

Mill Valley Oral History Program

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FLORENCE GARVIE

**An Oral History Interview
Conducted by Nancy McQuilkin in 2010**

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Florence Garvie was born on Mother's Day in 1924 at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C. Her father served in the Army, so Florence's family moved often in her early childhood, spending several years in Hawaii, Salt Lake City, and California. Florence attended high school in Pennsylvania and received a degree in botany from Pomona College in Claremont, CA. Her first job was as a nursery plant inspector for the Los Angeles County Agriculture Department. She then returned to graduate school at Pomona to earn a teaching certificate. In 1948, Florence accepted a teaching job in Ross and moved to Marin County, where she has lived ever since.

In her oral history, Florence recalls her childhood living abroad and the charming story of how she met her husband, Bill, after purchasing a leaky boat. She recounts how Bill and she built a summer home in Sonoma and how they enjoyed holidays and vacations with their four daughters. Florence shares her love of art and her friendship with her renowned art teacher, Ray Strong. In addition, she shares her experiences as an active member of the community, detailing her extensive involvement with the Outdoor Art Club, the Park School PTA, the 4-H club, and Girl Scouts.

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Oral History of Florence Garvie December 4th, 2010

Nancy McQuilkin: Thank you so much for having us today, Florence, in your home. It is December 4th, 2010. I am interviewing Florence Garvie. We are at 43 Nelson Avenue in Mill Valley. Florence has lived in Marin County for 62 years and at 43 Nelson for 56 years. Your father was in the Army and you traveled around a lot.

Florence Garvie: He was. I was born at Walter Reed Hospital in Washington, D.C. on Mother's Day in 1924, which I think not everybody can claim that. My father was moved from one spot to another. Before he joined the Army, he had taught high school in Wyoming and he really enjoyed that, so he requested Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) duty and was assigned to Pomona College in Claremont. So that is where my memory begins. I was three when we lived there. We lived there for five years and then we went to Schofield Barracks, which is in Oahu, and it was the Army's biggest military installation. It was interesting because they had air corps, field artillery, cavalry, infantry, the whole bit. And on special occasions, they would turn everybody out for a massive parade; that was fun. Then we moved from there to Salt Lake City and Fort Douglas, which is a Civil War outpost. It was built at the same time as Fort Point,¹ built for possible Southern invasion. It is a lovely very small post, and it was used during the Olympics.² It was exciting to see that the quarters we used were being used for different occasions there. So it was a lovely time in my life, being in Hawaii and then moving to ice and snow in the wintertime. Then my father got ROTC duty again at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania and that is where I went to high school. Then I came to college at Pomona and graduated from there, and I got a teacher's credential at the graduate school and came up here in Marin County in 1948 to teach in Ross, so that gets us up to me being in Marin County.

Nancy McQuilkin: Your first job was with the agriculture department?

Florence Garvie: I did. That was for two years after I graduated from college. I was a botany major and it was war time and all nurseries where they sell plants were inspected, so I did that. It was interesting, even with the dime stores that might sell plants. The ones you hated the most were the cactus because they were always down on the ground and it was hard to really see what you were doing. I forgot to say that in my going to school, I skipped first grade because I learned to read early, and when we lived in Salt Lake, they had a financial crunch in their budget and decided that they would eliminate eighth grade, just take it out, so I was two years ahead and graduated from high school when I was 16 by a month. When I graduated from college, because it was war time, we were on an accelerated program, I was 19. So it was sort of an early start on things. I worked for the Los Angeles County Agricultural Department inspecting nurseries all over Los Angeles

¹ Fort Point is located in San Francisco. The U.S. Army Engineers completed its construction in 1861 as part of a defense system to protect commercial and military interests in the San Francisco Bay. The Fort became a National Historic Site in 1970.

² Salt Lake City hosted the 2002 Winter Olympics.

County. I had a ration card, a funky old car, it was interesting, but I knew it was something I didn't want to do forever. There were three of us, girls, replacing men who had gone off to wartime sort of things. So that is when I went off to graduate school and got a teaching credential.

Nancy McQuilkin: What did you teach at Ross?

Florence Garvie: I had fifth grade first. I had 37 children. It was, should we say, a baptism by fire. Thirty-seven is a very full classroom and I did that for two years, and then I had third grade for four years and that was pure heaven; it was lovely, a nice age to teach. They think the teacher is great and they are not into peer pressure as much as 10-year-olds are.

Nancy McQuilkin: Let's see. After that, you went to a boat yard and met somebody very special.

Florence Garvie: I did. I had bought a small sailboat from a parent in Ross and I realized I needed some help on some leaks that I had, so I went to a boat yard that was on the San Rafael canal and that young man was very attractive and told me what I should do. As it turned out, he was getting ready to go on a Trans-Pac race, Trans-Pacific from Los Angeles to Honolulu. This was 1955 – it is in the odd years – no, 1953. One of the teachers at the school had a sailboat and they had sold it recently and it was getting ready to go. The young man that I had met was to be a crew person, so the teacher at the school said, "You really should get to know this person." I said, "Aw, sure." So he came back from the race and they had gone to Honolulu and they had also raced from Honolulu to Tahiti and then brought the boat back to Honolulu, so they did a lot of sailing. He came back just about Halloween time, came to see me, and by Christmas we were engaged and by Easter of the following year, we were married. So we didn't take too long to decide this is what we wanted to do. We were married for 55 years, living in this house. He had already bought this house because it had a basement in it where he could keep all his equipment and he was building a boat right underneath where we are sitting today. It was just, his lifetime, that is all he really thought about, besides me of course. He had been interested in boats since he was a little boy, had gone to Mare Island Naval Apprentice School, and I think he just knew without anybody telling him how to put things together. In three dimensions, it was very easy for him. For me, I could do two dimensions, but after that, I am lost.

Nancy McQuilkin: Tell me a little bit about some of the boats that Bill built.

Florence Garvie: Well, we counted them up once; there were eighteen boats, which is not as much as somebody might do. He designed the last two himself. No, one of the boats that he designed next to last was 27-feet long and he named it for one of our children. It was a cruising boat, not a fast sailor. When our second daughter was in high school at Tam High, in the springtime, he was all ready to set sail for Hawaii, so she did an independent study program through the school and went with him. She was just then 18 and they had one crew person and the three of them sailed to Hawaii. They had no

telephone and no communication and I thought if one more person said to me, “What do you hear from them,” because I didn’t – I just had to sit and wait until they got there, and they could then let me know. But they did get there safely and I flew out with the two younger children and we spent a month in Hawaii going from Hilo to Lahaina on Maui and eventually to Oahu and Honolulu. And then he stayed with the boat and sailed it back with two other crew persons and I came home with the children and the daughter who was in high school just in time for graduation.

Nancy McQuilkin: Oh, how wonderful.

Florence Garvie: It is. It is an experience to do something like that with your father that not everybody can do.

Nancy McQuilkin: Especially on a boat he built.

Florence Garvie: Yes, it was a very comfortable boat. He probably spent two or three years planning it in his mind and it proved to be absolutely wonderful. At the moment, it is up in the Puget Sound area. Then he built another boat, which he started at the age of 80 to build it from a magazine article he had seen in 1938. He had just a single page from the magazine and then built it from that. It was 37 feet long and he finished it when he was 86 and got to go sailing, and then he died when he was 90. I think that is a great deal of faith to start a job like that yourself. I mean, he didn’t have people helping him; it was from the bottom up to do it. Just like this house, he did everything himself here from the bottom up, although we did have roofing done, not that he couldn’t, just that it took longer than he had time to do.

Nancy McQuilkin: You had three remodels here. Can you tell me about that?

Florence Garvie: Well, this was one remodel, this living room that we added on. Then we put the bedroom, which is towards the front of the house, with the fireplace out there, and the last one was the back of the house, we went out 10 feet. It is nice; we have two and a half lots here, so we have lots of space in which to do this. There was nothing he could not make or do.

Nancy McQuilkin: It is a beautiful property. I know you have seen a lot of changes in the neighborhood since you have been here. You want to tell me about some of those?

Florence Garvie: Well, this was the Goheen development, George Goheen. There were probably four house plans and by turning them one way or another, they seemed like different floor plans but they were essentially the same. There were a few houses that were not Goheens and the space next to us was empty for many, many years because it was a drainage area and the city owned it. A woman bought the property from the city and moved the house that is there now onto the property. And the house came from across the street from the Lutheran Church at the beginning of Tennessee Valley. It was a little board and batten attractive little one story house, and there is still is sort of a studio, which I’m not sure, the Highway Patrol uses it for an office, but the grounds where the

house is at is a park, and you can go have picnic lunch there, and I know somebody had a birthday party for a child there. The creek runs right next to it, it is a lovely little spot. We bought the house next door so we now have two houses on Nelson.

Nancy McQuilkin: That's great. So the Goheen development, was that called Sycamore Park at that time?

Florence Garvie: Yes. All the houses down on Oxford, Plymouth and Valley Circle, many of those are Goheen houses. Certainly on Nelson, there are a lot. There have been a few houses that were torn down, totally, and a large house put up. I find that terribly distressing to change the neighborhood as much as that does. You would say, that's what you have done to your house. Well, I didn't tear the house down. We added on to it and kept the same general demeanor of the space. We were the "Winchester House" of Nelson Avenue because of several additions that took a long time to complete.

Nancy McQuilkin: Plus you have a lot of space around your house.

Florence Garvie: We do. There is a house that is just now being finished up the street where they have kept the same footprint of the house but added onto it, and I think, "How do they fit the floor area ratio?" FAR – is that what they call it – Floor Area Ratio? It seems like they have no yard left. I haven't walked through the house, but I am used to a lot of space here, which when you need a lawn mower, you realize how much space you do have.

Nancy McQuilkin: You do have a lot of space for the neighborhood.

Florence Garvie: So I think this house was started in 1915. One of the persons who lived here, not the one who sold the house to Bill, but before that, was Shell Kovaly, who had British Motor Cars in San Francisco.

Nancy McQuilkin: Someone was telling that when they started the Goheen development, that there was a big landfill.

Florence Garvie: Well, I have heard that the other end of Nelson going towards Blithedale was called Pansy Hill and that they took a lot of that and that might be what you are thinking about. It is still uphill to go up to Blithedale, but not as extensively as it might have been in the very early days.

Nancy McQuilkin: They used the soil from Pansy Hill to fill in down at Oxford.

Florence Garvie: Right. We filled in with many truckloads when they were starting to put the freeway, the interchange, at the end of Blithedale. When we first lived here, to go out onto Highway 101, you had to sit and wait for the traffic to get a spot to go quickly across Highway 101 and it was a bit hairy. That was before they put in the cloverleaf. So when they were doing the cloverleaf, there were truckloads and truckloads of fill and that is what we put in, all of this whole area between us and the creek, which is called Alto

Way. It is the drainage; it is also known as the Ryan Ditch. When we get high tide and two or three inches of rain, we get water in our basement. People say, “Oh, why didn’t you put a pump in?” Well, there is no place to pump to, you would only be pumping back into the same flood area. So after seven or eight hours, the water goes down and you just learn to keep stuff up off the floor.

Nancy McQuilkin: Where does the Ryan Ditch go, do you know?

Florence Garvie: It goes down to the Middle School. They put a gate on it, which really helps. I am not too sure how the hydraulics of that works, but it somehow keeps the tide a little bit more under control. It is wonderful for frogs. In the springtime, it is an absolute croaking noisy thing and it just sounds wonderful. Many times we gathered pollywogs, and raised them in an old aquarium to little frogs.

Nancy McQuilkin: Have you noticed any changes in the wildlife that has been here since you have lived here?

Florence Garvie: Well, yeah. I have a planter box at the bottom of the stairs and I had some columbine and I came out and the columbine were all neatly chopped off, so it is deer which come down, occasionally a raccoon, but I think the deer get down here by mistake. I was really sort of horrified that my little plants were chomped off. Crows, I get crows now and then. I don’t think, I see very few birds. Sometimes we get birds moving through and eating the berries on the cotoneaster and pyracantha, but I don’t see a great variety of birds here, which is sort of sad.

Nancy McQuilkin: That is sad. You haven’t really noticed any, maybe there used to be something that is not anymore?

Florence Garvie: No.

Nancy McQuilkin: This area is pretty much city, I think of it as being in the city, not a lot of wildlife.

Florence Garvie: Yep. I don’t even hear owls at night. We have a huge big pine tree behind us and several redwoods; you would think it would be a great bird refuge.

Nancy McQuilkin: Can you tell me anything about the school that you have noticed, changes over the years?

Florence Garvie: Well, our children all went to Park School. I noticed many parents don’t let their little children walk to school, but ours did. It is a fair distance to walk and you have to pay attention to where you are. I, of course, would look at the clock and think, “She ought to be coming home pretty soon now.” I have four daughters. They would come trudging in. They all walked to Park School. The school has not changed that much. I did a lot of PTA work there. I remember doing hot dogs on Thursday down in the kitchen and that was as much of a hot lunch that Park School ever had. It was

interesting to do. One of the persons who helped was Phyllis Faber, who was well known for establishing with Ellen Strauss MALT, the Marin Agricultural Land Trust, so you got to meet all kinds of interesting people with PTA work.

I know, the library, the school library. I was fascinated with children's literature. I would come home with stacks of books. One of the books I remember getting was on the Bayeux Tapestry, which is in France. It is one of these books that told you just enough that caught your interest, page after page. So when we were traveling through that area, that is something that I thought, I really ought to go see this. It was all because I found this book at the children's library at Park School. The nonfiction for children is staggering, it is just wonderful. Isaac Asimov, for example, has lots of books for children on science. I think the imagination in children's fiction is just marvelous.

One of the things that I have done for our grandchildren is to buy a book that I liked, and then I would read it on tape and talk to the child that I was reading it for, saying now such and such, on the this page, do you see what she is wearing? She is going to be doing something different. Then I would make a bag for the books so they could put it all together. And I would choose a picture out of the book and take the book to a photocopying machine and photocopy it and shrink it down so it was a tiny little one, and I would stick that on the tape, so the child who couldn't yet read could tell what tape this was because the picture on the tape matched the book. So it was fun to do, and I realized that I am missing doing that because my grandchildren are now grown and reading long since. But I know Hallmark has an ad on TV about two little girls and grandma is reading to them and I go, "uh-huh, I was ahead of them." It was fun to do and it was something special, each one had a little book or two books that I had read to them.

Nancy McQuilkin: That is special, and you were ahead of your time. They are exactly marketing that whole idea right now.

Florence Garvie: Yep, it's fun to do.

Nancy McQuilkin: It's great for them. You had four daughters and were very active with Girl Scouts.

Florence Garvie: Yes, I had a Girl Scout troop and I also did a lot in 4-H.³ I have always loved dogs and the Guide Dog puppies were always raised by children in 4-H. It was one of the projects that you could do with 4H aside from raising chickens or sewing or doing something else. The idea was that we met weekly out at the Northgate mall. You wanted to socialize your puppy, so when the puppy went into training, they had been in sidewalks, areas, in and out of swinging doors, up and down stairs – which is not to put down anything they do with Guide Dogs, but they started a step ahead, kind of, a kindergarten idea. Whenever the family went somewhere who had the puppy, I encouraged them to take the puppy with them, to ride in the car, go to grandma's house for dinner, meet the world outside. We had maybe 10 or 12 children who passed through this. I think I did it for four or five years. It is very rewarding. All Guide Dogs are free to the person who gets them, and is free to stay at the school and learn to use the dog. We have raised three adult breeding stock dogs and we have had five puppies. It is one of

³ 4-H is a national youth development and youth mentoring organization.

those things a child can take part in to do something for somebody that is very meaningful. They could go out and collect for UNICEF or something that is not a long term project, but having a dog maybe for a year, starting out as a few months' old puppy, and then returning to Guide Dogs when they are maybe 15 months old.

[Pause in recording.]

Nancy McQuilkin: Okay, Florence, we were talking about the Guide Dogs and the puppies and that sort of thing. How about the puppies that you raised, you said you raised five puppies. How many of those went on to be Guide Dogs? Did all of them graduate?

Florence Garvie: No, they didn't. It was disappointing. Only one did. They have about a 50 percent rejection rate of puppies. It is not that they are not neat little dogs and make good family dogs. They may have different reasons for rejecting them. Sometimes it is physical with their hips not being absolutely sound; it could be they are noisy; it could be they are too soft; the dog trembles like that when you speak harshly or whatever it is, so they need a dog that is a little more independent, not anything that you have done. But we did have one. I encourage people to go to a Guide Dog graduation. It is once a month, it is open to the public, and you get to see the entire grounds, walk through the kennels and see it, and one of the great things, it is a great tender moment, the child who raised the dog comes to the graduation to see their dog ready to go out into the big world. It is a beautiful grounds and it is supported by private donations, there are no federal or state funding of it, so it is people buying postcards or people who send a donation in. It is beautiful grounds. It is, as you know, in Northgate.⁴ You just need to call up and say, "When is your next graduation?" And get yourself there.

Nancy McQuilkin: When you first started, it was quite different than what it is like today.

Florence Garvie: It was. It was just one little building and the kennels were maybe 10 or 12 runs. It started in Palo Alto and then it moved up to San Rafael maybe in the later 40s. We got a dog about 1956,⁵ which is when we started. It is one of those things that you can do for somebody else that you never regret the time that you took to have it. Black labs are my favorite. We have had golden retrievers and black labs, but my heart melts when the big black lab looks at you.

Nancy McQuilkin: So tell me a little bit more. We talked about Girl Scouts briefly, but were you the scout leader?

Florence Garvie: I was the scout leader, with Joan Haxton; she and I shared it. Joan is no longer living, but she had a number of children and every week, we met at the church on East Blithedale [Avenue]. It is not the Seventh Day Advent; it is the one at Sycamore [Avenue] and East Blithedale, and they were very kind to let us use, I guess, a

⁴ Northgate Shopping Mall in San Rafael.

⁵ Editor's note: This date was later determined to be 1968.

community room there. It was a busy time and we would sometimes go out to Samuel Taylor Park for an overnight to go out camping, and it was fun to do.

Nancy McQuilkin: I bet you were good at teaching them.

Florence Garvie: Well, I didn't do the projects; we would find somebody who would. I was there for the general meetings and sort of find other helpers to do it, but yes, I have done a lot of sewing. With four daughters, you better learn to sew!

Nancy McQuilkin: What were some of your favorite projects that the Girl Scouts did?

Florence Garvie: Well, I haven't thought much about that. I can't seem to think offhand; it would take a little bit more time.

Nancy McQuilkin: Did you do cookie sales?

Florence Garvie: Oh, yes. I had a garage full of cookies once. What else did we do? We had cookies, and children could do badges by themselves or get someone to do it, sewing and cooking. I remember Ruth Scott, who lived in this wonderful house up above Park School that they built pretty much themselves out of brick. She did the cooking group one time, and that was lovely.

Nancy McQuilkin: How about, did they go Bothin⁶ for camp-outs?

Florence Garvie: They went to Bothin, yes, but I didn't go with them. It was probably with a larger group. I am drawing a blank on this, which you would think I would remember.

Nancy McQuilkin: No, it would just be an interesting thing to see if what you used to do is the same as what people do now. I know that they sell a lot of cookies now, a lot of cookies. I don't know if there were other things that you did back then. What other projects did 4-H do other than Guide Dogs?

Florence Garvie: Oh, any number of things. There would be meetings of the San Rafael 4H group. The big thing we did with the Guide Dogs was to sponsor a play day and a play day means that you would have children from all over the Bay Area who could come to this with their puppies and you would have an obstacle course. I remember we had one at a school in Novato on Center Street and you would set up different occasions of walking up some stairs or having them stop and do something. We also put out a lunch for them and we might have had 50 or 60 kids come with their puppies to this. It was one of those things that other 4-H groups would put on, and you could go with your puppy and daughter or child and go to one anywhere in the Bay Area and you would get ribbons and prizes, and it was exciting to see that your dog was improving. That was a huge effort

⁶ Camp Bothin is a camping and recreational facility run by the Girl Scouts of Northern California. It is located west of San Rafael, near Fairfax.

to put this play day on. They have an annual play day at the Guide Dog school themselves where lots of children come with their puppies.

Nancy McQuilkin: Did the kids in 4-H enter things in the County Fair?

Florence Garvie: No. We had a booth with pictures and members in their 4-H uniforms, white with their little caps on out at the Civic Center telling people about how you could raise a puppy, apply if you wanted to do it. But as far as doing anything else at the fair, that was the extent of it.

Nancy McQuilkin: Okay. I know that you have been very involved in the Outdoor Art Club. Can you tell me some of the things you have done there?

Florence Garvie: Yes. I have done grounds, I have done building preservation, I have been house chairman, rental chairman, treasurer, that was not good, I do not keep books all that well. I don't abscond with money, but just knowing exactly how to do a balance sheet was not something that I could do. [Doing] rentals was interesting because you lived in total fear that you might double book the place. I never did and I don't think that it has happened, but it is possible. At that time, we were not on the computer and the phone could ring any time, day or night, with people saying, "I just got engaged and we want to be married," so you would have to say when it was available and what the good things were about coming to do it. It was a fun job. They've computerized it now and I think you get a recording and leave your name and somebody calls you back; it is a little bit different.

I like being in the Outdoor Art Club because you got to know people who were younger to older. The same thing: I belong to the American Association of University Women [AAUW] and when I first came into the group, Lettie Evans was a member. She was a lady, she was very old, probably my age now, and she lived in a house that is just up above Lytton Square. She had married her husband who was a Chinese missionary. She was just a wonderful lady; the word "lady" you can apply to some people but not to others, but she was one of those. Her niece now lives in her house and she belongs to the Outdoor Art Club. The house was designed by – I can't say the man's name – it was kind of a Swedish name. It was on a house tour one year. Anyhow, it is interesting that you can go on from the Outdoor Art Club to meet people who are very young and some who have been in the club a long time or they joined the club in their later years as I did and stayed with the club, been a part of it. We have had weddings of our children there, we had a 40th wedding anniversary tea dance there; that was fun to do in the springtime.

Nancy McQuilkin: What was your fondest memory of being on the grounds committee?

Florence Garvie: Hmm. I guess when everything stayed alive and the deer didn't eat everything. We tried to make the budget stretch over what you wanted to buy for the grounds or to keep groundskeepers who would come keep the weeds at bay, to make people happy with what you had planted, and the color that you might be able to do. It is a rewarding job. Any one of them is.

Nancy McQuilkin: How about the house committee? That can be a nightmare.

Florence Garvie: Well, we have had some wonderful men who have done all the work for keeping it clean and moving the tables and so on, so you always hope that whoever it happened to be, that they stayed on and didn't call you Friday night saying, "I am not feeling very well, I can –" and you think, "Oh Lord, there is a wedding of 200 tomorrow and they want their tables set up." That never happened, but it is one of those things you thought it might.

Nancy McQuilkin: Okay. How about the treasurer – you said that wasn't your favorite job.

Florence Garvie: No, it was the first job I did. Let's just not even go there.

Nancy McQuilkin: What other memories do you have at the Outdoor Art Club?

Florence Garvie: It is just such a beautiful spot. Maybeck – once you get started on his architecture, you realize there are Maybeck houses in this area but not as many as there are in the East Bay. It is kind of like somebody's lovely old house. When I was grounds chairman, the nice thing about it is that you can set it up in almost any way that you would like. People would say, "Now, where does the head table go?" I say, "It is where you want it to be, there is nothing set up about this, you can put tables outside, you can have no tables, you can have the wedding however you want." So it is a spot that you can enjoy, it doesn't feel institutional at all.

Nancy McQuilkin: What about AAUW? What all have you done with them?

Florence Garvie: Well, I was treasurer for that too, at a time that was interesting to again try to do a balance sheet. Writing checks is easy enough; taking money in is easy. I have been a chairman of different sections, like the book group. Our book group did reviews. Instead of everybody reading one book and talking about it, the daytime books, if you agreed to a book, you could do any book that you chose; it could be fiction, nonfiction, a book from a series, whatever you liked. Then there is a play reading group where we get a box of plays, ten paperbacks, and there are ten of us in the group and we just read the plays cold. Sometimes they have been made into movies later and sometimes they are plays you have never heard of. Some plays are perfectly awful. Why did they ever choose this one to go around? The plays go to something like 60 different study groups, so whoever organizes it knows exactly how to make it so we have never read the same play twice. The plays come faithfully; we have a great time reading the plays. We have done some fundraisers at the large festival, selling fudge, I seem to remember, pretzels another time. Again, it is a group where you get quite a cross section of people who have PhDs, possibly, and some people who just have bachelor's degrees.

Nancy McQuilkin: Do you have any memories of, say, Memorial Day parades here?

Florence Garvie: Yeah, one of our children was in Girl Scouts, no, Brownies, with Verna Parino, who spent a lot of time in Mill Valley, and they walked with their Brownie uniforms. Another one, she got into a clown costume and walked down Miller Avenue in that. It is fun to go over and watch it go by. I was going to say about the old Safeway, when I was first married, it was up where the WestAmerica bank is now, East Blithedale, and the parking was as it is now. To realize the Safeway started out in those humble beginnings and then moved down to Camino Alto and then enlarged even from that to what it is now. The Purity store, which was down here in the Blithedale corner, so there have been a few changes in just grocery shopping.

Nancy McQuilkin: You remember Mill Valley Market?

Florence Garvie: I didn't ever go into that too much. I guess the parking might have been one thing, and maybe price-wise. I was thinking back to the Safeway, when my two older children were little, they had a bench that you could sit down on and it had a sort of table and they had little Golden Books, so you could park your child there while you did your shopping. I don't think anybody today would feel safe parking your child in a spot near the entrance to the store or with kindergarteners walking to Park School, I just knew that they could do it and that is what they did. Things have changed that way, I would say.

Nancy McQuilkin: Wow. Any other businesses that you remember?

Florence Garvie: Well, the furniture store, the [unintelligible] had a furniture store. Let's see, what is in there now? Florence Tyler,⁷ is that the name?

Nancy McQuilkin: Yes.

Florence Garvie: I remember buying some furniture there, and it has gone through a number of things. It was Varney's hardware store that moved in there. I think the general feel of Mill Valley has remained the same. The storefronts may be different and restaurants come and go. Good heavens, when I think of the money I have given to La Ginestra over a period of years! We have always enjoyed being there, nice family runs the place. My life has been really pretty much right here. I kept all of the books for my husband. You would think I would get through the treasurer's part a little more easy. But he did jobs on boats, he gave everybody an itemized billing of exactly all of the materials that went into it. I kept a card file. I made a card file on the prices: all kinds of screws, so you had oval head screws, round head screws, flat head screws. I mean, everything that was in a boat building business, and I would type it and send it out. So I was busy. We got to our third child; I said, "I can't do it anymore." So we then got a secretary and he built an office in the boatyard he had on the canal, so then I stayed pretty much here organizing children. It seems like we had children a lot with four. It was 13 years between the first and the last. As I said, I was in PTA forever.

⁷ Tyler Florence, chef and television host of several Food Network shows, opened his eponymous retail kitchen store on 59 Throckmorton Avenue (at Corte Madera Avenue) in 2008.

Nancy McQuilkin: You have probably done all the jobs for PTA by now.

Florence Garvie: Well, a few.

Nancy McQuilkin: Well, how about the Dipsea Race, did anyone you know ever run the Dipsea?

Florence Garvie: No. Well, one time, we went up and sat on some stairs just above where the creek goes through and I had never done that before and I thought, I wonder if that man is really going to make it all the way because by the time they got into the first 20 steps, it seemed like they were well out of breath and seemed like they really were not fit to do it. But no, I have not done anything more than that.

Nancy McQuilkin: None of the girls ran?

Florence Garvie: No. But we were into horses a lot. We had horses out at Tennessee Valley stables. It was a cooperative. When we first joined, we did a lot of heavy duty work out there making pens, putting up fencing. Bill installed a water system. And he got a horse, to join one of our daughters who had a horse. It is a whole other world.

Nancy McQuilkin: How was it run, then? Was it part of the Park Service, do you know?

Florence Garvie: Yes, it was part of the Park Service. We were constantly being threatened that we weren't going to be able to be individuals, or a cooperative is a better word for it, because we had to do everything ourselves. So now I think it is much more under the Park domination.

Nancy McQuilkin: I know that at one point, you led some history walks.

Florence Garvie: That was fun. You had to memorize the walk and I love Mill Valley, I was very attached to Claremont, a small town. I really wanted to live in a smallish town. I was very fortunate that I married the man I did, who had this house, so I got to come to Mill Valley. But going on these historical walks, you learned an awful lot. I often wished that the person who did the walk would be able to keep the booklets, but we had to turn them in. I couldn't understand how or why that came about. But you saw parts of Mill Valley! My children still love Mill Valley. I haven't seen a new book out on the stairs, steps of Mill Valley. I'm interested on how that is going to be. Have you seen that, David? It's really great. I thought it might make good birthday presents for my four daughters. This is a Skip Sandberg book?

Nancy McQuilkin: It's just been published. His wife is an Outdoor Art Club member.

Florence Garvie: By the name of Sandberg?

Nancy McQuilkin: No, no. She was a doctor so she kept her maiden name. I'll figure it out for you. But I know Skip would sign books for you. Let's see, let's get back to neighborhood stuff.

Florence Garvie: Well, the neighborhood group met here, what did we call the Sycamore Park neighborhood? Well, traffic has been a terrible problem up and down, mostly on Nelson Avenue. We gave some ideas to the City Council on how we could divert it or shorten it, but they said, "No, I don't think so." Even got Betsy Cutler, who was on the Council at the time to come here for a meeting of our group, left the front door open at night so you could hear the noise to make her impressed. We also took them to Berkeley, several of the council members, to show them how – what do they call them? – the diversions, and closing the street worked in Berkeley, but that didn't seem to sway them at all. So it is still a problem, cars taking a shortcut through here to go up onto Miller Avenue.

Nancy McQuilkin: You have been here what, 63 years? Has it gotten better or worse or is it about the same?

Florence Garvie: I have not been here that long. It's gotten worse. My children talked about how they might have played ball in the street. I don't remember that, but they are aware of how many cars there are and how quickly people drive on the street. I wouldn't mind putting a block across here and having to go around, but if it meant you didn't have the cars cruising back and forth all the time, it would be nice. Traffic is probably bad everywhere in Mill Valley. You wonder, "Where do they come from?" Coming into Mill Valley as much as going out of Mill Valley.

Nancy McQuilkin: When you first moved here, was it about the same?

Florence Garvie: As now? Oh no, no. I don't think so.

Nancy McQuilkin: Why do you think that is? Do you think people took public transportation?

Florence Garvie: No, I think there are more cars per house. It is the demographics of just everybody has two cars. The people across the street have two cars that they park on the street, they don't park in their driveway. We have had such a long driveway, we have had cars parking off the street. It is easy to get creamed with cars sliding by you.

Nancy McQuilkin: I know that traffic is an issue. Did the street always go through all the way?

Florence Garvie: Nelson? Yes. I think it was named for an early person who was killed in World War I. Do you remember?

Nancy McQuilkin: Was Nelson here before the Goheen developments started?

Florence Garvie: I don't know that. You can certainly see how Sycamore has been extended, it is wider here and then it gets narrower just a block or so further up towards town. It wasn't planned to be as wide as that.

Nancy McQuilkin: Oh, it wasn't?

Florence Garvie: I mean, it was narrower, and when they put the Goheen [subdivision] in, I think that was how they made it wider.

Nancy McQuilkin: I think they knew there would be more traffic with all the additional houses, maybe. Let's see. You were talking earlier about Ray Strong⁸ paintings. Can you tell me how you got interested in those?

Florence Garvie: Well, when I was teaching in Ross, I had no family members here. To do something different, I took an art class. Ray Strong was the one who had the class. He was tall, booming voice, bright blue eyes, which I find very irresistible, and a nice warm manner about him so that I knew him first in maybe 1950. He was teaching at the College of Marin, this was an extension from the College of Marin. Then early in our married life, we bought one of his pictures and I probably have owned six or eight of his pictures, all of Marin County. I find California artists most interesting. Getting into a Butterfield catalogue is kind of fun. These two on the right, I bought at Butterfield.

Nancy McQuilkin: You recognized the one in the library over the fireplace.

Florence Garvie: I did. I said, "I can recognize one fifty feet away or better." He has a style that is hard to miss. I think it is fun to own something of California art in your house because so much of the stuff changes with developments and more people. He lived to be 100 years old and came to the MALT showing out in Nicasio in May every year. He had a group of painters down in Santa Barbara and they would come up and stay with different members of the MALT group out in West Marin and paint, and then they would put them in the show. The show was in the, what is the little white building out there in the Nicasio, I can't remember the name of it. [Editor's note: Druids' Hall, out in Nicasio.] It is close to the restaurant out there and across the street from the baseball field. It was on two days. The proceeds from the sale of all of the pictures, some were given to MALT and some were given to, of course, the painter who did it. So Ray came to these and he often had a picture or two in the show. He was in a wheelchair at that time, but his mind was as quick as can be. I send out Valentine letters with pictures every year, instead of at Christmas. Christmas is a lot more fun when you are not trying to do Christmas cards at all! This would be the MALT show out there, it would be in May, and every time he would say, he could remember what I had written in the letter or the pictures that I had included in the letter. He was a very warm person. One summer we were away for quite a time, so he and his wife stayed at our house and he had a showing of his pictures out in the front yard. So we were good friends, corresponded for many years.

⁸ Ray Strong (1905-2006) was an American landscape painter associated with the Depression-era W.P.A. (Works Progress Administration) murals. He was active in San Francisco from the early 1930s to 1960.

Nancy McQuilkin: Wow, that's amazing. How did you come to have a house in Maine?

Florence Garvie: We have a summer cottage on the coast of Maine. Since we were in with boating, we were often invited to go sailing with people who had bigger boats. One time, we were invited to go, and on board that particular boat was a couple who had come from New York state. He was in the fundraising business, that is probably not the right term, but he would come, he was out in Palo Alto, Stanford, helping them on a six-week program to set up, either with Rockefeller funding or one of the others like that, and they were on the boat that day as guests of the owner of the boat. They were fascinating people, they were probably the age of my parents. They seemed to like Bill and me, and they sent us a magazine because they thought we were nice. They said, "We rent a house there for the summer. Why don't you come sometime?" "Sure, uh-huh." And then when they asked us a second time, I thought, "All right," so we did go, and then eventually we bought the house. We have owned it for close to 40 years. It is a simple little summer house. They turn the water off in October so you couldn't stay there year round, and it is just too cold, single wall construction and not suitable for cold weather. But it is magical and we have lots of people who rent it who come year after year when we are not there. Blueberries are around the house, lobsters are available. We don't have television and you wash the dishes by hand. We do have electricity. It is really a lovely spot.

Nancy McQuilkin: You replicated your view from Maine up in your house in Sonoma.

Florence Garvie: We did. We bought some property in Sonoma and I thought, "What is going to be the design of this place?" So we bought a barn in Maine and had it shipped, because it was being taken down, all the timber. We used many of the timbers in building the big house. I had seen a little house on an island that I thought was quite nice. If you go to Healdsburg, you see houses a lot like it, which are one story with peak roofs and porches pretty much around it for the hot weather. So that is kind of the way this house is. We call it the Fun House. I put my grandchildren out there and let them be as noisy as they want to be and stay up all night if they want to and sleep on the floor in sleeping bags. It is a lovely spot and has a view of the Sonoma Valley and it is kind of a feeling of we brought Maine to our house. As I said, in Healdsburg, there are little summer houses that look a lot like this. Nancy has been up there.

[Pause in recording.]

Nancy McQuilkin: Okay. We were talking about the Sonoma house. Can you tell me, did you build that one from scratch with the beams from Maine?

Florence Garvie: Yes. Years and years ago, we had no television, out of finances and the fact that I just didn't want it. Our children were busy doing fun things around the house and playing games and reading books and I thought we would get along without it. They would say, "Oh, we don't have television. We are supposed to see something for class." I would say, "Well, that's too bad." I think today they are just as happy that they didn't grow up with the television. I did believe in public broadcasting and we took

Focus, which is the magazine that KQED put out, and one time they had an ad in there for some property for Sonoma. I had been up in that area with my oldest daughter who was in the Amigos, which is a health-oriented group and they went to Central America for a summer program, and they were having a picnic up in that area. I thought “Oh, this is the most beautiful spot up here.” So when this property was available, we went to look at it, just to look at it. We went back a second time and thought oh, all right, let’s see what we can do with finances on this.

We did buy a beautiful lot, and then we were in Maine and there was a barn that was being taken down because it had slid off its foundation. Barns 150 years ago didn’t have foundations as they do today, they put them on granite pieces, so this barn was coming down. We happened to be in the area and these big huge timbers, some of them were 60 feet long, just gorgeous. So we thought, “Well, somebody is telling us something.” So we bought it for a very nominal bit and had it shipped. They had to cut the 60-footers to fit on a 40-foot truck bed, but we couldn’t put the barn back together because – I’m not sure of the right term – the building inspectors, they thought it was just inappropriate, or not structurally sound, I guess I’ll put it that way. So we used a lot of the pieces more as decorative. They look like they are doing the construction but they are not actually. I did most of the designing of the house. I had a contractor who was great to work with, he knew just how to manage me and how to manage the house and we came out with something that we liked a lot. We had the space to put in this extra little house and so we took the plans of a house that we had seen on an island that we can see from our cottage, and it is a little white house with a porch all the way around it. As I said before, in Healdsburg, in the northern areas, you do see these little houses with one story and porches all around them, wide porches you can sit on, maybe there are vines growing around it. So we have one of those and we call it the Fun House. It has a mini kitchen and a bathroom and lots of space you can stretch out on the floor with pads and sleep, or sleep out on the porch outside if you want to. Anyhow, that is our house in Sonoma. With not having Bill around, I’m just not going up there very much, which is too bad, but I find it is just more than I can manage to do.

Nancy McQuilkin: Tell me about your girls.

[Pause in recording.]

Nancy McQuilkin: Okay, Florence, we were talking about your house up in Sonoma and that you were not using it as much lately since Bill is not around. Do your daughters go up very often?

Florence Garvie: They do sometimes. We were there for Thanksgiving. It is a little different because our oldest grandchildren are working now and they don’t have two weeks off. Christmas is coming up, we used to go after Christmas and stay through New Year’s. Now they have to stay at work and my granddaughters are getting interim jobs like working at Old Navy or ushering at the theater or something like that, so they can’t come. So it is kind of different. But we are talking about travel. We did a lot of car camping. Bill and I designed a little trailer that carried all of our camping stuff and we did a lot of the parks in the western part of the United States and out into Canada with our

Volkswagen bus, which is a great thing to spread kids out so they are not on top of one another. Camping was an inexpensive way to go and you can stop and start and go where you want to go. It was a lot of fun.

We had several trips to Europe with our children. We went while I was pregnant with our fourth one, about half way through the pregnancy. I must say, people treat you very nicely when you are traveling! More often than not, we were taken as English people, which was okay with me. We bought a Volkswagen bus at that time in Europe and traveled around with that. We had some other trips. We got a number of exchange students staying here, some a half year, some a shorter time, so those were very happy experiences. The last time we went to Europe, Bill and I stopped at each one of the families whose children we had had, and I must say, that was great. We did exchange my third daughter with a family in Switzerland and in Oslo and I had their children here, which is great. You tend to do a lot for the visiting child because you know your child is going to have some nice experiences. So we have done international stuff that way.

Nancy McQuilkin: Who was the exchange through, was it through Tam?

Florence Garvie: No, it was word of mouth. You knew somebody who knew somebody who did something like that. It worked out that way.

Nancy McQuilkin: Were they in high school?

Florence Garvie: No, they were older. Some of them went to the College of Marin. They could take three or four classes that they were interested in.

Nancy McQuilkin: Okay. What was your favorite country?

Florence Garvie: Oh, dear. I don't know. I think if I went, you would have to be in Paris for at least a week. Why would you go to Europe if you didn't go to Paris? I guess that would be what I liked as well as anything. We bought Swiss travel passes to go traveling for a week in Switzerland. You get on anything that moves with the holiday pass, that is fun. We rented a car in England; driving on the left side of the road is not easy. Your reaction is so fixed, you have to stop and think what you are doing. You asked about our daughters. Our daughters live in this general area. Two are in Novato, one in Santa Rosa, and one in Petaluma, so they are close by. I am happy to say they all like each other and they support one another. They are very tight with their feelings and what they can do for one another and they will drop whatever they are doing if somebody else needs something done for them. I grew up as an only child and to me, it is a great joy.

Nancy McQuilkin: So they all went to Park School?

Florence Garvie: They went to Park School, and went to Tam High. Two went to the University of California in Santa Barbara; one of them went to College of Marin and a funny college in San Francisco, New College, kind of an avant-garde thing. And the fourth one, I was telling David, hated school and is now in the last part of her nursing program at the College of Marin, so you never know what somebody is going to do if

they are motivated enough to do it. The nursing program is very intense and sometimes, she has to be at the hospital over in San Francisco by 6:30 or 7 in the morning. She has two children and a husband, so it is a juggling act, but it is lovely.

Florence Garvie: My oldest granddaughter is in the Peace Corps in Cambodia. She is having a very hard time with getting used to the food, which is rice, rice, rice, and all kinds of odd things put into the rice; the weather; the toilets, which are potties. I think she would love to see a flush toilet again in her life. The weather is incredible, hot, you know, 95 to 100 and 100 percent humidity, and she is teaching English to a class of 70 at a time. How do you teach English to 70 people at one time? I haven't yet found out. She talks on her cell phone. Recently, at Thanksgiving time, she was on Skype. It boggles my mind when I pick up my phone and I can dial somewhere in the world, the cell phone bit and all this other. She is halfway around the world, it is different!

Nancy McQuilkin: Do you have a computer that you use to Skype with her?

Florence Garvie: No, I don't. I gave up my old Apple and I am relying on snail mail and the telephone and I am very happy with it. I don't get a lot of spam and I don't get other stuff and it's all right.

Nancy McQuilkin: As your girls were growing up here in Mill Valley, what was their favorite time of year?

Florence Garvie: I would say Christmas, maybe, because you would have a lot of fun things to do and they were home for a long enough period of time. Thirteen years between the eldest and youngest; one went to college when the others went to kindergarten. So you kind of do different things at different times of the year. You are still doing Easter eggs when somebody is long past that. People would say to my husband, don't you wish you had a son. He would say, no, I love having four girls and having one who could sail across the ocean with you or ride horses or things like that. It is alright. I think you have covered a lot of me.

Nancy McQuilkin: How about the city government? Have you noticed any changes in the way the city has been run?

Florence Garvie: No. I have been to some Council meetings now and then when it seemed something was terribly pressing, but I kind of let them run themselves.

Nancy McQuilkin: You felt like it was pretty well run most of the time?

Florence Garvie: Yeah. They could do so much. I think of what the city taxes on houses and the rate that they change ownership. You see houses for sale. I think it must be a great deal of money coming from city property taxes compared to other poor little towns that have just ordinary little houses but still have to run the same fire departments,

schools, so on. I am happy about Proposition 13 for people like us who lived in a house long enough that our property taxes are greatly reduced.

Nancy McQuilkin: What do you think about the library, the new additions?

Florence Garvie: Well, I worked very hard on several bond issues that we had. I think this was the third of fourth bond issue. We had to finally put the library in, and one of the objections to that was, “Oh, you are going to use up city property, parks where people could come sit under the trees and enjoy it.” You think of the number of people who are sitting in the library and enjoying that space and I think the building is utterly magnificent and fits Mill Valley perfectly and it is one spot that I bring out of town guests to come and see. Park the car, get out of the car, come and walk through the library. They “ooh” and “ah” at the windows as they are and the floors, everything about it. I think it is perfect. I did go with a friend that was living in a smallish town in Long Island; he took me to their new library. They have a spot downstairs that did not have carpeting. It was wooden floors where they sold muffins and coffee and had chairs. I thought, that sounds pretty nice. Couldn’t we do something like that? But it didn’t seem to go over with people who were on the library board.

Nancy McQuilkin: I think the library is a beautiful building and it is changing, and I am very pleased that you like the changes.

Florence Garvie: Oh yes.

Nancy McQuilkin: When the girls were little, did you go downtown a lot?

Florence Garvie: We used to go Friday nights to the library, even when it was over on Lovell, pick out books and then go get ice cream and come home. That was the Friday night activity. Our children have been book readers all their lives. I read to them and they read themselves. Going to the library was a great joy.

Nancy McQuilkin: Where did you go get ice cream?

Florence Garvie: I think it was Baskin Robbins, that is my recollection.

Nancy McQuilkin: It’s been there that long?

Florence Garvie: I would like to think so. I can’t think where else we would have gotten ice cream, I don’t know. And of course, the change of – where the bridge is going out of Mill Valley, with the big timber bridge before –

Nancy McQuilkin: Bridge, as in Bay Bridge?

Florence Garvie: No, I’m talking the bridge right here at the end of Blithedale, going out to the highway. They took it down and filled it in and put the road in as it is now. They used some of the timber, or maybe they took theirs over in Tiburon, I’m not sure.

But when they put the cloverleaf in at the highway, as I said, when I first moved here, you had to cross the highway watching for the traffic and then scooting across. It is hard to imagine.

Nancy McQuilkin: Do you remember any kind of trains or electric buses or anything coming in and out?

Florence Garvie: No, I don't. All I did was watch for the red truck that my husband drove. The fact that his business was in San Rafael, he was going the opposite direction of the heavy duty traffic, and the truck was kind of noisy and you could hear it about a block away. Sometimes my children would walk down to the corner of Blithedale and climb in the back end of the truck and ride back with their father to our house.

Nancy McQuilkin: I'm trying to think if there is anything else we wanted to talk about.

Florence Garvie: I just know that whenever we go away, we are thrilled to come back to Mill Valley and crossing the Golden Gate Bridge is kind of like going on a magical moat, you know. I chose to come to this area when I was looking for a teaching job and I have never regretted being here, or in this area of Mill Valley specifically.

Nancy McQuilkin: From time to time we have had some pretty good floods. Do you have any memories of any of the big floods?

Florence Garvie: I didn't have the flood that you had at your house. We would take cars out of the garage. We would get maybe eight or ten inches or water in this back yard. As I said, when the tide goes out, then water goes out and that is the way out. We have not had the flood that I know that you did.

Nancy McQuilkin: I'm glad you didn't have our flood. Well, Florence, thank you so much for letting us come into your house and talk to you.

Florence Garvie: I am glad to be chosen.