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NORMAN C. (BUD) ORTMAN

An interview conducted by

Carol Budds on November 2, 1994.

NORMAN C. (BUD) ORTMAN

Born September 26, 1919 in Mill Valley, Ca.

Interviewed in his home at 200 Summit Ave.,  
Mill Valley in November 1994.

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NORMAN C. (BUD) ORTMAN

Carol Budds: Today is November 2, 1994. We are at the home of Norman C. (Bud) Ortman at 200 Summit Avenue. Bud and I are going to be talking about the early days, and not such early days either, in Mill Valley. Well, Bud, I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about your mother's family, because I know they were the first ones of your family to be in Mill Valley. Is that correct?

N.C. (Bud) Ortman: Yes, that's correct. My grandfather had a wood and coal business in San Francisco on Folsom Street during the early 1900's. The family lived above the entry to the wood and coal business. until the earthquake in 1906. My grandfather had bought three lots on Millwood Street in 1903 and the family would come over and camp in the summer as did quite a few families at that time. And when the fire destroyed his property on Folsom Street, he built the house where I was born on Millwood Street.

CB: What was the number on Millwood?

NCO: 14 Millwood at that time. Now there are six numbers on that same property that run from 14 to 24. Grandfather built the house in the corner of three lots so it was sitting right on the property line on the back and side and the rest of it was left open. He raised vegetables and all kinds of fruit. We had so many fruit trees you couldn't consume all the fruit. As a kid we used to play hide and seek in the raspberry and blackberry bushes and I'd pick a spot and sit down and eat the berries off the vine while someone was looking for me.

CB: It was much more open then, I guess, if you could grow so many things.

NCO: Oh, it was. There are now seven residential units on the property where originally there was only one.

CB: And that was three lots?

NCO: Yes, three lots, two of them were forty feet wide and the third one was 60 feet wide with 140 foot frontage on the street. And the lot goes back to about 180 feet or more in a couple of spots back to the creek that runs down through the lumber yard towards Sycamore and Locust.

CB: Now that wouldn't have been the Mt. Tamalpais Land and Water Co. on that side of the creek?

NCO: No, it was the Shingleman property, Millwood subdivision, as headed in the records...hooked into Sycamore and all of that area.

CB: Now your Grandfather's name was Henderson?

NCO: Yes, H.C. (Hugh Charles) Henderson. He was originally from Pennsylvania. His wife, my grandmother, died when I was about two years old so I never knew her, but she came across the country in a covered wagon in the middle of the 1800's. They settled in San Francisco. He was always involved in politics and was on the Board of Education until they moved to Mill Valley. My mother attended Tam in her junior year and was in Tam's first graduating class (1910). There were only five students in the graduating class.

CB: Five in the graduating class! My goodness!

NCO: Her brother and my uncle, Herbert Scott Henderson, never appeared to be an athlete but when I went through the old Pai of 1909-1910 it showed that he was on the baseball and football team. No doubt such a small enrollment made this possible.

CB: Now, he was younger than your mother?

NCO: Yes, he was one year younger than my mother.

CB: Did he stay in Mill Valley?

NCO: No, but he lived with all of us on Millwood Street until 1928 when he married. The family included my uncle, grandfather, mother, dad, and my sister. Mother cooked and kept house for the whole gang. My uncle was an insurance broker in San Francisco on Sansome Street and commuted to the city on the train. Many a time he would be late and catch the train at Park Station which was in the same direction the train would be going from from Millwood Street. He would be running along eating a bacon sandwich and the train would slow down so that it wouldn't pull in and pull out of the station before he caught it. He commuted that way until his marriage in 1928.

CB: Now, what about your Dad? Was he from the San Francisco-Bay Area?

NCO: Yes, and no. Grandfather Ortman was an electrical contractor and became involved in the installation of the third rail system in Marin County. Because of his experience he was hired to help install the electric railroad system in Davenport, Iowa. It was while the family was back there that dad was born. His brothers and sisters were all born here in Marin County. He would have been if his father had not been transferred to Davenport for a short period of time. Grandfather Ortman returned to California and ended his career as the head electrician at Mills College.

CB: Your mother and dad met in Marin County?

NCO: Yes, they met at an Odd Fellows party or at one of the other lodges. . . Masons, or Eastern Star in Mill Valley. They were married in 1917.

CB: That was during WWI?

NCO: WWI was already going on but the USA didn't enter the war until 1917. My parents were married when we entered the war and even though they were without children at that time, I don't know why my father was not called. My uncle who was single did however enter the service. Dad was a foreman painter for the Northwestern Pacific Railroad. He had the responsibility of painting the bridges and stations as far north as Eureka.

CB: That was in the 1920's?

NCO: It would have been as there are photographs of me on a handcar on the rail somewhere in Northern California. Somehow we went along with the crew and lived in one of the workmen's railcar quarters for part of the summer. I would guess I was about two or three years old when the photo was taken. He finally quit that job because it was taking him away from his family. After that he worked for Sutro Baths out at the Beach. He was foreman painter for Sutro Baths and had a rather large crew. There were a lot of buildings to cover by a painting crew. There must have been at least ten painters on that job. When the depression came they gradually laid off some of the crew until he was the only one left. It got so bad from the standpoint of income from the Sutro family, they finally had to lay him off. He then went to work as a painter on the Golden Gate Bridge and worked two or three years there during the depression. The way he tells it, if you didn't cover the number of square feet of paint that you were expected to paint, somebody was standing by to take your place.

CB: Oh, my goodness!

NCO: There was a lot of pressure.

CB: And that was after the bridge was completed?

NCO: No, that was during the construction. In the meantime he applied for a State Civil Service job and finished as painter foreman for the Port of Harbor Commissioners. I don't know if you are familiar with the fact that the State owns the waterfront including all the warehouses.

CB: No, I didn't know that.

NCO: All the piers, all fishermans wharf. All of these belong to the State of California.

CB: I didn't realize that.

NCO: Also the State Belt Railroad.

CB: I remember that though.

NCO: That was part of the whole operation. He worked there until he retired at the age of 67. He worried what he would do, but travelled quite a bit after that. Mother died when she was 57 so it was about 10 years that he was batching here at home.

CB: On Millwood Street?

NCO: For a while, but he sold the property and moved into a condo in San Rafael. He got tired of living by himself so started looking for places like the Tamalpais. He also inquired about one over in Oakland called Piedmont Gardens near the Kaiser Permanente Facility. It was run by the Baptist Church but you didn't have to be a Baptist in order to live there. He lived there for ten or eleven years and I think those were probably the happiest years of that man's life. He had people to be involved with .. he was on the food committee one year and he was on the arm chair travel program another year.

CB: Wasn't that great!

NCO: Yes and there were more ladies than men in that place and he still had a car for the first five years that he lived there. He ran errands for all the ladies so he was much in demand. He met some very nice ladies, but nothing ever came of any of it.

CB: Now, you have one sister, Jean?

NCO: Yes, a sister, Jean.

CB: Is she older than you?

NCO: Yes, Jean is 19 months older than I, and is currently living in Healdsburg and has been there for the past 18 years. She lived in Sonoma for a short time before that. She was married to Tom McLarnon. Tom died about 12 years ago. She now spends a lot of time with our oldest son and his family in Santa Rosa. When the second child, Alex, was born, Jean came down from Healdsburg and spent three weeks living with Norm and his wife, Norma, and helped take care of the new baby.

CB: That was great. You really are an all California family!

NCO: That's right, except for our two sons who went out of the area to have marital relationships. Howard, the youngest, met

Christa Baumgartner in Spain. She was a school teacher in Austria and was in Spain on a holiday. Howard had completed his medical internship and was travelling around Europe playing tennis in England and Spain. His brother, Norm, flew over and met him in Spain for four weeks before returning to his job. Howard spent about four months over there. When they met Christa who was staying at the same hotel, they invited her to a bull fight. That was the start of the romance between Howard and Christa. The boys then followed Christa to her home in Linz, Austria and met her family. They visited with them for a week before Norm headed home. Howard then continued on for a little longer stay in Europe. The following summer Christa came over here and stayed with Howard in San Rafael. A year later they were married. The wedding took place in Linz with all our family attending including my sister and her husband, Dorothy's sister and her husband and Norm. That was a real experience!

CB: I imagine so.

NCO: In Austria you have to have a civil ceremony so we all headed to City Hall at noon on the 31st of July. The civil service is conducted much as if in a church setting with the two principals, husband and wife, sitting at a table opposite the magistrate. He would read or talk to them in German and then repeated everything in English so that all of us would understand what the ceremony was about.

CB: It made it a lengthy ceremony, didn't it?

NCO: Yes, and from there we went to the Luthern Church in downtown Linz. We were standing outside the church until two o'clock when the church bells began to ring. The minister came out the front entrance to greet everybody and lead the bride and groom into the church, followed by the family.

CB: Oh!

NCO: You don't go inside and sit down and wait for the ceremony to begin but are ushered in by following the minister and the bride and groom. The minister conducted the service in German. However, Dorothy's sister's husband, Fred Cleaveland, who served as deacon in the Episcopal church in Mill Valley (Church of our Saviour) was invited to read passages from the Bible, which he did. So that was the one bit of English that was part of the ceremony. After the ceremony we wait in the churchyard for the minister to come out. The bride and groom then form the reception line right in front of the church. By now traffic is going by in this downtown business day in Austria and the public is looking in to see what is going on. As the guests come up to congratulate the couple they

hand Christa a bouquet of flowers...everybody has a bouquet of flowers...

CB: How interesting!

NCO: Christa hands the bouquets to Howard and Howard hands them to one of the bridesmaids. After this we all leave the church and attend a sitdown dinner for thirty-five family members at the Tour Hotel overlooking the Danube. The dinner was held in the Mozart Room with a balcony adjoining it on the second floor....a very picturesque setting to watch the boats going by. Sometime during the dinner Christa has disappeared and its then when Christa's father tells Howard that she has been kidnapped and that it's the custom for the groom to try and find her. With one of Christa's cousins, Howard starts running around the hotel looking for her. Finally the father tells him that he has an idea where she might be. They get in the car and head up the river a couple of miles and there at a little inn is Christa and two of her girl friends having a drink. Howard was told he had to ransom the bride to get her back and the ransom is the cost of the drinks. Afterwards they come back to the hotel in time to finish dessert. Then everybody adjourns to the Disco Room for dancing and that went on until midnight.....a twelve hour non-stop activity.  
for us!

NCO: Our son, Norm, 3 years older than Howard, also had a fantastic wedding which took place at St. Nicholas Church, an Eastern Orthodox Church in San Francisco, six years after the Austrian wedding. He married Norma Jweinert, a lovely Jordanian. Over 400 guests attended and our friends still talk about it. Like his brother's, the wedding and reception lasted about eight hours.

CB: Speaking of weddings makes me think of you and Dorothy and where did you two meet?

NCO: Where did we meet? I was a student at Stanford and Dorothy had been a student at the University of Washington but was at home at that particular time in Burlingame. One Sunday afternoon my fraternity brother and friend, Martin Seaver, said, "Let's go over and visit my friend, Dick Bentley." I said, "Fine". We get in the car and drive over there. He wasn't home, but his sister, Pat, was. So after visiting with Pat for awhile, one of us suggested, why don't we play bridge and see if we can get a fourth. Pat gets on the phone and calls Dorothy. She says, "Sure she can play." So the three of us drive to Burlingame to play bridge at Dorothy's house. Later that afternoon we drove back to school and both of us commented that she was a pretty nice little gal, so we flipped a coin to see who would call again, and I won.

CB: That was a lucky toss of the coin.



NCO: Yes, and that's how we got together.

CB: So you were at Stanford and that was before World War II?

NCO: Yes, I graduated from Tamalpais High School in 1937 and attended Stanford until 1942. I stayed out part of the year by working at the American Bridge Company at Mare Island to earn enough money to help pay the cost of tuition. My uncle in Palo Alto had a connection at Columbia Steel. Through him I got two pretty nice summer jobs....one at Mare Island framing the machine shop and the following summer working on the Pitt River Bridge, which is the bridge crossing Lake Shasta going north on I-5. The bridge was 500 feet above the ground. It was a double deck bridge with trains on the lower deck and the highway I-5 on the upper deck. They built it from pier to pier from the south end going out half way which left a large section of the bridge suspended in open space. Then they went around to the other side, building it in the same way as the first side, joining the two without having to build supports in the middle. Being in the laboring crew we had to carry all the scaffolding back to the end of the bridge by walking on a 12 inch steel beam 500 feet above the river and the highway. The old Golden Gate Bridge net was slung beneath the roadway probably 50 feet below the steel beams we were walking on. There still were five deaths which occurred during the construction of the bridge. One occurred while I was there. He was working for the painting contractor and fell from the top deck to the top of the pier. It wasn't bad working at that height if you didn't stop to look around. The laboring crew carried 2 x 12 planks with one man at each end. We carried these approximately 200 yards from the center of the bridge to the land at the end of the bridge. I have pictures of this which I can show later.

CB: Yes, I would like that. But talking about Stanford earlier perhaps we can go way back to Mill Valley when you went to school here. Didn't you go to Park School?

NCO: Yes, that's another part of the story. I went to kindergarten in San Francisco as my father and mother decided to buy a home there in order to raise their two children separately from the rest of the family. We lived on Geneva St. in the outer Mission district and the whole year we were there my sister was sick. So they sold the house and moved back to Mill Valley where I spent four years at Park School, one year at Summit School and three years at Old Mill School before attending Tam.

CB: Do you remember any of the teachers you had at Park? Was Miss McGuire there at that time?

NCO: Oh, yes. Miss McGuire was the principal as well as the fourth grade teacher. Miss Jackson was the third grade teacher.

CB: Blanche Jackson?

NCO: Yes, and Miss Locey was the first grade teacher.

CB: Was Mrs. Mills there?

NCO: No. Park School in those days was not the way it looks today. It was closer to the playground area on Catalpa. The main entrance of the school was on Catalpa and the building consisted of 4 classrooms on the upper level and kindergarten on the lower level. The entrance today is at the corner of E. Blithedale and Elm and this area was nothing but a dirt playground. Wintertime was a muddy situation. The fifth grade classes were held at Summit School but the boys and girls that lived in the north end of Mill Valley attended Summit School from kindergarten through fifth. Mrs. Van Loon was one of our teachers.

CB: And she was probably the principal.

NCO: Yes, and then there was Miss Johnson and Mrs. Hildebrant at Old Mill.

CB: Winifred Johnson?

NCO: Yes. And Miss Belle Abraham was the eighth grade teacher and the principal. Superintendent of Schools was Roy Huffman. He had his office at Old Mill School. You'd walk in the front door of the school and his office was on the right as you entered. Mr. Huffman and his secretary were the entire administrative staff for the Mill Valley School District. Now there probably are as many administrators as there are teachers.

CB: Do you remember anything about the Homestead area and the Homestead School?

NCO: Oh, yes.

CB: In talking about the Homestead School we previously talked about the Stoltes, Frank and Virginia, long time residents of Homestead. Their parents were friends of your parents. Correct?

NCO: Yes, that's correct. A group of six couples had a bridge group and played once a month on a Saturday night and we children would either spend a night at Frank and Virginia's or at our place or at the Gallweys who lived on West Blithedale, east of King Street. Once while staying at Frank and Virginia's we got into a little trouble with guns, but fortunately nobody got hurt.

CB: What was the story about the guns?

NCO: Well, Frank had a .22 and he was showing it to me and it supposedly was unloaded. I pulled the trigger and the gun went off and put a hole in the wall.

CB: How old were you then?

NCO: At that time I would have been 11 or 12.

CB: That's not so bad, I guess.

NCO: Another incident happened at that time. The Stoltes residence in Homestead was just across the street from Stolte Grove. Once a year on the 4th of July or on Labor Day they would have a BBQ or a party down in the Grove. Frank and I got involved with a BB gun. Fortunately there was no serious damage, but a pellet from the BB gun hit Mr. Medlicott in the back. Another incident, but fun incident, with Frank...Frank and Virginia would come to Old Mill School by climbing the hill behind their property to the top of the Dipsea stairs and then walk down the Dipsea stairs to Old Mill Park to go to school. The reverse was done after school, hiking up the Dipsea stairs and down the hill. Well, Frank would sometimes pull a couple of sleds up to the top of the Stolte property on the ridge south of the Dipsea stairs and then Frank and I would go over and spend the afternoon after school at his house and getting there was done by riding the sleds down the grassy hillside and under barbed wire fencing. We would lean back to go underneath the barbed wire..and nobody got hurt. And then there's that beautifully maintained property next to Stolte Grove which was purchased by the neighbors of the Stoltes.

CB: That's right, the Homestead walk.

NCO: This property surrounding the grove had a lovely garden. It contained a series of four dams. One of them formed a lake large enough to row a boat, paddle a canoe, or dive off the diving board. There were two smaller dams which were designed at that time to filter out dirt during the rainy season by means of settling ponds. One was on the Stolte property and the other three were on this garden property. What a lot of fun we had playing in the nearby creek and on the Stolte property.

CB: Do you remember any other swimming places that the kids used?

NCO: Well, yes, we built a dam behind our place on the Corte Madera del Presidio Creek which is behind Marin Floor Covering and the Lawson-Dyer Pharmacy. During the winter my friend, Charlie Hanson who lived across the street, and I would go to the grocery stores in town and collect their empty potato sacks. When spring came we'd fill them with sand and dirt and dam the creek. Charlie was always interested in orthinology and later became a Ph.D. in

that field. About 10 years ago he and four other crew members were killed while flying over the Grand Canyon counting bighorn sheep.

There were other dams further down. One on the corner of Park Avenue and Sycamore. It was deep enough for us to dive off the banks into the water.

CB: It was that deep!

NCO: We also had two rafts made out of railroad ties that we borrowed from the Northwestern Pacific Railroad. Four ties nailed together made a raft with two empty paint buckets upside down as seats and a home made paddle for each. We could race from below our house to the bridge on the corner of Miller and Millwood Street up to the lumber yard.

CB: How late in the year could you do this?

NCO: All summer long. Once you got it filled, as much water was coming in was going out. But even though it was very slow moving water, there was enough water flowing in. As you know, there were dams all up the creek through West Blithedale and Cascade Creek. The Marcus family had a very beautiful concrete one and it was possible to swim all summer long in the ones at the Redwood Lodge. the water would come in, go over the dam and down to the next one and so on until it finally got down to us.

We also went trout fishing and the big time was on May 1st which was the opening of the trout season. I would be up at the crack of dawn at the creek behind our house fishing. In those days there weren't any big ones, just five inchers.

CB: Did they plant the creek?

NCO: Not then. They have since, but I am sure nobody is fishing there now. But we did a lot of fishing. In the winter time if there was enough rainfall, we would catch salmon.

CB: That were coming up stream?

NCO: Yes, we would do it with a pitchfork. We also hunted for crawfish. When we got enough, we would boil them and eat the tails.

CB: Is that right?

NCO: And this was out of the Mill Valley Creek.

CB: Did you eat the salmon too?

NCO: Yes.

CB: It doesn't seem possible when you see the creek now.

NCO: No, you wouldn't now, but you had to catch them in high water time.... in February, March or April.

Because our yard was so big there were several kids in the neighborhood that were interested in track and field. So we built our own track. Sprints were up and down the driveway and the hurdles were also up and down the driveway and were made out of two orange crates standing on end with two steel bed runners clamped into place and used as a cross piece. You'd better not hit one or you would have a mighty sore shin. We also had a pole vault pit ... we started in the garage right by the creek, made a turn, running full speed toward the pit which was close to the front sidewalk. We kept records and everybody knew what was going on. The kids out for track at Tam played with us and we could vault as high as 9 feet. We also used the same pit for the high jump. But we had a separate pit for the broad jump which had sand in it rather than wood shavings which we got from the Mill Valley Lumber Company.

CB: Is sand as soft as shavings?

NCO: In the broadjump the purpose is to see how long and far you can jump so you couldn't identify the distance jumped in shavings or leave a mark you could read. All track meets throughout the world use sand for the broadjump. But now they use styrofoam for the highjump and pole vault.

CB: Rather than shavings?

NCO: Yes, when shavings are wet there is not very much give.

CB: Did you go out for track when you were at Tam?

NCO: Yes, I ran the hurdles and the pole vault and lettered in both in both my junior and senior year.

CB: Was it a red or a blue sweater...did they have letterman's sweaters?

NCO: Yes they did. The blue sweater was for the varsity and the red sweater was for the lightweight division. Both were widely acceptable and it was an honor to play on either. The lightweights couldn't be over 17 years old, over six feet tall, or over 140 lbs. and make the team. Some of the kids fasted for a few days before weigh-in in order to weigh between 120 and 125 lbs. Then within a week they would be back up to 135 or so pounds. The lightweights

did very well in North Bay League, which today is the Marin County Athletic League including seven schools: Vallejo, Napa, Petaluma, Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, San Rafael and Tamalpais.

CB: So you really did some traveling then.

NCO: Yes, indeed. I didn't take up track when I went to Marin. but played football for two years on the varsity.

CB: At College of Marin! That probably was called Marin Junior College then?

NCO: Yes, that's right. There were some pretty good athletes in all sports at the junior colleges who later transferred to a major school. That was at the time of the end of the depression and kids could still stay at home and get started in college before transferring.

CB: Now what about Sam Chapman? Was he ahead of you?

NCO: He was four years ahead of me.

CB: I see, so you never played with him?

NCO: No, but I know him and see him as he belongs to the Sirs. He was quite an athlete.

CB: I just remember his name being such a big name in Marin.

NCO: Tam had one of the rarest things that could ever happen in sports in the days when Sam Chapman played. There were only eleven men playing on the football team playing both ways. You couldn't substitute every other play like they do today. If you substituted in one quarter, you couldn't get back in the game until the next quarter. In my senior year at Tam I played all but five minutes of the whole season in both offense and defense.

CB: My, goodness.

NCO: That doesn't happen anymore. Anyway, Sam Chapman and Perry Schwartz were both from Tamalpais High School. Perry Schwartz grew up here in Mill Valley. They both made All American the same year when there were only eleven All Americans.

CB: And they were both at Cal?

NCO: They were both from Cal and from Tamalpais High School.

CB: That speaks pretty well for the program at Tam. Tamalpais had a very good program all the way around in the 1930's, didn't it?

NCO: Yes. They won virtually every year in baseball, did well in track, did well in swimming, and did well in basketball.

CB: And a good scholastic program?

NCO: A high scholastic program. If you had a C average from Marin J.C. you could qualify for entering Stanford University or U.C. Berkeley.

CB: With a C average?

NCO: In those days they were looking for students, too. It wasn't like today where there are 8,000 applying for 1,000 openings. And transfers were easier to come by than freshmen.

CB: So it was easier for you to go to Stanford from Marin J.C. than to go in as a freshman.

NCO: If you had a C average at Marin J.C. you would qualify to go to Stanford and I had a better than a C average.

CB: Do you remember at all what the tuition was at that time?

NCO: \$90.00 a quarter at Stanford. And you attended three quarters a year for \$270.00 a year.

CB: That's quite a difference.

NCO: Yes, it 's a few thousand now.

CB: When you were at Stanford, what was your major?

NCO: Economics and Business.

CB: I see. So the engineering work that you did working on the Pitt River Bridge had nothing to do with it.

NCO: No, nothing to do with it. I wasn't an engineer on either. I was an assistant time keeper on the Vallejo job and I was the laborer on the Pitt River Bridge at \$0.75 an hour.

CB: Now what year was this?

NCO: 1940.

CB: When you worked on odd jobs in Mill Valley do you remember at all what you got paid?

NCO: I worked for Varney Brothers on Saturdays for a number of years and received \$3.00 a day.

CB: That would be like an eight hour day?

NCO: Yes, an eight hour day.

CB: What kinds of things did you do?

NCO: The fun job ... Jack Varney, the son of Johnny Varney who was one of the owners, was about four years ahead of me in school. He went to work for his father at the hardware store and delivered a lot of things. One of the things he delivered was coal. Coal was delivered in 100 lb. sacks. Jack would always save the tough ones for me. There was one house on Lower Alcatraz that had 117 stairs and you had to carry a hundred pound sack of coal up those stairs. Your knees were wobbling before you reached the top. You didn't dare stop or you wouldn't get started again. Another one was down by Stolte Grove in Camp Tamalpais, back in the woods, and another one with a hundred stairs.

CB: You had a driver's license so you could drive the truck?

NCO: Yes, the driver's license wasn't required other than just the one you had for driving an automobile. In driving, we used either a pick-up truck or just a small two axle truck. When I was at Marin Junior College I got a bus driver's license with the thought that I might be able to do some of the driving of our teams if we were going down to play San Mateo or Menlo. We also played Menlo, Modesto, Salinas, Folsom, Yuba, Santa Rosa, and San Francisco.

CB: Did the college have its own bus at that time?

NCO: Yes, the college had its own bus and even though I had the license, the opportunity never came up.

CB: Well, then did you go into the service during WW II?

NCO: No, I didn't. When I was at Marin Junior College I tore the cartilage in my knee playing football. The loose cartilage would get caught in the knee joint and I couldn't straighten the leg until it was put back in its proper place. That went on for quite awhile until 1942, right after Pearl Harbor, when I had surgery but I couldn't qualify for anything at that point. A year later I was reexamined but because of the knee problem, the army would still not take me. Finally I went to the Marine Corp to volunteer and was examined by a Navy doctor at their office in the Palace Hotel in San Francisco. He said, "I could find something wrong with everybody if I wanted, you're ok." So I was reclassified from 4F to 1A and went back to the medical examiner at the draft board and they again came back and said, "No way, with that knee the army or the government would be paying for it the rest of your life." By



then they had enough recruits, so I spent the war years at the C & H sugar refinery.

CB: Was that at Crockett?

NCO: Yes, and it's still there now, owned by C & H Sugar. I worked in the Personnel Department recruiting workers. The biggest problem we had was getting people who could probably make more money in the shipyards or somewhere else during the war. I would go down to the employment office in Richmond and try to find warm bodies. We provided housing for them buying up a little motor court in Geyserville and hauling it to Crockett and setting it up in a field near the refinery. I even loaned fifty cents to several for something to eat, but never got my money back. While I was there I wrote a newsletter every week to all my friends who were in the service. The newsletter was usually two pages single spaced and I would tell them what was going on in the bay area, who I'd seen, who I dated, any jokes I had heard, football scores, baseball scores... whatever I could put together. I did this on my lunch hour in the personnel office typed with 7 carbon copies.

CB: And then you sent it off to your friends?

NCO: I sent it off to my friends and kept them going throughout the war. I wish I had kept a copy now.

CB: I wonder maybe some of them might have one.

NCO: Probably not. They would pass them around among their friends in the military as they would have friends in the bay area that maybe would be interested in scores of games and what was going on politically and locally.

CB: At what point did you come back to Mill Valley?

NCO: Well, I had a room at the Crockett Club during those three years. The Crockett Club was owned by C & H Sugar and had a swimming pool, a library, as well as meeting rooms.

CB: So you hadn't really left home?

NCO: That's right. I came home on weekends. Quite often the weekend was one day long because everybody worked a six day week. There were six employees from C & H, all male, that rented the six rental rooms upstairs. You had to go down the hall to the bath, but I don't remember the price I paid for the room each month.

CB: Did you get enough gas to drive home?

NCO: Sometimes I came home on public transportation, taking the train from Crockett to the Mole in Oakland ... then the ferry across the bay to San Francisco, a ferry across to Sausalito, and a train to Mill Valley.

CB: That took a little while?

NCO: A little while, yes! And occasionally my folks would drive me all the way to Crockett or I would take the Richmond auto ferry.

CB: And then you would take the train to Crockett?

NCO: Yes, but only when I would go via San Francisco. I also had fond recollections of meetings that took place at the Buckeye with two of my friends from Tiburon, Gerry McDonogh and Bob Creighton. Creighton had signed a minor league contract after he finished the University of Oregon and was slated to be a pilot in the Navy as was Gerry McDonogh, whose brother owns the Angel Island ferry.

CB: Oh, Milt?

NCO: Yes. We'd meet at the Buckeye at about six or seven o'clock on a Saturday evening whenever we could. We'd have a couple of drinks with Jack the bartender and then Jack would buy us a drink. Then the three of us would pile in somebody's car and drive to San Francisco, stopping at the Palace Hotel or the St. Francis where the big bands were playing.

CB: Can you remember the names of any of the big bands?

NCO: I remember Freddy Martin, who played at the St. Francis, and Paul Pendarvis ("When you hear the violin, that's Paul Pendarvis") who played in the Garden Court at the Palace. We probably wound up getting home at about two or three o'clock in the morning. Our touring the San Francisco night life finally came to an end when they both got their calls to go to flight school. I managed to meet with other friends in the military who were home on weekends or on leave so I would see a few of my friends that way.

CB: Now, back to when you were younger in Mill Valley growing up, you mentioned you worked at Varneys, but even before that can you tell a little about the downtown area? What it looked like? Different areas say where Varneys is today. Is that where Varneys was then.

NCO: No, Varneys was where Pozzi's liquor store is today. They moved to the present location in the early '30's. The Post Office and Purity shared the space now occupied by Banana Republic.

CB: The Post Office and the Purity Store shared it?

NCO: Yes, when the Post Office moved over to Miller Avenue and occupied one half of the Wells Fargo Bank (formerly American Trust Co.) Purity took over the rest of the building, which is now Banana Republic. When Purity first came to Mill Valley in about 1928 or 1929 it opened in what then became Quinn's bar, "Meet the Quinns," which is now a part of the Mill Valley Market.

CB: Oh, it must have been a very small store.

NCO: Well, when Safeway first came to Mill Valley in the '30's it was located on the corner of Throckmorton and Miller. Originally this was the site of Mill Valley's early grocery store called, Wheeler-Martin. Grocery stores weren't very big then. Finally, Jacob Albert built a larger store for Safeway where the West America Bank is today.

CB: Albert built that?

NCO: Yes, and rented it to Safeway.

CB: Did he buy the property from Costa Brothers?

NCO: I don't know if he bought it directly from Costa Brothers, but he acquired it. When we were doing research for the East Blithedale Walk, I called Larry Mayer, who is the son-in-law of Jacob Albert. Albert had two daughters. One married Mozart Kaufman who had Kaufman's in San Anselmo. The other married Larry Mayer who was given the Mill Valley department store to manage. The store known as Alberts was on the corner where Lockwood's Pharmacy used to be (now the Coffee Roastery on Miller and Throckmorton). Alberts Department Store was known later as Mayers.

CB: Did Larry Mayer have any photos?

NCO: When we were getting ready for the 1983 History Walk I called Larry to see if he had any photographs or information on early history of the Albert family. He said, "Oh, hell, we clean out the file when we sell property."

CB: Getting back to Crockett...

NCO: During the war I didn't date very often except for an occasional date with local girls from Crockett or Mill Valley. There was a long period when Dorothy and I did not see each other. But near the end of the war I wrote to her in care of her parents' address and received a reply from Los Angeles where she was working for Time Magazine. It wasn't too long after that when she decided to return to San Francisco and we decided to get married. By 1945 I left C & H. because I felt there was no opportunity there with

several in the department having seniority. I was given an introduction to Nulaid Foods in San Francisco and remained with the company for 30 years before retiring. Nulaid is an agricultural cooperative marketing eggs, turkeys, chickens and feed. In those days there were 1000 employees, 3000 egg shippers and 7000 feed and supply users. Most of the employees were represented by 10 or more unions. Today there are only 2 growers or egg producers working from a ranch in the San Joaquin Valley. In 1956 Nulaid moved to a huge packing plant and distribution center in San Leandro. During all this time I continued to commute to San Leandro from Mill Valley via the Richmond Bridge.

CB: That was quite a commute. What was your position there?

NCO: I was director of operations for the marketing division and responsible for labor relations, insurance, as well as trucking and real estate maintenance.

CB: And you lived where in Mill Valley?

NCO: First in the duplex my father and I built at the end of WWII on property adjoining the old family home on Millwood Street. Then a friend of ours had a flat in Sausalito with a beautiful view of the bay. We stayed there for about two years until the property was sold. We moved again to San Bruno ...Dorothy's father felt property values were better on the Peninsula. During that year in San Bruno, we commuted every weekend and holiday to Mill Valley and built a small home on the third lot, next to the family home. We moved back to Mill Valley from San Bruno one year to the day. Six years later we built a larger home on Manor Drive near Park School and lived there 19 years. We have been here on Summit Ave. for the past 17 years.

CB: My, you did a lot of moving!

NCO: Yes, but what prompted us to build the duplex was the fact that a large market, then called the Food Mart, was to be built right behind our house. We contacted the contractors on that job to build our duplex. When the job was finished, we were to meet with the builders at their office in San Francisco. Only one of them showed up that morning and when he presented the bill, we were able to show our figures, as my mother kept track of their hours. The builder seemed nervous and couldn't find a match to light his cigarette. He finally agreed to our figures and we settled for \$3,000. below his bill.

CB: Your mother was a good business woman.

NCO: Yes, she was. But after her death in 1948, all of the

Millwood Street property was sold by 1956. That was when Dorothy and I built and moved into our home on Manor Drive.

CB: You were always in real estate then?

NCO: When I was with Nulaid I handled all the sales of their surplus property. Then after retiring in 1977, I became a realtor in Mill Valley and enjoyed this activity up until 1985. I have been out of the business now for the past 10 years.

CB: Can you talk a little about the value of homes in Marin Co.

NCO: Well, in 1977 I sold a small condominium in Lucas Valley for \$35,000. It doubled in value in 2 years. That same unit sold in 1994 for \$180,000. And little Goheen houses in Sycamore Village sold for \$9,000. new in 1940, and now sell for \$300,000.

CB: Of the many changes, is there anything in particular that stands out?

NCO: Yes, traffic congestion. The other day it was stop and go from Park School to Highway 101. When I was doing research for one of our Walks by reviewing the Mill Valley Records for 1919, I found the headline "100 Cars Now Registered in Mill Valley". And of course we used to play football, baseball and other games in the street without interruption. Then there was the druggist's brother, Mr. Rutherford, who was confined to a wheelchair. His wife would push him along the street from Sycamore to the Sequoia Theatre where they would enter the theatre through the Exit door on the side of the theatre.

CB: Did you have any part time jobs in the early days?

NCO: Yes, I did gardening for the Rutherfords at 50 cents an hour and built stairs for Mrs. Fisk on Magee. I mentioned earlier in this ~~X~~interview that I worked for Varney Brothers on Saturdays. And in the summer I worked for the city fire department burning weeds and grass on vacant lots. Varney paid \$3.00 per day. My friend, Nook Ryan, and I unloaded a carload (30 tons) of coal for \$1.00 per ton. We did it in two days and each of us got \$15.00. We bagged the coal in 100 lb sacks and delivered half of it to customers. The balance was stored under Suey Kee's (now Sonapa Farms).

CB: Would you tell us some of your recollections of the fire in 1929?

NCO: It was in the afternoon when it started. I was playing with Charlie Hanson. I was eleven years old and Charlie was probably nine. We went up to the corner of East Blithedale and Millwood

which is where Cagwin, Seymour and Hamilton is now and watched the smoke and talked about it. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon and we could see embers coming down the street which was a long distance away from the fire. When my dad got home he immediately got out hoses and got up on the roof and spent most of the evening wetting down the roof so that if any embers landed on the shingle roof he would be able to put them out. My recollection now is that there were no fires downtown or in our area but that evening people were evacuating from the West Blithedale area. We had two families spend the night at our house, the Postels, who lived on Eldridge and Galways who lived on West Blithedale. There were two children in the Galway family, a brother and sister, and Lloyd Postel was the only child in his family, but his grandmother lived at home with them so we hosted six people and the two husbands stayed on the roofs of their houses that night to put out any embers that might come down. There was a constant flow of fire equipment and fire fighters coming in and out of Mill Valley but I didn't get any closer to the fire than that.

CB: What about the smoke? Was there a real pall of smoke over the town?

NCO: Oh, yes.

CB: Was it hard to breathe, or not that much?

NCO: I don't remember that there was smoke and embers carried that far...a mile or more as the crow flies.

CB: Was everyone around you in your neighborhood watering down their roofs?

NCO: I don't remember. I guess I was more concerned with playing with Lloyd, Chester and Violet Gallwey, and my sister. It must have been quite a job getting food organized though, but it all worked out.

CB: Now did it only last overnight?

NCO: Yes, as far as the West Blithedale area was concerned. The fire was moving toward the west and it came down to where we now live here at 200 Summit. There are still relics of where houses had burned. Houses on one side of Summit burned and houses across the street were saved in the area of Magee and Summit.

CB: Is that the reason for some of the stucco houses we see around here...like the one next door to you on Magee? And down on Alcatraz Way?

NCO: I don't know if that was a reason why the houses were built

in stucco, but it certainly would have helped. The real danger however was from the roofs. If you had a tar and gravel roof you were a lot safer than if you had a shingle roof. If the embers landed on a shingle roof, it would start to burn. It would burn itself out on an asphalt gravel roof.

CB: Well, the other day when we were doing this video, we talked a little bit about the Sequoia Theatre. But it was in regard to the Rutherfords as I recall. Could you tell us your recollection about the Sequoia. Did you go every Saturday like some kids did?

NCO: I went, at times, more regularly than not. I'd go in the evening and again on the weekend. There was a friend and school mate, Bob Manning, who ushered and collected tickets at the door and occasionally he would let some of us through without collecting a ticket. That was how I would get an extra movie.

CB: This was when you were in high school?

NCO: Yes, this was when I was in high school. The Sequoia was built in 1929 if my memory is correct.

CB: Then you don't remember going to the Saturday matinees every week?

NCO: I remember going to the Hub Theatre matinees more than I remember going to the Sequoia Theatre. The Hub was where the IOOF Odd Fellows Hall is located at the corner of Madrone and Throckmorton across from the new Mill Valley Inn.

CB: Did they have sloping seats there or was it always just the flat auditorium?

NCO: I think it had sloping seats, but I wouldn't be certain.

CB: But they had the regular movies like the Sequoia?

NCO: It was mainly the silent film days when they had someone playing the piano to accompany the film.

CB: Do you remember who was playing the piano?

NCO: Edna Thompson (or Edna Krausgill). Her family lived on the corner of Hill St. and East Blithedale. Her brother was one of the big band leaders here in the bay area. He played at the Rosebowl in Larkspur and sometimes he played in San Francisco. Phil Harris was in his band when they played in San Francisco. We have a copy of sheetmusic with a photograph of the band on the cover and you can pick out Phil Harris very easily.

CB: Do you remember any other people in Mill Valley who became somewhat famous?

NCO: Well, Murray Owens, whose father was the music director for Tamalpais High School. His son, Murray, and his daughter both taught music at Tam. Murray had a band and played around the bay area. I think they lived in the house that was occupied by the Robert Gravers, long time residents, on Miller Avenue.

CB: What about anyone else? Eve Arden, of course. But she was older than you.

NCO: That's right. I didn't know her at all but I can remember her father who worked for Oppenheimer's Grocery Store and did deliveries. I remember him delivering groceries across the street from where I lived and his name was Eddie Quedens. Then there was George Cory, who was in my class and probably not so well known. He wrote the music to "I Left My Heart in San Francisco". The Cory's lived on Walnut St. in the Sycamore area. He was talented on the piano and organ and in the late 1930's played the organ at the Sequoia Theatre. The union finally put a stop to it. He then served in the army during WWII writing music for the Army Entertainment Section. He worked awhile in New York after the war and later moved to San Francisco in the 1960's. He opened a music store, but died shortly after.

CB: Did you ever belong to the Cub Scouts or Boy Scouts?

NCO: I belonged to the Cubs and later the Boy Scouts. In fact Mill Valley Cub Pack No. 1 was one of those very few that remain today in the same location at the time cub scouting started throughout the United States in 1931. About ten years ago the cubs celebrated their 50th Anniversary.

I was also a member of Scout Troop No. 1 in Mill Valley and remained in scouting for probably three or four years. I was a little annoyed with myself for having quit but we lost our scout master, Mr. Reasoner, who was transferred to the east coast for Sunset Magazine. He was replaced by another gentleman whom I did not like as well so I left scouting even though I only had three merit badges to go to become an Eagle Scout. We used to meet at Scout Hall on East Blithedale but it looked different than it does today. The two rooms on the front end were added about the time I left scouting.

CB: So you had just the big hall in the back?

NCO: Yes, the big hall.



CB: What about going places, like in Warner Canyon? Did you do that?

NCO: When I was a Cub Scout the first overnight camping trip that I ever took was from Scout Hall to Warner Canyon which is now Scott Highlands. We walked out through and around the golf course to an area near the creek. We didn't have sleeping bags in those days, but we had two blankets that were folded and pinned together in a way that they were like a sleeping bag. We had a dinner of beans and hot dogs and breakfast the next morning before hiking back to scout hall. That was our big outing. Later in scouts, we did more. We were divided in patrols. And as a patrol we went up and camped at Boot Jack Camp on Mt. Tamalpais, and also over to Muir Beach. Below Boot Jack was Rattlesnake No. 1 and Rattlesnake No. 2. I don't know where they got the names. We would wake up in the morning and look out and you would be above the fog and see the sea of white covering all the bay area. That was before the Golden Gate Bridge towers would start to appear through the fog. It was a beautiful sight.

CB: Who else was in your scout troop?

NCO: Harvey Klyce, the grandson of the first Harvey Klyce, was a member of my Pine Tree Patrol. Jack Creighton who now lives in Napa whom I still see quite regularly. Also, George Conroy, known as Cookie, who played a mellow trombone in the style of Tommy Dorsey and played in Richard Gump's German Glockenspiel band. And Joe Byrne of the Rita Raymond and Bob Byrnes family. We took quite a few overnight hikes either on the bluff at the south end of Muir Beach or Rattlesnake or Boot Jack camp on the mountain.

CB: When you went out to camp did you need any kind of permit?

NCO: No, there was just a small group of us, and there weren't that many people around on overnight hikes particularly. We also had jamborees where you would have all kinds of competitions, such as building towers out of eucalyptus, etc. The jamborees were often held up at Tamrancho, scouting property near Fairfax.

CB: What about the High Sierras? I guess not high sierras, but up above Auburn?

NCO: We did go once when there was a troop contest for the winners of a patrol. We won it one year and had a three day holiday camping trip near Markleville in the high Sierras. Herb Beasley was one of the fathers that took us on the trip. Then one year my folks sent me to scout camp at Cazadero. We went from Sausalito, caught the Eureka steam train and chugged along up to Cazadero. Eventually the Cazadero scout camp was replaced by the one at

Fairfax. That was a great experience because there were scouts from all over Marin County attending the week long program. There were four scouts to a tent for sleeping and a tent set up for the kitchen and mess hall for meals. The Cazadero Creek was dammed up to make a large swimming hole. Ropes were available to hang from the trees so that you could swing out and drop into the water. There were workshops and things of that nature along with playing in the water, and day hikes where you would take a bag lunch and hike over to other areas in the Cazadero part of Sonoma County.

CB: What about some of the other activitie? I know they didn't have Little League, but Boyle Park was there. Can you tell us of some other activities?

NCO: The only organized activity at that time was American Legion baseball for kids 13 to 16. I was not a regular or starter but did play one year as a reserve. We did reasonably well but lost to Sacramento in the play-offs which would have lead to a national title. One Mill Valley team in 1929, long before my time, reached the finals at Omaha, Nebraska. There was semi-pro baseball all summer long played in Boyle Park. Home plate was about where the pitcher's mound is now on the National League field. Boyle Park has two Little League fields, one off Buena Vista and the other off Thalia with both center fields coming together. In the old semi-pro days they had a grandstand that has since been torn down to make room for the two Little League fields. I remember at those semi-pro games if a heavy hitter was due up, the center-fielder actually stood on Buena Vista and could run down the slope to the field if the ball was hit low. But if it was well hit, he would be able to catch the ball on Buena Vista. There was no grass on the field...just dirt and rocks. As a result there were a lot of skinned shins and legs from sliding on that hard surface.

Semi-pro baseball was quite popular in the bay area and the teams from San Francisco, the east bay, and Marin County played here. I don't remember many of the names of the teams although I do remember the Mill Valley Merchants. They were sponsored by the local merchants much as Little League is today. There probably were two or three players who were the stars that received a little bit of money. The rest were just local ball players that played for the fun of it.

CB: But there wasn't anything for the younger kids the way there is Little League today?

NCO: None other than scouting which covered the same ages as Little League.

CB: Could you tell us about some of the other things you did?

NCO: Yes. Across from the lumber yard I can recall playing tennis on a court belonging to the Finn family. Their house was situated on a hill above. Several years ago apartments were built on the tennis court but the Finn house is still a single family home and was featured in one of the historical society's Walk into History in the 80's.

I can also remember as a ten year old walking alone in the dark from home along the lumber yard to meet other cub scouts at the train depot. We met at the crack of dawn for an early morning hike. I could imagine all sorts of bogymen in the shadows as I walked in the middle of the street. There was no danger of being hit by a car because there were very few cars travelling along Miller Avenue at such an early hour, but I had a little difficulty getting over that feeling. Miller Avenue was a two way street on the west side of Miller Avenue and one lane in each direction and there was no problem with traffic. You can imagine today what it would be if the same traffic on Miller Avenue was just one lane. It would be like East Blithedale is today.

CB: Wasn't there a freight station up towards town on Miller Avenue?

NCO: Yes, the freight station was located in that wide parking area on Miller between Baskin-Robbins and Vogue Cleaners. This is when automobiles were shipped from Detroit in freight cars, about three automobiles to a car. Refrigerators and all kinds of heavy merchandise were also shipped to Mill Valley by rail and unloaded at the freight depot. On weekends and evenings we would go down there on our bikes and go up on the freight deck and down the ramp to the level of Miller Avenue and see how far we could go in the air on bicycles before we hit the ground. Again, with little traffic you could time your jump. That's why there's that big bend in the street today where there's parking for the condos on the west side of Miller. The railroad track from Locust to the plaza is where the north bound lanes of Miller avenue are today. Passenger rail cars were powered by a third rail electric system. Freight arrived by steam powered engines.

CB: Could you continue up Miller and describe the places of business, just as you remember them going on into town past the freight station?

NCO: Yes, going into town on the right side was nothing but rail tracks. On the left side going towards town was Brown's furniture store and next to that was a barber shop about where the locksmith is located. Then the Tamalpais Hardware operated by Tieman and Dux, two brothers-in-law. They sold all hardware items as well as wood, coal, and ice. We had an ice box for many years before the

refrigerator was available and mother would send me up to the Tamalpais Hardware to get a 10 lb. block of ice and carry it home. Ice was a cent a pound so a 10 lb. block cost a dime. They would wrap it in newspaper and bind it with twine so you had something to hold. It was about six blocks from home to uptown. At other times the ice was delivered.

CB: How long would the 10 pounds last in the ice box?

NCO: About two or three days I imagine. And next to the hardware store was Spurs' Mill Valley Garage, probably where D'Angelo's is now. A gasoline pump was on the curb. When a car would pull up to the side, the attendant would take the hose and put it in your tank. He could control when to stop by watching the gauge on the side of the bowl up above street level. The repair shop was behind the pump. Then I remember when that was later replaced by a post office, and a branch of the American Trust Company of San Francisco. Now it is the branch of Wells Fargo Bank which merged with American Trust many years ago. Then came the Eastland Bakery. (Oppenheimer's Market was in there once), and another bakery called Quality Bakery. Lockwood Pharmacy was on the corner.

CB: And if you went around the corner and went up Throckmorton towards Dowds, do you remember any of the places along there?

NCO: I remember one very vividly by the name of Espostis. We always went to Espostis Ice Cream Parlor and the latter years of their existence they made their own ice cream in the building. It was done in a little room that was right on the street with a big plate glass window where you could stand and watch them make the ice cream. They also had a fountain where they made ice cream sodas and milk shakes, banana splits and whatever else was available. Then between Espostis and Bardea's shoe repair was a billiard parlor where you could play billiards, buy cigarettes and other tobacco items, and newspapers.

CB: So what is part of La Ginestra now, I guess, was the Bardea shop and billiard parlour. And going on up Throckmorton?

NCO: The Five and Dime.

CB: Where Living Foods was located for awhile. And then across the street right next to the old Hub Theatre what would have been around there?

NCO: The Tamalpais Land and Water Co. had its early office on that property. Later Fidelity Savings and Loan was located there. Also, I remember George Hoyle's brother, Carl Hoyle, had a milk distribution office there. He sold milk over the counter as well as other milk products and had a milk route as well.

CB: Now, is that the building that had been a toy store before that?

NCO: I don't remember a toy store.

CB: Then the Nostrand Realty Co.

NCO: Yes, I remember that name. Probably in the building with the Tamalpais Land and Water Co. It was a real estate and insurance office.

CB: I think it must have been. Then the Mill Valley Market.

NCO: Yes, the market was located where the Laundromat is today.

CB: Do you remember what that was before Mill Valley Market?

NCO: No. But I know Allen and Rosevere's grocery store was on the corner of Bernard and Throckmorton.

CB: What about Pritchard's.

NCO: Pritchard's was a dry goods store next to the Bank of America and the Mountain Railroad office.

CB: Where Rutherford's was located?

NCO: Yes, where Rutherfords Pharmacy was located. Then down west of that was another barbershop. The barber's name was Chavez. He owned the house on Blithedale where the Avenue Grill restaurant is today. Bordens had a dairy and distribution office next to the Keystone Building and Pritchard's Drygoods Store. Then there was the Sunset Market in the Keystone Building.

CB: Whereabouts?

NCO: About in the middle of the Keystone Building. That would have been in the 20's. And then there was the PG & E office that was located where the present Mill Valley Market is located. The PG & E office was later replaced by the White Mill restaurant by the creek. Purity Stores occupied the space before the Mill Valley Market. For a time Quinn's Bar was next to the Mill Valley Market. Purity, a chain like Safeway is today, then moved across the street where the Banana Republic is. They moved once more to Camino Alto and East Blithedale and remained there until they went bankrupt. At that time this area was all marshland.

Everything in the Sycamore Village area from Sycamore to Miller Avenue and Locust to the High School was all marshland. Our family

would take walks down Miller Avenue to the high school and up Camino Alto which was highway 101 to East Blithedale and then back East Blithedale to Millwood Street. That was a pretty good hike. We did that quite often on Sunday evening after a light dinner as we had the main meal around one or two in the afternoon. The theory being that the housewife had cooked all seven days of the week and this would give her a little bit of rest in the evening by having Sunday dinner early. When we would walk down towards the high school on Miller Avenue, you could hear the crickets by the thousands in the marsh. It was almost deafening. Gradually development took place. There was a little hill where the Weiner Schnitzel was for a long time and is now Gira Polli, on the corner of East Blithedale and Camino Alto. The developers moved the dirt from the hill into the marshland which is now Sycamore Village and Safeway and all of that area.

CB: Now was that Goheen who took that hill down?

NCO: Yes, I would assume it was. I don't know who were the actual movers of it, but Goheen was the developer of Sycamore Village. We referred to it as Goheen Gulch. Most of those houses have passed the test of time quite well and they were quite inexpensive. As I recall that was about in 1940 or 1941. There was a lot of government building going on. They started building them about the beginning of WWII and then were permitted to finish quite a few of them as they could be used for war housing for workers at Marinship. Right after WWII when the last of them were being finished, prices were around \$4,000. and \$5,000. They were approximately 1,000 sq. ft. of floor space, 2 bedrooms, 1 bath. Some of them have been expanded and upgraded extensively. A \$4500. house now is as high as \$300,000. The first were built on Juanita Street which is the street that parallels East Blithedale.

CB: So that wouldn't be on fill?

NCO: No, they were on firm ground and were larger houses and more substantially built and they would sell I am sure for around \$400,000. today. Goheen was also the developer of Scott Highlands and Scott Valley. Scott was the name of one of the backers of George Goheen. His brother, Robert Scott, is a very well known and long time resident of Mill Valley.

CB: Were there any real floods in the part between Sycamore and the high school?

NCO: Yes there were. One of them would have been in the late 50's. It flooded our property on Millwood Street at that time and flooded the lower part of Mill Valley, especially the Locust area.

CB: Do you think the water actually came into those houses the way it did down in the Shoreline area?

NCO: It might have. I can't be sure, but I know that it flooded most of the heating systems because the houses were built low to the ground. They were only 18 inches above ground level and you were barely able to have a little crawl space in there. They were heated with floor furnaces so they had to dig a pit where the furnace sat. PG & E had to be called quite often to comeback after a heavy rainstorm to service heaters that filled up with water.

CB: Would that have been economy in construction or did they just not have central heating that much in Mill Valley?

NCO: They didn't have central heating that much in Mill Valley in that size and type of house. I know in the duplex we built in the late 40's we installed wall heaters that were about 4 to 5 ft. tall but it was the same idea as the floor furnace. They were built right into the wall rather than in the floor.

CB: So that was after WWII.

NCO: Right. That was right after, in the late 40's.

CB: What about that area where Lawson & Dyer is and the Copy Center, that whole section? Was that developed together?

NCO: Yes, I think it was. Again it was right after WWII. Up until then it had been the home of the Bagshaws. And the Bagshaw family owned the area from Sycamore to Whisler's property which now includes what is now the Lawson & Dyer Pharmacy, the Food Mart (now Marin Floor Covering) and the Copy Center. There was a service station where the little restaurant and deli is now. In the late 40's it was developed by Oliver Solomn. He bought the property from the Bagshaws. Mrs. Bagshaw had divorced her husband and married Gus Oppenheimer, who operated a market downtown. They lived on that property for quite a while before they built the house on Buena Vista at the corner of Hill. Solomn built a Ford garage where the Copy Center is today, and Lawson & Dyer was first occupied by a Varney store which featured appliances.

CB: That was large appliances, like washing machines?

NCO: Washing machines, radios, washer and dryers, and refrigerators. That didn't last too long and they decided to go back to the hardware store downtown. Lawson & Dyer became the next occupant with the Food Mart, Mill Valley's first super market adjoining it. The market was a run by Walter Johnson and Jim Phelps. Phelps was a food broker and had an office upstairs above

Lawson & Dyer's. Jack Whisler owned the property on the corner and down Millwood Street to the big blue house (it's been blue for quite a few years), but I think the color has been changed just recently.

CB: It's the first house next to the shops on Millwood.

NCO: Yes, the Whisler house was next to the shops on Millwood. The driveway entrance was on Blithedale. Jack first built a florist shop on the corner of East Blithedale and Millwood. He along with his wife and aunt operated the shop for quite a few years. When WWII came along, Jack went to work at Marinship as an electrician on the building of the liberty ships. Later the florist shop became a laundromat and now it is a Video store. He also added two little shops that face Millwood. One of them was a beauty shop that Rita Raymond operated for many many years. She was the sister of Bob and Joe Byrne whom I have mentioned before.

CB: I guess parking wasn't the problem that it has become when they were built?

NCO: That is for sure. The thing I like about Mill Valley at least from my own view is that it has changed for the better in many ways. The downtown is a nice village area although there is just the one grocery store but it still has some of the shops and types of businesses that were around for many years. It is quiet, its streets are tree lined, and its dead end or off the main arterial. The only hazard now is the automobile and the automobile has sure taken its toll. Yesterday, when I was coming into Mill Valley at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon the traffic going north out of Mill Valley was double breasted from the freeway to Camino Alto and then it was single file from Camino Alto down to Park School and I have 't the foggiest idea as to where all those people come from.

CB: Do you think there is any solution to the traffic problem?

NCO: I really don't. It's going to be that way or more so as long as they keep putting in shops that attract people in cars. The saving grace I guess is that a lot of businesses down town are restaurants and that is not a problem in the day as it would be at night between the theatre and the restaurant business. Downtown is pretty busy at nighttime now and far more so than when I was a boy. I don't see any change in that happening and what you can do about it.

CB: Was there any kind of gathering place such as the plaza? You mentioned the clock .. that you would meet at the clock. Was it a gathering place or just a place to meet?



NCO: Just a place to meet, I think. Until WWI the depot was for trains. Then it became a Greyhound bus depot for many many years. The commuters all boarded the busses at what is now the Plaza. They parked the busses at night along the east fence and there were probably twenty or thirty parked there overnight or the weekend when they were not used on the commute service via the Golden Gate Bridge. Now the busses don't come any closer to town than Sunnyside Avenue.

CB: Were there any town characters, that you might have seen around the 20's or 30's?

NCO: Well, I don't know if you call them characters or not, but there was a man called "tail-light Andy" who was really the night watchman. He didn't have a car. It was a two man police department. Chief McCurdy had his own car and I guess he got paid something for the use of it. He was the only police officer on day duty for a long time. Tail-light Andy got the name because he stopped the cars for not having their tail lights working properly. He patrolled the business area by foot and checked the doors to see if they were locked. I also remember there was a Japanese boy named, Matt, who sold newspaper at the train depot pushing papers very hard to make a sale. Joe Canet was another character in downtown Mill Valley. He came on as a second police officer and ended up as Captain Joe Canet. He was around a long time. For the last ten years Bob Byrne was quite the town character until his recent death. I don't think Bob got the credit that was due him. He was a good athlete in high school, a quarter and a half-miler on the track team. and was a winner. But when he went to sea during WWII in the South Pacific, he contracted encephalitis and was never quite right after that. He operated a gardening service but had to quit after his eyes got so bad. But don't feel sorry for him or his heirs because the property he owned is now worth one or two million dollars.

CB: Now where is that located?

NCO: The Byrne property is located on East Blithedale, Dell Lane, and Mountain View. Bob lived in the little house on Dell Street until he died. He owned all of the property along Blithedale from the corner to the modern office building opposite Cagwin Seymour & Hamilton's real estate office.

CB: There is another office building that was a doctor's office at one time.... a smaller building a little closer to Dell Lane. Was that on Byrnes' property also?

NCO: Well, there was a little rental and real estate office on the corner of Dell Lane.

CB: Maybe that's what I'm thinking of.

NCO: It was built as an office building for real estate rental. Crystal Palace was the name and it is now down on Miller Avenue.

CB: There was a doctor during WWII who had come from Germany and was not allowed to go out at night. His office was in there.

NCO: I don't remember that. But the office building was not built until the 80's.

CB: I don't remember his name either. Well, are there any others in town that we haven't touched on who contributed something?

NCO: Well, the Wesleder name comes to mind. Why I thought of that ... they lived in the building next to Cagwin, Seymour and Hamilton's office. It was a private residence during the time the Wesleder family lived there and he was the man who built the "Super" service station on the corner of Hill and East Blithedale. The island in the center of the station had bird houses in the attic and bird houses were also around the perimeter of the the Studebaker salesroom. Mr. Wesleder operated both the service station and the sales office for Studebaker. The story goes that when he first started selling Studebakers in Mill Valley, he had to teach his customers how to drive as well. It was called a super service station because in those days you could get standard gasoline if you preferred, or you could get Shell gasoline or you could get Flying A or Mobil. They had four separate pumps and tanks. One for each brand of gasoline rather than grades of gasoline.

CB: Would that be the usual thing at gas stations or was it only there?

NCO: I think it was only there. I have another recollection. I mentioned earlier..the Eveready Garage on the corner of West Blithedale and Throckmorton (now the furniture store outlet). It was a television appliance store for many years, but originally was built as a garage. Eveready Garage was a Buick dealership and the showroom was right on the corner. The repair shops were behind and extended clear behind the double deck parking which is still there over some shops. I can remember watching the delivery man bring gasoline to the service station. He had nothing much larger than a pick-up truck and the tank probably held at most 500 gallons of gasoline. He would stop by the pump, which was one of these tall ones about eight feet tall with a glass bowl at the top, and then hand pump the gasoline from the tank up to the bowl. Then the gasoline filled the tank in your car by gravity when the handle on the nozzle was squeezed. The driver would unload the rest of the

gasoline in the underground storage tank by putting a 5 gallon funnel in the fill-pipe, then go to the back of the truck with a five gallon can and fill it, and then walk back to the storage tank and pour the gasoline in the funnel. If the service station wanted 40 gallons of gas, it would take 8 trips to fill the tank. That was how gasoline was delivered in the early and mid 20's.

CB: I guess they didn't worry about toxic clean-up then the way they did on East Blithedale for the super station? That had remained idle quite awhile.

NCO That was a vacant lot for a long long time but originally was a grocery store owned by the Bickerstaff family. There is a photograph in the History Room of a woman standing at the door of the grocery store on the corner of Hill and East Blithedale. It later burned down, long before I remembered it, but the stairs were still there for years and years until the lot was purchased either by an investor or Wesleder. But Wesleder built the super service station. Much later it became the Standard Oil Service Station operated by Fred Jandura. And now it has just recently been converted into an office building, housing primarily lawyers with underground parking coming off Hill Street rather than East Blithedale.

CB: There aren't many places in town now where you can get gasoline.

NCO: The closest one is at Locust, a Shell station and a Chevron station down at Reed and Miller. Tom operates that one and I don't know who operates the Shell station. The Shell station is strictly for gasoline. There is no maintenance service. They do sell candy and things of that nature inside. At one time there was a Mobil station across from the Outdoor Art Club where Dominic's barber shop had been for years. That was operated by the Martin Bros., Fred and Jack. Jack later went with his other brother, Bert, in the building supply business at Tam Junction. There was a Richfield station across from City Hall where Smith & Hawken is located. Alex Bardea ran that for awhile. Then Fred Martin and Alex Bardea got together and managed the Flying A Associated station on the corner of E. Blithedale and Sunnyside, now the Avenue Grill restaurant. They were married to sisters. All in all there were five stations downtown that are no longer there.

CB: Wasn't there another station across Hill Street at one time?

NCO: Oh, yes.

CB: Wedged in between Hill and Mountain View?

NCO: Yes, there was. An office building is there now and it has been for sale for the last couple of years. The service station was there for many many years and obviously some waste material has seeped into the soil, but it has been a hangup on the sale of the property for the last couple of years getting EPA clearance.

CB: Now the house next door, was that the Creighton house?

NCO: Yes, Mr. Creighton was a copy reader or rewrite writer for the Call Bulletin in San Francisco and the family lived there for many many years. Jack Creighton, who now lives in Napa, had two older brothers who left the area long ago. Jack's mother, Mrs. Creighton, was a widow at that time and had the service station built for the oil company on a lease basis. The demand for larger service stations meant that many small stations in Mill Valley eventually closed and properties were developed for other purposes. An office building was built on the Creighton property and Scott McCall had their real estate office there for awhile.

CB: Do you remember who lived in any of the other houses on that block on Mountain View?

NCO: Tommy Bickerstaff lived in the house near Dell Lane on the north east side of Mountain View and there was a Cavalli who was related to Tommy Bickerstaff. He lived in the house next to Creighton's.

CB: Was that Hugh Cavalli?

NCO: I don't recall.

CB: Wasn't there a plumber named Simms along there?

NCO: Yes, Simms sold the business to Stanley Searles and the property to a contractor. I think the house belonged to Tommy Bickerstaff who later sold it to Simms.

CB: And weren't the Moraes living in that area?

NCO: Yes, the Moraes family lived in a two story house that would be be the second one from the corner of Dell Lane. The Moraes that you mention were the Roque Moraes. Mr. Moraes was a Portuguese dairyman who operated a dairy near the Alto Tiburon intersection on highway 101 and that large property is now known as Enchanted Knolls. The main street going into Enchanted Knolls is called Roque Moraes Drive.

CB: Well I think that probably is about it,

NCO: A lot about Mill Valley.

CB: That's right. We can call it a day for today.

NCO: I'm happy to call it a day for today.

THE END