boys and we adopted a little girl. It turned out to be such an amazingly wonderful neighborhood project to adopt a little girl. Nobody in the neighborhood had ever had that happen to them. This was sort of a neighborhood baby.

**Stella Perone:** How old was she?

**Phyllis Faber:** She was I think three weeks. She was tiny when she came. So everybody was just thrilled with this baby. I had babysitters up the ying-yang. Ricky Goldfine would come over and we would taste test different baby foods. They would babysit. It was just a great fun project.

**Stella Perone:** How old were your boys when you adopted her?

**Phyllis Faber:** I think the oldest was nine and Charlie was six, something like that. It was a neighborhood project. I always remember the neighborhood getting into adopting this baby and how much those kids loved that baby.



**Stella Perone:** What was her name?

**Phyllis Faber:** Caroline. They all wanted to hold her, they all wanted to take her here and take her there. She had a very busy life.

**Stella Perone:** Were you working at this point?

**Phyllis Faber:** No, I was home. I was going to school.

**Stella Perone:** What were you going to school in?

**Phyllis Faber:** We had moved so much, we had moved something like 15 times over our married life and had been back and forth across the country. I really felt like I needed something for me, it was time.

**Stella Perone:** But you already had your bachelor's degree, right, before you got married?

**Phyllis Faber:** Yeah. So anyway, I went back to school, started taking courses at San Francisco State and discovered field biology. I had worked in labs when I got out of school. I worked at Rockefeller and Eli Lilly and ran a hospital lab. I had had a lot of years of laboratory experience but I had never done field biology, which I discovered at San Francisco State and absolutely loved. At the same time, Watson and Crick had just done their thing with DNA and in the years that I was at Rockefeller, we had been working on the model of DNA in the nucleus and RNA in the cytoplasm. So we kept breaking up cells and then testing the nuclei for DNA and RNA and we kept finding traces of RNA. So we thought we weren't getting ourselves really clean, so we did this over and over and over and over, I can't tell you how many times. Of course when Watson and Crick came out, their model was that there was RNA in the nucleus, there was the transfer of the information out of the cell to the ribosomes where the proteins are made, so it made absolute sense and we were just looking at the wrong model for so many years. So I was enthralled by this and so decided that that's what I would get my master's in. Then Xerox moved us again. The faculty at San Francisco State happened to have a contact at Yale, so she arranged for me to go and work at Yale. I worked at Yale and maintained a culture collection for Dr. Ed Adleberg at Yale, and then the following year he gave me a little piece of the research he was doing so I could finish my master's, so that's how that worked. It was a fascinating era in science.

**Stella Perone:** It must have been hard to have three small kids when you were doing that.

**Phyllis Faber:** Well, we had a wonderful Jamaican that came and lived with us, so she took care of Caroline, so that was alright. But it did mean that I couldn't really go into laboratory-type work because those are long days and you really have to just be devoted to it. So it changed the course of my life, which I think has probably been a very good thing, because when I finished, I took a job teaching in the private school that was in the community where we were living so I could be home after school when the kids came home from school. So that worked a lot better

and it really set me off in a totally different direction. I think for my lifetime that has really worked well.

**Stella Perone:** And that's when you got involved in wetland preservation.

**Phyllis Faber:** That's when I got involved in wetland preservation. The woman whose job I was taking was named Joy Lee and her mother had been the mayor of Sydney, Australia. Joy Lee was a force to contend with. She said to me, "The world is going to fall apart if we don't preserve wetlands." So I knew nothing about wetlands. The woman that was at Yale in my lab was in charge of Yale's problem down in Sapelo Island, Georgia. So I went to her and I said, "Barbara, did you know that the world is going to fall apart if we don't save wetland?" And she had no idea. So Joy Lee knew what Yale didn't know. So anyway, she did really persuade me that I should pay attention to wetlands, learn about them, and should foster the organization that she had put together, which was called Protect Your Environment. So I was at the helm of Protect Your Environment. It was the year that was the first Earth Day.

**Stella Perone:** What year was that, do you think?

**Phyllis Faber:** This was in 1970. So Joy came up at Christmas and we went to the AAAS<sup>3</sup> meetings and she made sure I met the people in Washington that were putting on Earth Day. I spent that spring working like crazy putting together an enormous Earth Day.

**Stella Perone:** For your town?

**Phyllis Faber:** The school and the town, yeah. We rented an enormous tent and we had a very wonderful program, I must say. All kinds of people, all kinds of interests, all kinds of environmental issues. It was a very big deal. People still remember it, all these years later, in Rowayton, Connecticut. It got me launched into the field of wetlands. So when we did move to California in 1970, I started teaching with a small group of teachers called Natural Science Education Resources that were interested in natural history. And so I also was interested in wetlands, so I got involved with the group that was trying to pass coastal legislation. Back in Connecticut, there was a coastal bill, there were three coastal bills. I really tried very hard to get the most stringent of those three bills passed in Connecticut. The girls and I would go and meet people at the train station and say, "Work on this bill, get them to pass!"

**Stella Perone:** Wait, who were the girls?

**Phyllis Faber:** The students at my school, we'd go down and meet trains and pressure people to do the right thing. So anyway, back in California, I became part of a group that Janet Adams was heading. They were trying to pass coastal legislation. Alan Sarodi had a bill fail. There was a second bill that he was trying to get passed and it was agreed that if that bill failed, and I think its number was 1475, if that bill failed, that they would put an initiative on the ballot. Pete Wilson was mayor of San Diego at that time and he agreed to this, he liked the idea of a coastal initiative. It's curious that later when he became governor, he didn't like the Coastal Act at all, but he did support it back in 1970. Because he did, Janet Adams had the courage to put this

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<sup>3</sup> American Association for the Advancement of Science

initiative on the ballot. So I became co-chair for the Marin County effort. I have to say, I really worked like a dog, I got signatures night and day. Marin came in with the largest percentage for Prop 20 of any county in California except Yolo County and that was the Davis students, the Davis students really went all out. So the two of us really had a tremendous turnout. Well Peter Bayer was our state senator at that time. Sort of as a reward, he invited me to become a member of the first Coastal Commission, which is what Prop 20 did, it created a Coastal Commission in California.

**Stella Perone:** Now was this before you bought his house? How did that work?

**Phyllis Faber:** It was before.

**Stella Perone:** Was it a coincidence you bought Peter Bayer's house?

**Phyllis Faber:** You know, I'm a little fuzzy on what I was doing. I think we bought his house before. It wasn't connected at all. My work wasn't connected with 212 at all. But I think I might have been living there, I really just don't remember. I think it's highly coincidental. It does seem like a coincidence but it actually had nothing to do with Prop 20.

**Stella Perone:** Okay, so anything, Peter Bayer got you on the Coastal Commission.

**Phyllis Faber:** So through the senate rules committee, he invited me to join the Coastal Commission. And that has always been an extraordinary experience. It was intimidating for me, it was sort of overwhelming to me to be on such a commission.

**Stella Perone:** Was that a full-time job?

**Phyllis Faber:** No, no, there were meetings just once a month.

**Stella Perone:** A lot of prep work to do?

**Phyllis Faber:** There was a lot of prep work and a lot of visiting the sights and looking to see what the projects were. It was a lot of pressure. In those early days of the commission, people felt very free calling you and urging you to vote one way or another on an issue.

**Stella Perone:** What were some of the issues that you would address while you were on the Coastal Commission?

**Phyllis Faber:** Oh, well, there were a lot. Some of the ones that I can remember were, there was a man that had purchased a, there was a former business partner of Bill Strauss.

**Stella Perone:** Of the dairy?

**Phyllis Faber:** Yeah. Herb Angrus had been a partner of Bill's, he had become a partner, hadn't brought any money in the partnership but became a partner and worked for a number of years. When Bill wanted to break up that partnership, he gave Herb Angrus 100 acres of land as

thanks and as fair breaking of the partnership. Well, Herb Angrus tried to develop a campground because he thought that, this was sort of the end of the '60s and hippies were the big thing, so he proposed a campground on a piece of this 100 acres that was in the inboard side of Highway 1 on the edge of Tomales Bay. The county freaked out about having a campground with hippies, so they turned down Herb Angrus's project. So then he thought, "Oh, alright, if the county doesn't want that, then we will have a motel." So he made plans for a motel and he cited it on the bay side of Highway 1. Of course, in the meantime, the Coastal Act passed and the Coastal Act prohibits anything from Highway 1 out to the water edge.

So when this came up to the Coastal Commission, it was extremely interesting because Michael Wornum as a supervisor had voted for the Angrus motel. Margaret Azevedo as the plan of the heading commission had voted for the thing, but now both of them as Coastal Commissioners, which they both were, they voted against it because they could see it didn't conform to the Coastal Act. I was really proud of both of them. Herb Angrus's project went down in flames, so that was interesting.

There were some wonderful projects. We had a commissioner named Wanda Zankich, she owned the Tides restaurant up in Bodega. She was a wonderful woman. She was fairly inarticulate but she absolutely supported the fisherman. So Wanda always spoke up when there were issues of fishing that would come up, she would always stand up for the fisherman. Our commission made possible for the dock in Bodega Bay to be built and I think that was always a wonderful project.

We had some silly projects. There were projects in San Francisco. Our commission covered San Francisco, Marin, and Sonoma. Some of the silly things, we had projects in San Francisco, there were some Irish contractors there and they wanted to remodel or build houses. So it got into issues like would the new houses create shade on a neighbor's house and so on. This was just stuff that we should absolutely not have been dealing with. Eventually all of that kind of permit work was taken away from the commission, which was a good thing. Some of the interesting things, like the Steep Ravine cabins, there were owners that owned the Steep Ravine cabins. When GGNRA<sup>4</sup> was created, that ownership went to the federal government — is that right, or the state?

**Stella Perone:** I think it might be the state, because you call the state campgrounds to make reservations.

**Phyllis Faber:** Okay, yeah, that makes better sense, it went to the state. So the state came, that's correct, the State Parks, and applied to tear down the Steep Ravine cabins. Because the coast commission had low and moderate cost housing as one of the things that was to be preserved, we turned down tearing down Steep Ravine cabins. So then the State Parks came back and they said, "ah," and they came back with a proposal to build them all up to code, which was prohibitively expensive, so we turned that down. Then they came back with what we have today, which is just so terrific. They were low cost, no electricity, no running water, and the public has really enjoyed that.

**Stella Perone:** So the cabins there today were built after this decision?

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<sup>4</sup> Golden Gate National Recreation Area

**Phyllis Faber:** The cabins were there. They were owned by individuals and the state took them over.

**Stella Perone:** Okay, I understand now.

**Phyllis Faber:** So what to do about them. State Parks first wanted to tear them down, then they wanted to build them into castles, and then they finally got it right.

**Stella Perone:** So they just kept them as they were but took out the electricity? Or did they have electricity?

**Phyllis Faber:** They didn't have electricity. They made them what they are today, no electricity, no running water. I think they got it right finally. But that was the kind of issue that the Coastal Commission has dealt with. And what has been really thrilling was that there was one state commission and six regional commissions. Joe Bonovitz, who was the first executive director, created a plan delineating 10 different areas of planning: marine resources, the coastal energy citing, coastal highways, there were 10 elements to the planning effort. All six commissions and the state all made plans for their part of the coast that covered these 10 areas. There were hearings for each of the 10 elements in each of the six commissions. If you multiply three hearings, one for our north-central commission, one in San Francisco, one in Marin, and one in Sonoma, three hearings for each of the 10 elements, that's 30 hearings minimum, times six regions, plus the state. All of this was put together in one plan and sent back to the legislature in 1976. That's what the 1976 Coastal Act was built on. When it all went back to the legislature, it was the same legislature that couldn't pass the Coastal Act before. No local government wants a regional agency to tell them what to do or not to do, so they were still against it. The local governments didn't want anybody interfering with their power, so there was a hostile audience up in Sacramento for the 1976 plan. I went back to them and Willie Brown got people in a room and said, "We will pass a plan." So that is the Coastal Act that we have that Mel Lane, who was chair, said, "This is an impossible act we have been given and we will make it work." So it has worked, certainly not perfectly, ever since, but at least there is some coastal regulation along California's coast.

**Stella Perone:** Great. So how long were you on the Coastal Commission?

**Phyllis Faber:** I was on for probably — it was three years until — and then I was on another six years I think. I was the chair for two years and eventually I was knocked off the commission. I was appointed to be on the state commission and our new state senator Barry Keene knocked me off the commission because I hadn't supported him in his election, I had supported Gary Giacomini. Peter Bayer had never told me what a political spot I was in. He was such a wonderful person and he never said, "Phyllis, you are in a very political role," and I never thought about it. So when Gary said would I support him to run for Senate I said sure, not understanding what a stupid thing that was. So you know, I shot myself in the foot.

**Stella Perone:** Wouldn't you have still supported Gary Giacomini? Do you regret that move supporting him?

**Phyllis Faber:** I could have just stayed private and then I wouldn't have been knocked off the commission. Yeah, yeah. You live and learn. So I was off the Coastal Commission and spent — at the same time, I had formed a little consulting company called Madrone Associates.

I think I'd like to just talk a little bit about the Coastal Commission on the formation of MALT. Ellen Strauss and I had this wonderful idea but it really would have been a very long shot for our wonderful idea to have taken hold in the world of politics. I'm from East Marin and a biologist, that certainly doesn't give me any cache with the agricultural world at all, nor with the political world. Ellen was the wife of a rancher, fat Jewish woman. The two of us, I mean, who would have thought that we could form an organization that would serve the county as well as it has. I think the reason that it worked was that at the time that we proposed this idea, it just was coincidental that the county was having to create a coastal element for their general plan and that's what the 1976 law required.

Each city and each county along the California coast to create a coastal plan that would be embedded in the local general plans for the counties and cities. So Marin was in the middle of doing that in the late '70s and they were having a hard time. Marin has a lot of agricultural land. The downzoning for A62, A60 that had occurred several years before in '73, something in that era, had been extraordinarily controversial, hugely controversial. So the idea of further downzoning as required by the Coastal Commission was causing the supervisors to have panic attacks. It wasn't just from A60 to A70, it was to 120 or 240 that the Coastal Commission was talking about. The worst of it was that there was — the coastal line went right down the middle of the agricultural land in the county, so one side would remain A60 because it would have been out of the coastal zone, whereas the other side of this line would have been in A120, creating huge inequity in the community. So the supervisors were facing this situation they just simply didn't know how to deal with. So at that time, the people who were involved in Ellen and my meetings about forming a land trust were Gary Giacomini, the supervisor; Jerry Freedman, the head of the planning commission; and Ralph Grossi, who was head of the land use committee for the Farm Bureau. Those were the three people that were dealing with this. So at that point, Ralph said to the other two, "Well, maybe the idea of a land trust would get us off this road and we wouldn't have to do this dividing and downzoning half the county." So that was the push that made them accept the idea of MALT as a land trust.

[September 9<sup>th</sup> interview ends]

**Stella Perone:** October 4<sup>th</sup>, Stella Perone talking to Phyllis Faber.

**Phyllis Faber:** So, the county board of supervisors chose to try out the land trust instead of downzoning in the county. So we set about putting together such a land trust. It was the first agricultural land trust in the nation with no existing examples to follow. The Trust for Public Land recommended a really wonderful lawyer, who helped us set up the 501c3 corporation. Ralph Grossi remained extremely helpful in the process and became our first chairman.

**Stella Perone:** Was he the lawyer?

**Phyllis Faber:** No, he was the Farm Bureau person, the rancher and head of the Land Use Committee of the Marin Farm Bureau who had said, "Let's try a land trust instead of downzoning" to the County Supervisors. He, Ellen and I got together to choose the first board of

directors for MALT. We did this carefully and chose very well-respected conservative ranchers from West Marin; a person from the Coastal Conservancy, Don Rubenstein, who was familiar with land trusts; and Rod Martinelli, a lawyer for many of the ranchers. Our first board met at Ralph's father's ranch. I'll always remember meeting in a little house on this ranch, it was great fun. Little by little, we got started, the ranchers in West Marin, of course, didn't think anything of MALT, and we made no headway for quite a while with the ranchers because they could see no purpose in this organization.

The first easement that we undertook was with a ranch that had a huge amount of debt with a feed company and they were about to go under because of this large debt. So we purchased their development rights by placing an easement on their property. Ralph organized this easement purchase, which was exciting, we had number one easement. The other ranchers certainly weren't excited. We turned down Bill Niman and Orville Schell down in Bolinas. They had bought a big piece of property on the edge of the coast in Bolinas and wanted to raise pigs. We turned them down because we were so nervous that Bolinas with its hippie reputation would confirm the mainstream ranchers' view that MALT was not safe for them. It wasn't until Willie LeFrankie, a very well-respected and conservative rancher and member of our board, came along and carried out a project with us in Nicasio that the ranchers' views changed about MALT. His neighbor had died — she had a property that Willie could see out his bedroom window, and had always wanted to own. If he put easements on his ranch, it would give him enough money to buy the neighbor's ranch with easements on both. This transaction with Willie LaFrankie changed MALT's history because other ranchers said, "Wow, if Willie did that, then maybe we should consider MALT."

It's a wonderful story. The San Francisco Foundation that later became the Marin Community Foundation and the State Coastal Conservancy both funded us and helped MALT get started. I've always been grateful to them. They liked the idea and they gave us money, so it got us off the ground and eventually we hired staff. The first staff person we hired didn't work out very well so they didn't stay terribly long, a year. We hired Bob Berner when MALT had been functioning for about two years Bob did a wonderful job with MALT's easement program. He was there for I think 28 years and during the course of his tenure, MALT now has easements on almost 50 percent of Marin's agricultural land, which is huge. It gives me great comfort because I think no court would reverse these easements. The easements are created in perpetuity but nonetheless I have always been concerned that there could be some legal maneuver that the courts would say, we really need to reverse this easement and then of course other easement holders might wish to reverse theirs. We recently hired a new executive director, Jamison Watts, whom I like. He and the staff seem to get along very well, so I think we are off and running.

The really hard part for agriculture is twofold: one, the value of the land, somebody that is very wealthy can easily buy a ranch, a 300-, 600-acre ranch, and build a castle on that ranch, which they can do it even if there are easements on it; and two, the threat the Point Reyes Seashore poses to agriculture. The park, according to the former superintendent Don Neubacher, is planning to get all agriculture out of the park. That represents 23 percent of Marin's agriculture, so it would be a very severe blow to our agricultural efforts because no industry can sustain a 23 percent drop and have the support team, the people that fix machines, sell machines, sell grain, remain healthy with a 23 percent shrink in their industry.

**Stella Perone:** Why do they want to get the agriculture out of the park?

**Phyllis Faber:** I don't know. I think it's extraordinarily unwise, but there are people who crave wilderness. The concept of wilderness is sort of a romantic dream in my view. There are roads out there in the park, there are cattle, it has been in agriculture for 200 years, so I don't even know what they are talking about with wilderness. The whole of Point Reyes, the whole land mass is not large enough to support a top predator, so it never will be genuine wilderness as a complete ecosystem. The people that plead for wilderness to me are sort of pleading for a romantic dream, but in the meantime they are undercutting such a lot of open space and habitat for wildlife in the rest of Marin County. I think they really don't understand the long-term consequences of their quest for wilderness on land developed 200 years ago. So far, MALT is doing well. We now have the fourth board member who is a second-generation board member on our board. It is encouraging that new generations of ranchers are supporting MALT and chipping in to help.

**Stella Perone:** Who is that?

**Phyllis Faber:** Well, the first one was Sam Dolcini, whose father Earl was on the original board; and then we had Loren Poncia, Al Poncia's son; and Lynn Stray, Bob Giacomini's daughter; and we have Sam Dolcini back on the board for the second time.

Okay, I'm going to back up a little bit. When we came back out to California in 1970, I started teaching with a group called Natural Science Education Resources, NSER. We had a contract to do the program out at Audubon Canyon Ranch teaching the volunteers about what was at Audubon Canyon Ranch, looking at the birds and plants. We had a lot of fun doing that. I taught a little course in a salt marsh here in Mill Valley. Dick Harding from Harding-Lawson Soil and Engineering Co. heard or read about it and called me. He said that they needed to have a biological consultant because the California Environmental Quality Act [CEQA] had recently been passed. They had soil engineers but didn't have any biologists on their staff, so they wanted somebody that would come and consult with them. Well I panicked and said to them, "You need a PhD, not me." They said to me, "No, we don't want a PhD, we want somebody like you." So anyway, I got a couple of my friends at NSER to join me and we formed a little company called Madrone Associates. Dick Harding and his partner Bob Lawson and Frank Boerger, recently retired from the Corps of Engineers, and us three biologists, Nona Dennis, Remmie Kingsley and I each put a couple thousand dollars in and formed a little company called Madrone Associates.

**Stella Perone:** Wait, so did Harding and Lawson leave Harding and Lawson to come?

**Phyllis Faber:** No, they just put money in and gave us office space. So we started doing environmental impact [EIR] studies. It was all brand new, very brand new. The CEQA law had just passed. We really didn't know what the law required sometimes. I think at one point it asked for something like civil services, we had no idea what it meant, but we finally figured out, oh, they mean is there a fire department or a police force. One of my first assignments was to write an EIR for the Golden Gate Bridge district who wanted to expand their ferry service. They had looked at a lot of different sites in Marin and had settled on the site where the current Larkspur ferry is located. The best site was at the bottom of San Quentin prison with a much shorter channel but the warden of the prison fell apart when he heard that there might be a ferry terminal there. He said "Absolutely not, I'm not about to have boats at the foot of my prison for the prisoners to jump onto". So the selected site was moved back up the creek. I wrote an EIR for



that location. There was a small pickleweed island in Corte Madera Creek that required dredging resulting in a required mitigation. The mitigation we worked out for that project was for the bridge district to acquire the Muzzi Marsh, a 200-acre site of former wetland diked by Muzzi in anticipation of development. The Bridge District [GGBHTD] acquired the 200-acre site to serve as a mitigation for the ferry terminal. Part of the site was to be used to dispose of dredge spoils and part of it, 130 acres, was to be kept as a marsh restoration, the largest marsh restoration attempted to date.

The restoration consisted of opening the dikes to allow for tidal flow to return with no vegetation planting. The goal was to see just how the marsh would recover on its own. We believed that it would. There was a culvert inside that drained the marsh and some cord grass seed had apparently come through the culvert and was growing inside in a little pool. From that we believed that the plants would take hold on their own. We didn't have enough money to do anything else anyway. Tom Harvey down in South Bay had been working on a marsh called the Faber Tract and he had done some transplanting of cord grass and it had worked, so we just went ahead because there really wasn't a realistic alternative with this particular project. So that's how the Muzzi Marsh was created, really as a mitigation measure for the ferry terminal and as an experiment in marsh restoration.

Two years after the property had been purchased and the dikes breached in four places, the marsh began to become vegetated. Amazingly, there was a fine cover of pickleweed in the landward upper part of the marsh within two years the bayside sections took longer as the soil chemistry and elevations needed time for cord grass to establish. There were a couple of people on the Corte Madera City Council said this isn't what we were promised, we were promised a marsh. Two years after the dikes were breached, there was not 100 percent marsh cover, so Corte Madera felt they had been misled and they persuaded the Department of Fish and Game agents to complain to the Bridge district. The GGBHTD needed to be able to do maintenance dredging for the ferries so GGBHTD had to agree to some further actions, a trench all the way around the marsh to create a larger tidal prism, more water coming in. I always thought that was punitive and not needed.

The Bridge District needed the ability to dredge the channel for the ferry channel, so that had to go along and a plan to increase the tidal prism around the marsh site by digging channels around the site. They hired me to monitor the marsh and the response to the added channels around the site. After the channel was dug, I noticed that there were some changes that I couldn't explain from a botanical point of view, I really felt we needed a hydrologist, so I called up Phil Williams who was a hydrologist, and said, "I'd really like you to come and look at this and see what you think." So he and I got into monitoring wetland restoration projects, first the Muzzi Marsh, and China Camp as our control marsh, and then we monitored Warm Springs down in Fremont because that was another project in which Phil was involved. Eventually he also was involved in restoring Sonoma Baylands project, so I did the monitoring there as well.

So we did this monitoring work for about 25 years and have the longest data set available. I think it's really very unfortunate with the sea level rise coming that those monitoring projects are not being funded and followed. The Coastal Conservancy funded us to write guidelines for wetland restoration, just basically done as a kind of question and answer. If you could answer all the questions in the affirmative in this list of questions, then you are almost sure to have a good wetland restoration project. It really led you through the steps that you had to take, the things that you had to do to ensure that you had good channels and things like that. So anyway, we did that, and I think that's a valuable tool for people today. I wish the monitoring

was still going on because I think that with the amount of data there is in existence, it's too bad not to be watching to see what the sea level rise is doing, but funding is really hard to come by. Marin Community Foundation was very good to us for a lot of years. While still at Madrone Associates, I wrote the EIR for the Soulajule Reservoir and the ensuing bond measure. It is disappointing to see how that project has ended since the cost benefit study for the EIR all looked good.

Six months after the reservoir was built however, the oil crisis hit and the price of oil skyrocketed, if you remember. So the water district rarely pumps water from Soulajule because it's so expensive, the oil prices remain so high.

**Stella Perone:** How about now that oil prices have, gas prices — they are probably pumping off of gas. Gas prices are really low?

**Phyllis Faber:** I don't know, I really don't know. I really can't answer that. I don't think they do, I think they haven't need to. The water is there, so if they ever needed to, it's there. I think that's a comfort to MMWD<sup>5</sup>. The net safe yield is always a difficult number to come up with, how much do you actually have on a reservoir, how much can you actually pump out, when will your pipes start drawing water from the bottom, all those things are difficult and those numbers change all the time. But I don't think they have, except for once. Maybe in time they will, who knows, very dry year, they might have to.

So let's see. I guess, what I had done in 1980 when all this wetland work came up is I decided that what we needed was a field guide for the wetland plants. I was very involved with the California Native Plant Society at that time trying to learn all the plants of California. After I left Madrone, I really decided my greatest lack of information was the plants, so I went back, took all the courses over in Berkley in the botany department and got to be good friends with Herbert and Irene Baker, and Bob Orndoff, who have all added to my life so much. I put together a book, it's a field guide for wetland plants. I printed it myself because no publisher would print the pages keeping the scale of images life size. What I had done was lay a plant on a page and Xerox it, so you could take a plant out in the field and put it on the book next to the image that looked like it and you could be extremely sure that you had the right marsh plant. It's a wonderful field guide. I published that in 1980. Orndoff over at Berkeley saw it and asked me to become the editor of *Fremontia*, the journal of the California Native Plant Society. Marge Hayakawa was the retiring editor.

**Stella Perone:** Is that Senator Hayakawa's wife?

**Phyllis Faber:** Yes, a really lovely woman. She wanted to retire, so Bob asked if I would consider taking it on, which was a huge compliment to me. So I became the editor and I just loved it. It was a wonderful job. I spent the next 17 years searching out people around California to find out what was going on in botany in California. I ended up getting a fabulous designer who knew nothing about plants at all but over the years, not only did we become good friends but she learned so much about plants.

**Stella Perone:** What's her name?

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<sup>5</sup> Marin Municipal Water District

**Phyllis Faber:** Beth Hanson Winter. Publishing was so different back then. The text had to be typeset and the pages had to be pasted up, a very different show from our present computer world. Before too many years someone urged us to publish a flora that had been prepared. We did and it led to the formation of the California Native Society Press. I think Beth and I must have published 19 or 20 books for CNPS<sup>6</sup>. We put out little catalogues that were charming, and people bought many books. It came to an end when a group in the society wanted the money that we needed for publishing books to go to conservation projects even though publications produced about a third of the CNPS budget. I always thought it was too bad because I think the Native Plant Society has a very special niche for plant books. I think they think so now too. When CNPS decided to stop publishing, Bob Ornduff invited me to join him at UC Press and become co-editor of the Natural History Series with him. That was in 1999 or 2000, maybe. So we were co-editors for the rest of his life, he died not too many years after. And I'm still there. The California Natural History Series is a terrific series. I think they don't market it very well and people aren't buying books as much as they used to, so it doesn't get the attention and acclaim that it should, but it's a valuable service for the natural history of California's plants and animals. My feeling has always been that if people don't know them, if they don't learn them, then they won't care about protecting them, so in my view the series becomes really hugely important to California. I do a little publishing outside of UC Press. Just recently I published a book celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Point Reyes National Seashore, so I've done different publishing but primarily through UC Press.

The only other thing that we have to talk about is my time on the Buck Institute Board. My friend Crawford Cooley called me up and asked if I would have lunch to talk about an organization called the Buck Institute for Age Research. It was one of the three projects that were set up when at the time the court set up the Marin Community Foundation in Marin. The San Francisco Foundation had sued to break the Buck Trust, a large trust left by Beryl Buck and had lost in court. Crawford invited me to have lunch and talk about the Buck Institute that was being formed to do research. Sometime after that, he asked me if I would join the board of the Buck. Because he was there and because I had so enjoyed working with him at MALT, he had been the first outside person put onto the board at MALT after the original board, and we had become good friends. Because I had been engaged in research when I started after college at the Rockefeller Institute and at other research companies, I was intrigued by a research organization coming to Marin, so I accepted the invitation to join the board. The organization was just in its formative stage, it wasn't even clear what kind of research. Before I had joined the board, they had already purchased a piece of property in Novato. I don't think the location was a particularly wise choice but Gary Giacomini, a Marin supervisor, and Doug Maloney, County Council, had done this as this piece of land became available

**Stella Perone:** Is that the site where they are currently at?

**Phyllis Faber:** Yes. So the thing kept moving along and Jack Rowe, the director of the Mt. Sinai hospital in New York City — he later went on to be head of Aetna insurance — was our guide, really, and was terrific. He was a very enthusiastic, positive person. Eventually it was decided to go forward and create age research as the focus for this institute located in Novato. IM Pei had already been selected as the architect. We hired Carla Dingillo who took us out of the expensive offices that we had and put us into trailers on the site of the institute. The building was

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<sup>6</sup> California Native Plant Society

built out of those trailers. Dale Bredison, a researcher at the Burnham in the University of California in San Diego, came as the CEO and chief scientific officer. He has carried out his Alzheimer's research ever since.

I became chair of the construction committee and fortunately also hired Russ Fox, a supervising contractor who had also helped the County build their jail. The contracting company hired to build the building went bankrupt within three or four months of starting work. Ralph O'Rear, hired by Carla as facilities director, happily still at the Buck, and Russ Fox together got that building built. I, as chair of the construction committee, will be in awe of them forever. We had construction supervisors that drank on the job, we had so many problems with that building but Russ and Ralph saved the day. Today the buildings are working well and are very beautiful.

I question whether it was the wise route to spend so much money on buildings at the outset. If we had moved into warehouses and done our early science in warehouses until we had more money, it might have been wiser, but you know, it is what it is. So they are marching forward. I think they have done a terrific job of saying yes, we are not in San Francisco. They do great interdisciplinary work and I think Buck is off to a really good start. So we'll see, we'll see, 20 years from now, we'll know. I won't know, but they'll know. So I think that's pretty much where —

**Stella Perone:** I was just saying that it seemed like being the chair of the construction committee wasn't a logical choice given your background.

**Phyllis Faber:** No, wetland biologist to build that building was the height of folly, but there just wasn't anyone else. I mean, the board had shrunk down. By this time, there had been disagreements on the board, it had shrunk to just three members. Fred Drexler, Crawford, and I ended up at one point being the only three members still on the board. Crawford was chair and Fred Drexler, older and wiser, was our financial person, so there really wasn't anyone else to do the construction oversight.

**Stella Perone:** Phyllis, going back, Crawford was the one that your father on his father's knew — so that was like a total circle coming around.

**Phyllis Faber:** Right. That's always been a wonderful piece of the story. But anyway, I was, but I was under no illusion that I was adding much to the pie, but I was able to report back to the board and so on. Eventually, when I think the first buildings were built and opened and one of the early additions to the board was Art Gensler who is Gensler Associates, the world famous architect, and he has been their right-hand man ever since. He has been terrific, he has helped them in so many ways. So yes, my term as construction chair was short, but it was during a very important time because that's when the building got built. Art has been there for the subsequent building and for remodeling of another one. The Buck Institute, I think, has a very bright future and they are working very hard to become more integrated with the community because this community is a community of aging people, so that should be a centerpiece for the community, so we hope they get there.