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Mill Valley, California

CHARLOTTE DOWD (MRS. GORDON) SWITZER

An Interview Conducted by

Helen Dreyfus

v. 45

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Mrs. Gordon (Charlotte Dowd) Switzer

Born March 14, 1905 in Mill Valley.

Resident of Mill Valley until 1942.

Interviewed April 1978 in the Mill Valley Public Library.

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CHARLOTTE DOWD SWITZER

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CHARLOTTE DOWD SWITZER

Helen Dreyfus

This is Helen Dreyfus, interviewing Charlotte Dowd Switzer on April 7, 1978. Tell me, how did your family originally get to Mill Valley?

Charlotte Dowd Switzer

Grandma and Grandpa Kratzenstein came by ship from Hamburg, Germany. They crossed the isthmus on muleback and then sailed up the coast to San Francisco. They met on the boat. She had never known him, and he didn't know her. I think she was only seventeen or eighteen. They were married when she was eighteen.

They got here in 1853. They bought a house on Bryant Street in San Francisco, as I remember mother talking about it, and then grandpa bought the property on Corte Madera Avenue in Mill Valley, where the firehouse is now, that whole block there. He had his little "rose cottage" first and then his big flower garden, and they came over for the summers. After the 1906 earthquake they moved over here. The earthquake and fire destroyed practically their whole neighborhood.

In the meantime Aunt Charlotte had married a sea captain. He wanted a house in Mill Valley, so grandpa gave him part of the lot and they built that big old house that belongs to the Sutherlands now.^{1/}

^{1/}36 Corte Madera Avenue.

Mrs. Dreyfus

That big old yellow house?

Mrs. Switzer

Yes, that was Aunt Charlotte's. Then the Sutherlands sold off the other lot for what is now the shoe repair shop. They tore down what grandpa called his rose cottage (it was in pretty bad shape) and built that nice stucco house right next to the firehouse.

Mrs. Dreyfus

When did the Dowds get here?

Mrs. Switzer

Grandpa Dowd^{1/} came from Ireland -- steerage, I imagine, because I don't think he had any money. They were married in Boston in 1853, came across the plains in a covered wagon, and settled in Corte Madera. I think somehow Grandpa Dowd managed to get a Spanish grant, and dad^{2/} was born over there in Corte Madera. Mother was born in San Francisco. After Grandpa Kratzenstein and the whole family moved over here -- well, they were still coming back and forth for the summertime when mother met dad, and they were married in 1893.

^{1/}Michael Dowd.

^{2/}Charles James Dowd (1865-1912).

My brother^{1/} was born in 1896, and my twin sisters^{2/} were born in 1898. I was the caboose who came along in 1905.

Mrs. Dreybus

When did your father and mother go into the moving and storage business?

Mrs. Switzer

Dad originally started in 1891, in partnership with his brother, George, in what was called the Redwood Stables. He and his brother could never get along because dad was very open-handed and my uncle was a miser -- as tight-fisted as could possibly be -- and they just didn't get along. So dad bought Uncle George out in 1892, and Uncle George started a dry-goods store where El Marin Florist is now.^{3/} They tore down that building and rebuilt it. He later moved up the street into Deacon Braid's old store, where Fidelity Savings and Loan is now.^{4/} Then dad built the new barn at 157 Throckmorton, which became Dowd's Fashion Stables. Apparently when he bought the property it had an old tumble-down barn at the back which he used to store his wagons and his big dray horses -- because he also did grading. Then he built the modern livery stable at the front. The horses were stored down in the basement, and the upstairs was kept for the buggies. We lived upstairs in the upper flat. That's why we've always said we're like the good Lord -- we were born in a barn, all four of us.

^{1/} Charles Irvine Dowd (1896-1965).

^{2/} Vivian Dowd Teulie (Mrs. Felix J.) and Lillian Dowd Sturken (Mrs. Frank).

^{3/} 108 Throckmorton Avenue.

^{4/} 130 Throckmorton Avenue.

The stable burned in 1910, and dad rebuilt it as it is now. A big flood came in February of 1924 -- that was when I was in college -- and a house from Marion Avenue washed down the creek, backed up against the back of the old barn, and flooded everything. The barn was on its last legs, so Bud^{1/} tore it down and built that new storage building. It wasn't a storage building to begin with but a place for his big trucks. He maintained a mechanic to repair them, so then they always had a place to put them.

Dad started in the livery stable business, and then he went in for the heavy grading, and then he decided he might just as well get into the moving business. That was when people were beginning to come back and forth for the summertime. Dad would move them over here in the summer and take them back to the city in the fall. He always moved the O'Shaughnessys, Dr. Barkan up in Cascade Canyon, the Schlesingers -- oh, four or five families.

Dad used to board their horses in the summertime. Kate Pohli lived right across the street from where Margaret^{2/} used to live on West Blithedale, and she boarded her horses with dad. They were supposed to be delivered at the house at six o'clock in the morning. My brother did not like getting out of bed, and mother would have to keep screaming at him. Pretty soon the phone would ring, and it would be Mrs. Pohli screaming for her horses! She made her husband take a prebreakfast ride every morning; she thought it was good for him. She did this with Mr. Pohli and later with Mr. McLeod when she married him. She herself rode until she was in her eighties.

^{1/}Irvine Dowd.

^{2/}Margaret Wosser Dowd (Mrs. Irvine).

Mrs. Dreyfus

I know, I can remember seeing her riding as a very old lady.

Mrs. Switzer

After dad died in 1912 mother^{1/} kept running the business. Irvine went to work for the Federal Reserve Bank. Then he was drafted in World War I. When he came back from overseas he didn't want to go back into the banking business, so he checked to see if mother would let him run the business with her. Of course we all agreed.

Dad had died without leaving a will, so the business had to be in a guardianship until I was eighteen and couldn't be transferred. As soon as we got it straightened out in the court, we three girls had turned the business over to mother. She said we'd get the house up on the hill in back of the business property and the piece of property on Madrone where the Keaton and Dowd funeral parlor was. Dad had also gone into the funeral business.

Mrs. Dreyfus

That's right; I'd heard that.

Mrs. Switzer

He didn't do any of the embalming; Steve Keaton did that, but dad conducted the funerals. He had just bought a new hearse, new hack, and new everything to go with it. We had quite a few

^{1/} Emma K. Dowd (1863-1942).

Portugese funerals, and they did spend money on funerals! All this burned with the barn. They didn't save a thing, not a stick of furniture, nothing. The only thing they saved were the horses. We simply went downstairs and cut the ropes and drove them out, over the creek and up through Spurrs. Next morning everyone was phoning and saying, "Please, Mr. Dowd, your horses are in our front yard." But at least none of the horses were hurt.

I think that's what killed dad. It was such a frightful shock, financially and every other way. I think that's what started his heart attack.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Well, it would, really, in an older man.

Mrs. Switzer

Of course you know he built the original road to Stinson Beach, the coast road.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Did he!

Mrs. Switzer

That was when he was chairman of the Board of Supervisors. He was the one who put it over. That was before you had any "conflict of interest," so he could put his own men and teams on the job. There used to be a great big rock that juttet over it the last turn before you came into Stinson, and for years it had

dad's name on it and a date. They finally blasted it out when they widened the road. It used to follow the canyons, and talk about windey!

Mrs. Dreyfus

That must have been a frightful job with horse-drawn equipment.

Mrs. Switzer

It was all done with horses and scrapers.

Mrs. Dreyfus

He engineered it too, I suppose.

Mrs. Switzer

I imagine he did, but I don't know. He did have a smattering of engineering experience, but they may have hired a county engineer. Dad did all of the actual grading. Of course he was supervising, he didn't do any of the driving. Originally he had the bus service from West Point to Dipsea before there was a coast road.

Mrs. Dreyfus

The train went up to West Point, and then there was a bus to Dipsea?

Mrs. Switzer

Yes, dad had a bus at West Point — a horse-driven bus.

It went down the Old Stage Road into Dipsea.

Mrs. Dreyfus

So that's what that road is that goes up to West Point!
There's still the remains of that road.

Mrs. Switzer

Yes, you can see it.

Mrs. Dreyfus

And there was enough business to run a stage down? How often
did it go -- once a week, once a day?

Mrs. Switzer

It used to go mainly on Saturdays and Sundays. If there was
a special party dad would send the bus up to meet them during the
week.

Mrs. Dreyfus

That was the only way to get to Dipsea?

Mrs. Switzer

The only way to get to Dipsea -- until the coast road was built.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Do you remember what year the coast road was built?

Mrs. Switzer

It was when I was a little girl. It must have been before 1910, because it was done before the barn burned. I would say around 1908.

Mrs. Dreyfus

I remember you as riding, always. You must have ridden a great deal.

Mrs. Switzer

We kept our saddle horses long after the rest of the barn was gone. In fact my sons learned to ride here. Irvine rode a lot too; he always kept his own horse. Dr. Bennetts used to complain constantly about flies, so one day I told him, "Well, it's just too bad because we were here before you were!"

Mrs. Dreyfus

Like building next to an airport and then complaining about the noise.

Mrs. Switzer

Dad always kept the barn spotless, so there weren't very many flies. There's bound to be some flies with livestock; you can't help it. Our sons still ride. They both do rodeo roping.

Mrs. Dreyfus

They were raised on a ranch?

Mrs. Switzer

No, they were raised here in Mill Valley. But we bought ten acres in Sacramento and they rode a lot there and did a lot of roping. Then Gordon was transferred to Elko, and we bought thirty-four acres out there. The boys went to work every summer at the big ranches cutting hay, and of course they'd have a rodeo in the evening. All kids will, you know; they never get too tired for that. Even now our youngest son has two feedlots, and he keeps horses for the girls. He has riders as enthusiastic as he ever was.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Riding certainly was in your family.

Mrs. Switzer

Oh, yes. It was grand before Mill Valley streets were paved. We had an awful lot of fun. Then, of course, you could ride up the old mountain road. Even after they took up the tracks, you were still allowed to sneak in the side gate. So we could ride up that trail, and it was wonderful. We'd ride to Muir Woods to see my aunt who lived over in the canyon. Then we'd ride down to Muir Beach and swim there.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Did you go to school in Mill Valley?

Mrs. Switzer

Yes, I graduated from the old Summit School, Tamalpais High School, and then went on to college in Berkeley.

Mrs. Dreyfus

What year did you graduate from high school?

Mrs. Switzer

In 1921.

Mrs. Dreyfus

What do you remember with most affection about your youth in Mill Valley?

Mrs. Switzer

Well, it was the glorious freedom that we had. Now if kids did the things we did they'd be considered vandals.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Really? Like what?

Mrs. Switzer

We were allowed to fish in the creek. We could go down in Aunt Aggie's back yard and fish in Corte Madera Creek; we could go for all the crawfish we wanted. When we went to Muir Woods there were no restrictions -- we could climb the trees, bounce up and down on those big bay trees that are prostrate, and wade in the creek if we felt like it. Then we could be sent downtown any time of the day or night, and there was never any reason to be afraid of anything. Our doors were never locked, ever.

As I look back now and somebody says, "Wouldn't you like to be a teen-ager again?" I say, "Not in this day and age, for all the tea in China, absolutely not!" There are too many restrictions and too many things kids can't do. They don't have an outlet for their energies as we did. Of course we always had plenty to do -- we had the garden to work in, and we had the horses to ride. We were extremely lucky.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Yes, you really were. I envied you from the bottom of my heart through my entire youth.

Mrs. Switzer

I'm glad we were able to raise our kids here. They still had the freedom to do what they wanted to do -- I mean things that were decent and compatible and not cause you all kinds of worry and fuss.

Mrs. Dreyfus

I know; I'm glad I'm not raising teen-agers myself now.

Mrs. Switzer

I don't know how Barbara^{1/} can stand to do it. They've got seven girls and I think, "My God!" Seven girls and one boy. Of course, they are on the ranch. That means the children have chores to do. They don't run to town every five minutes because they

^{1/}Mrs. Switzer's daughter.

can't. Consequently they're leading a very healthy, wonderful existence for this day and age.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Where is the ranch?

Mrs. Switzer

In Calexico. Actually it's a feedlot, but it's big enough that the kids can have their horses, and they've got outside chores to do.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Were there a lot of young people who had horses in your early days?

Mrs. Switzer

I don't remember. The Ward children did -- Jean and Marion. They always had their own ponies. And Mrs. Ward rode constantly. She was a marvelous rider. She'd ride up and down Corte Madera. And Mrs. Ralston White always had her horse up there on the hill. She used to ride that poor little devil up Corte Madera Avenue on the dead gallop; why he didn't drop dead I'll never understand. She was Ruth Boericke, you know.

Most people had no horses. You couldn't maintain them in your own backyard. We had the barn, that's where we were lucky. Mother still had the horses and the drayage horses after dad died. It wasn't until Irvine came back after the war that he bought his first truck.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Yes, my mother used to rent a donkey from your mother, and I would stand by the entrance to the yard holding the donkey while mother did her shopping. I was in terror that one of those big teams was going to come out while I was there.

Mrs. Switzer

Irvine's pin money came from the donkeys. They lived on the manure pile and didn't have to be kept in the barn. They could get along on what was thrown out. There was always straw and hay wasted, and they'd stay sleek and fat on it. So his Saturday and Sunday job, when he was in school, was to keep the donkeys saddled up to rent.

The twins rode the donkeys more than they rode horseback because they were more available and they could take their friends. One donkey would go if the other one went. The one on the second donkey kept a nail in the end of a board and she'd stick the front donkey, which would go -- then the rest of us would go.

Mrs. Dreyfus

How many were there?

Mrs. Switzer

Four.

Mrs. Dreyfus

But you were always on a horse. I don't remember you on a donkey.

Mrs. Switzer

I rode Agezelow once in a while — that was the tiny white donkey. But he pitched me off two or three times so I didn't think he was so hot.

I remember my first horse. The old Irishman who lived with us and was night watchman at the barn bought this horse in San Francisco, and after he brought him home he would never take him out of the barn. We used to have the blacksmith come and chop off his hooves — it was just awful. Finally I persuaded Irvine to buy him for me. Irv paid Pat \$50 for him, and that was my first "own" horse. Of course I had always been able to drive the buggy horses that were there, or ride if I felt like it.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Did you have riding horses for rent?

Mrs. Switzer

For a while. Mother used to bring them in on the weekends. That was after dad was gone, because he never rented. All he rented were the horse and buggies. They maintained one saddle horse to use when they delivered the buggies to the various people who boarded their horses. Little Jimmie was trained to go along with the buggy. He never had to be tied; he'd just follow along. But if the stableman stayed inside too long and had a cup of coffee and smooched with the maid, Jimmie would come home!

Mrs. Dreyfus

And the stableman had to walk home.

Mrs. Switzer

Then dad would always know what they were doing because the horse would come home first.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Where did the people who had jitneys keep their horses?

Mrs. Switzer

I don't remember that we had any rentals like that to meet the train. I think people just kept their own personal horses. When the jitneys came in they were Model Ts.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Yes, but I can remember a horse-drawn jitney. Not for very long.

Mrs. Switzer

The Salzes always kept their horse and buggy at the barn. She would come down and get the buggy and meet the train and then go home. They did have a barn up there, but they preferred to keep the horse at Dowd's where she'd be cared for, and not have the muss around the house. Gee, she was a beautiful thing, just gorgeous -- great big immense animal. They had a special buggy that had hide-leather seats, Morocco leather; you just sat back, you know, like the Queen of Sheba. They finally got tired of fussing with her so dad bought her. We always used to call her the Salz mare -- I don't know what her name actually was.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Was Mr. Wood the principal at the high school when you were there?

Mrs. Switzer

Oh yes! He was the original principal, the very first one. Irvine went to high school under him, and that was when Tamalpais High School was first built.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Just that main building?

Mrs. Switzer

That was all, just the main building and the tower. That was about all there was to high school even when I went, except they did have the woodworking shop built out in back. But there was nothing down on the flat.

Mrs. Dreyfus

By the time I got there there was another building out in back. Now it goes all over.

Mrs. Switzer

When I graduated there were forty-eight students in the graduating class. Now look how many there are!

Mrs. Dreyfus

Forty-eight was quite a lot. What became of Miss Abraham?^{1/}
She lived up near Eldridge for a while. I guess she must be dead
by now.

Mrs. Switzer

She lived with her brother. She was just such a love. The
boys would sit in the back row, and they'd make her cry. Then we'd
feel so badly we'd want to brain them -- but we didn't want to
start a fight because she would have cried harder if we'd gone
after the boys!

Mrs. Dreyfus

The historical society is thinking of doing a model of Throck-
morton Avenue from about your barn over to Suey Kee's, as it was
in about 1910. You'd have been five years old then, so you wouldn't
be our best source of information on that.

Mrs. Switzer

No, I don't think so.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Was the Hiker's Retreat still there when you were a little
girl?

^{1/} Belle Abraham, teacher at Summit School.

Mrs. Switzer

Yes, it was right next door, across the alley.^{1/}

Mrs. Dreyfus

What was on that corner across the street when you were young? Can you remember?

Mrs. Switzer

When the barn burned, my uncle had a dry-goods store in the middle of the block, but I've forgotten what was on the corner.

Mrs. Dreyfus

The Hub Theater was over there, but what was on the corner?

Mrs. Switzer

The MacNamaras built that building that Dr. Bennetts has now.^{2/} All I remember is Uncle George's dry-goods store. We were sitting out in front — it was a warm evening — and mother spotted smoke coming out of the barn. Without stopping to think, she went over and threw those great big doors wide open. Of course the whole place went up like a candle. I don't mean to criticize her, and I don't blame her, but if she hadn't done that they might have been able to stop the fire. Probably not, because of the wood and hay. Dad had just put in his full supply of winter hay.

^{1/}153 Throckmorton Avenue.

^{2/}160 Throckmorton Avenue.

There was a whole carload of coal upstairs for the cook fires. They used to feed the men then. There were dormitories across the back of a big wide deck that faced the creek. The men's rooms were there, and they ate in their own private dining room. Dad kept a chinaman cook for them.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Really! How many men were there?

Mrs. Switzer

He must have had ten or eleven. After the barn burned, we moved up to the house on Lovell Avenue — which we called the little house because the one on Bayview was bigger. Dad built on an extra dining room so the men could eat there.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Where was that on Lovell?

Mrs. Switzer

At 16 Lovell, right next to Dr. Danford's building,^{1/} that little old-fashioned house. That was built about 1880. That one was built first, and then the big house was built in 1900.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Irvine was born when did you say?

^{1/}Dr. P. R. Danford, D.D.S., 22 Bernard Street.

Mrs. Switzer

In 1896. And the twins were born in 1898. I can remember the block from Dowd's down to the corner; the rest I'm not sure of.

Mrs. Dreyfus

I saw a picture the other day of what appeared to be that corner across from where the Hub Theater was -- there's the Hub Theater and the street going up to the old library. There's a sign that says "Hiker's Retreat." That was not where I remember the Hiker's Retreat. The Hiker's Retreat was next to your barn, and there were lockers down below and dressing rooms upstairs.^{1/}

Mrs. Switzer

What was the name of the English couple who ran it?

Mrs. Dreyfus

Odlin.^{2/}

Mrs. Switzer

Odlin! Little Daisy used to come over and help Pat clean the barn because she'd get so bored staying there with her folks. Pat was awfully good to her, patient as he could be. Edward "Pat" Ryan. He had gone to school with dad in Corte Madera and then went to work for dad when he built the livery stable. He never

^{1/} Ralph Sterner, old-time hiker, says the move across the street was made in 1918.

^{2/} Mr. and Mrs. Odlin and daughter, Daisy.

married, but he always watched out for all of us. When our kids were little they considered him their grandfather because they didn't have any other grandfathers. He still ate up at the house when mom no longer maintained the Chinaman cook. Pat was a fixture by then, so he had his meals with us. The only thing he wouldn't do was eat with the family at Thanksgiving. He'd come early to have his Thanksgiving dinner, and he always ate in the kitchen. He never would come into the dining room if we had company. They called him the "manure coachman" because he drove the manure wagons around Mill Valley when people ordered fertilizer. Poor man!

Mrs. Dreyfus

Then there was a Mr. Sheppard who ran kind of a candy store -- it seems to me about where Dimitroff's is now. Do you remember that at all?

Mrs. Switzer

That I don't.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Was Esposti's there?

Mrs. Switzer

It was, yes, and it was the first candy store I remember. Actually Kingwell's^{1/} was the first candy store in Mill Valley.

^{1/}Kingwell's Ice Cream Store, 127 Throckmorton Avenue.

They owned that beautiful white house on the corner about two blocks up. It has been remodeled because it was about to fall down the hill. It was a beautiful old home.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Well then, where was Freddie Roth's pool room and cigar store?

Mrs. Switzer

It was next door to where Esposti's went in. They've torn down that building. You know that empty lot that they use for a parking lot? The building was there.

Mrs. Dreyfus

It was! I've tried and tried to put it together in my mind, and it didn't seem to fit. So it's where they tore down the building?

Mrs. Switzer

Yes. I can remember the pool hall. It was the one place where we were told not to loiter. We were to come straight up the street!

Lockwood's Drug Store was on the first floor of the big building on the corner.

Mrs. Dreyfus

There were apartments upstairs, weren't there?

Mrs. Switzer

Freddie Roth finally went into the jitney business, and Mrs. Roth would yell from her apartment out the window across to the bus station when she'd get calls for him. Daisy Mitchell drove the other jitney, you know -- a big, heavysset woman. Her husband was quite ill.

Mrs. Dreyfus

That's right, and it was Mr. Mitchell who had the horse-drawn jitney before the cars.

Mrs. Switzer

That I don't remember. But I do remember her. She'd get out there and crank her up and away she'd go!

Mrs. Dreyfus

Were you in Mill Valley at the time of that first fire in 1911 or 1912?

Mrs. Switzer

I probably was. But I don't remember. I might have been up in Boyes Springs, because after dad died my aunt and uncle owned the springs. They would take my cousin and me for the whole summer so mother wouldn't have to worry. She was running the business and didn't have too much spare time. Aunt Aggie would take the two of us for the summer.

Mrs. Dreyfus

I'll bet you were up there when that happened; you'd surely remember it if you had been here. But the other fire -- the one in 1929 -- you were in Elko when it happened?

Mrs. Switzer

No, we were in Lassen County.

Mrs. Dreyfus

And you say sparks fell on the house on Bayview Avenue?

Mrs. Switzer

Yes. There was the big empty lot where Dr. Danford's office is now, and then that apartment. Our cat used to play in that lot. He was a short-tailed Manx, and a spark burned his tail! Pat got the fire out. If he hadn't turned the hose on the Bayview house we'd have lost it. The sparks were coming down that bad. You see, the house was shingled and it had a shingled roof too, so it would have gone.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Did Mrs. Zeiter live near you?

Mrs. Switzer

Right. She lived on the corner of Bernard and Bayview. That house burned about five years ago. It was gutted from the inside, and they finally tore it down and built a new house there.

Mrs. Dreyfus

When we sent out the announcements of meeting to organize the Mill Valley Historical Society, one of the people who responded right away was George Pimlott. Do you remember George Pimlott?

Mrs. Switzer

Oh, yes!

Mrs. Dreyfus

He seems to live in San Anselmo now. He was about my age. Do you remember him as being sort of a bad boy?

Mrs. Switzer

Well, he was full of the devil, let's face it! Now they would call him a juvenile delinquent, but they didn't in those days. They just figured he had too much pep. George didn't like school; he made no bones about it. He would much rather be out working with his dad with his electrical work or fooling with some kind of a contraption than to be in school. He got through school by the skin of his teeth, that's all you can say for him. But he made a success of himself. They named Pimlott Lane after them, so George wasn't really as incorrigible as they made him out to be. He was full of the devil, but that quiet brother of mine was no angel either. Irvine and Oscar Cappelmann could do some of the darnedest things! They had poor Captain Staples nearly out of his mind half a dozen times trying to find them when they'd done something.

Mrs. Dreyfus

What kind of things?

Mrs. Switzer

Well, one Hallowe'en they built a dummy and stuffed it with hay from the barn, they they greased the tracks from Locust to Park and stood the dummy up on the tracks.^{1/} When Mr. Ritchie put on the brakes, the train just slid down the tracks! He had a heart attack, and it blew out all the fuses in the powerhouse. Southern Marin County was dark for two or three hours. Oscar hid up in the pigeon loft at their house on Summit Avenue for three days.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Where did Irvine hide?

Mrs. Switzer

He didn't think he had to. Captain Staples always knew that it was Oscar. He wasn't certain that Irvine was a devil, so Bud managed to get away with it. But he sure was hunting for Oscar.

One New Year's Eve they decided they'd build a cannon up on the property and shoot it off. They swiped the powder from dad's powder magazine that he used in the quarry. They fastened a pipe in the ground with concrete and loaded it with everything under the sun, with a trail of black powder. Instead of going off harm-

^{1/}Northwestern Pacific Railroad from Sausalito to Mill Valley.

lessly and not hurting anything, the whole confounded thing lifted up out of the ground and went down through Mrs. Schlesinger's window on Alcatraz Avenue and set fire to her curtains. It didn't do any other damage except break the window. So they were no angels, let's face it.

Mrs. Dreyfus

No, they'd have been in juvenile hall these days.

Mrs. Switzer

That's what I said -- for what was considered a prank then. They spent all Hallowe'en Eve taking the Chinaman's laundry wagon apart and putting it together again on dad's barn on Madrone Avenue. Everybody's skates used to end up on the telephone poles. Those were just childish pranks -- little boys letting off steam.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Where was your dad's quarry?

Mrs. Switzer

Up Cascade Canyon, not too far from Dr. Barkan's house and across the creek from it. Dad had his own rock crusher on Madrone. Those big rocks were crushed for paths and for street work. He was really a very enterprising person. He only went through the fourth grade in grammar school, but he had an awful lot of drive. Mother did too. She couldn't have continued like she did if she hadn't had plain intestinal fortitude -- keeping four kids and that business going. In that day and age no woman did a thing like that. You sat down and wept that you were a widow.

Mrs. Dreyfus

And she did that in long skirts that touched the ground!

Mrs. Switzer

Always! And high-laced shoes! And her pencil stuck in the top of her Katzenjammer knot.

Mrs. Dreyfus

She was really a cute woman.

Mrs. Switzer

She had a sense of humor, but she could swear like a trooper, too.

Mrs. Dreyfus

She was tough!

Mrs. Switzer

She'd have to be to do what she did -- kept us out of trouble and ran a lot of businesses. She had the funeral business, was doing the drayage, had the moving business, and still was doing some heavy grading and plowing. They still had teams when Gordon and I were married in 1925, although they bought their first truck in, I believe, 1919. Pat had the Belgian team, and the other man had the big black Clydesdales. Those were the four horses that Bud kept, besides the saddle horses. By then he was out of the buggy business, out of the livery stable business, altogether.

It was too much of a headache. But he did maintain a few saddle horses to rent on weekends.

Mrs. Dreyfus

When we were little my brother said he wanted to be a moving man because he wanted to drive those big horses.

Mrs. Switzer

They were fascinating. Ed Ryan used to come through town, coming home from a job or from hauling something, and he'd hold those two big Belgians down until they'd make the turn right at the square. Then he'd start them trotting and come right straight through town, scattering people in all directions.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Yes, they seemed like they were fifteen feet high.

Mrs. Switzer

They were huge, and they were so pretty -- just gorgeous.

Mrs. Dreyfus

It was really a nice world we lived in, wasn't it?

Mrs. Switzer

It was. As far as I'm concerned nothing could have been better. If we felt like going to Muir Woods we could just hike over. We didn't think anything about it.

Mrs. Dreyfus

I suppose there are reasons for that, too. After all, somebody crazy might be there. But it was certainly a simpler, pleasanter time.

Mrs. Switzer

Even our boys were so lucky.

Mrs. Dreyfus

How old is your oldest boy now?

Mrs. Switzer

Forty-seven. And Stanley will be forty-five in October.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Just a bit older than our boys. Our oldest would have been thirty-eight this year -- and even our boys felt they grew up in a pretty free area. There were one or two yards they couldn't run through but not many. Now I don't suppose there are many yards the youngsters can run through.

Mrs. Switzer

Oh, heavens to Betsy! If anybody came inside my sister's yard she'd be out there screaming her head off at them.

Mrs. Dreyfus

And we didn't ask our mothers to drive us.

Mrs. Switzer

I'd have gotten told to go you-know-where if I had! Mother would say, "You've got two good legs, Tatie. Go ahead, hike it." We'd scoot up over that hill and think nothing of it. We'd hike all the way to Muir Beach if we wanted to go swimming.

Mrs. Dreyfus

And if we had someplace to stay we'd often walk over to Stinson. We didn't think much of that. Nobody walks any more. Do you remember how crowded the trails used to be on weekends?

Mrs. Switzer

Oh, my goodness. People were just pouring up that hill past our house on Bayview, up the stairs to Summit Avenue, by the hundreds.

Mrs. Dreyfus

We lived up on Helen's Lane, and you could see them going up the hill. The train would come in and about ten minutes later a hundred people would ...

Mrs. Switzer

That's why the Hiker's Retreat did so well. When his dry-goods business started going downhill, my uncle put two or three

dressing rooms with lockers upstairs, and he had regular customers. He only catered to men. It did augment his income.

Mrs. Dreyfus

I suppose he didn't charge much, but every little bit helped.

Mrs. Switzer

It was a steady income, that's the thing. He ran all his customers away from his dry-goods business! If he didn't have a pair of shoes to fit you, he'd put on any pair he had in the store whether they were too big or too little. I've always blessed him, because he always fitted me with shoes too big, so consequently I don't have any bunions and my sister does. Uncle George was terrible, he really was. He was rude to his customers, and miserable -- no more like my dad than anything.

Mrs. Dreyfus

George Dowd?

Mrs. Switzer

Yes.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Canepa's was next door to Dowd's Store, wasn't it?

Mrs. Switzer

At that time, yes. He moved next to Canepa's, and then he

moved up to what we used to call Deacon Braid's store. Mr. Braid used to get potted every night on his own bootleg whiskey. So what did Irvine and Fred Cavalli do but lock him in. They wired the door so he couldn't get out the next morning.

Mrs. Dreyfus

They were rather bad boys! But as you say, nobody predicted disaster for those boys.

Mrs. Switzer

Freddie Cavalli turned out to be one of Mill Valley's best citizens.

Mrs. Dreyfus

So did Irvine.

Mrs. Switzer

Irvine was certainly not disliked.

Mrs. Dreyfus

No, he was a nice man.

Mrs. Switzer

Irvine would never stop and think up things like that, but he always aided and abetted, believe me. He was right there, Johnny-at-the-rathole.

Mrs. Dreyfus

But it was Oscar who thought them up?

Mrs. Switzer

Oscar was the one. He was a devil on wheels.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Greasing the rail track is about the sneakiest thing I ever heard.

Mrs. Switzer

No one expected anything like that to happen, and it scared them out of a year's growth.

Our own kids decided they'd pull that stunt later when we lived in Carmichael. They'd heard their uncle talk about it. There were no rails to grease, so they just set the darn thing up on the road in front of us. Some women came along and thought they'd run over the man when they saw the dummy lying there, and a riot went on! The kids came flying into the house about a half an hour later, soaking wet. They'd gone down to the creek and sneaked back up that way. They told me what they'd done and I said, "Was anybody hurt?" They said it scared the women but they didn't get hurt. I said, "All right, go to bed."

Pretty soon the deputy sheriff came to the front door, and I said, "No, they've been here all evening." He said, "Well, somebody certainly did it." There were nineteen boys on the street, and they were all in on it. Then the other deputy sheriff who

lived down the road came up and said, "I found a laundry mark on the shirt and pants, and I could send it in to the FBI, Mrs. Switzer. Also, you're the only one in the neighborhood who beds horses down with sawdust, so I know the clothing had to come from here." I said, "That's fine, Mr. Baker, that's perfectly all right; but your son was in on it too. If you want to start something, go ahead. I'll keep quiet if you will." "Well," he said, "I guess we'd better just forget it."

When I told Gordon about it when he came home the following weekend I got Hail Columbia. He thought I should have let them be punished. I said, "Don't be silly, they didn't do any harm. If anybody had been hurt it would have been a different story, but as long as nobody got hurt it was all right."

Mrs. Dreyfus

That's the kind of a mother to have!

We used to go into empty houses. All winter long, those houses were empty. We never took anything; we just wanted to go in and see what they were like. We could get into any house, you know; those houses weren't very secure. If we'd been caught nowadays we'd be in juvenile hall forever. Even if we'd been caught then I think at most we'd have been scolded.

Mrs. Switzer

You'd have gotten the devil, and that would have been it. Now it seems they call the police first and think about it afterwards.

Mrs. Dreyfus

What became of Beatrice?^{1/}

Mrs. Switzer

Bea lives in Woodland. Her first husband died when their little boy was about a year old, and she married again to a man with a lucrative business in Woodland. She's just the same as ever, still singing. And do you know who comes to see her every summer from Canada? Peggy Cowper-Thwaite. Remember her?

Mrs. Dreyfus

Really? My brother and I were talking about the Cowper-Thwaites the other day. There was a Mona Cowper-Thwaite. What ever became of her?

Mrs. Switzer

Mona is in England. Peggy goes over to see her about every third year. Apparently Peggy's husband left her very well off. I think she lives in Toronto, but she spends her winters in Florida.

Mrs. Dreyfus

She was a lively girl.

^{1/} Daughter of George Dowd.

Mrs. Switzer

She still is. She dances every night when she's in Florida, plays golf every day.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Peggy was really -- well, kind of wild.

Mrs. Switzer

Oh, she was. She was wild as could be -- conformed to nothing! Mona wasn't quite like that, but Peggy was alive right to her toes, absolutely.

Mrs. Dreyfus

That's the way I remember you, too, as kind of wild. But as I say, I envied you so because I was always seeing you on horses. It seemed to me heaven on earth to have free access to a horse.

Mrs. Switzer

It was. I don't think I appreciated it at the time because we'd always had them and they were just part of the family. Now when I look back I think how lucky I was.

Mrs. Dreyfus

You must have appreciated it, because you rode such a lot.

Mrs. Switzer

Yes, I did. The twins are seven years older than I, and they didn't want to be bothered with me. In fact, they made me wear my hair down all the time I was in high school because it would age them a little bit if I put it up! Bud was busy working, so I was more or less on my own. Riding was the only thing I really cared about. As long as I had the horses I never felt lonesome.

Dad taught me to ride and to drive a buggy horse when I was barely able to hang onto the reins. He believed in it, and he thought we should, too. Not so much with the twins -- they were more interested in just riding; they didn't care about driving. Dad spoiled me more than he did the twins. I mean he took me everywhere with him. I would always go along in the buggy, and he would let me drive. It was a blessing that he did, because when Auntie was over in Muir Woods and Uncle Ed had to be away, the road got so bad that you couldn't get over it with anything but a horse and buggy. I would go over on Saturday and get her and take her into town to do her errands. So it was a good thing I learned to drive as well as I did.

Mrs. Dreyfus

Was the Muir Woods road in at that time -- down into the woods?

Mrs. Switzer

You could drive a car into the woods, but at times it got impassable at the top. You had to go up past the dairy ranch to what was the livery stable up there, then cross the top of the hill and go down the other road -- and oh, what a devil! Ruts

this deep. You couldn't possibly drive a car over it.

Mrs. Dreyfus

It would be hard even with a buggy?

Mrs. Switzer

Oh, it was miserable. And how the wind would blow at the top of that hill! The reins would be blown out away from the horses' heads in a big loop like this and then come back into your hands. Auntie insisted on wearing a sailor hat pinned to her long hair. It would raise right up when the wind hit, and all I could think of was, "She's gonna have it take her hair all off some day and drop it down in the canyon."

I remember she bought all the candy jars from Kingwell's candy store when they went out of business. She was going to use them in her kitchen. I was driving mother's black horse, Pico, who had a very bad habit every time we went down hill of practically sitting on the breaching strap. Auntie insisted the strap was going to break, so I said, "All right, you get out with the baby and walk, and I'll drive the rest of the way down." She got out, but she kept screaming at me. Finally she said, "If you don't get out and lead that horse I'm gonna have a fit. If anything breaks where're you gonna end up?" I said, "All right." Poor old Pico was so afraid of stepping on me that he kept pulling away. Pretty soon he got the buggy up on the bank and whammo!

Mrs. Dreyfus

Over went the jars?

Mrs. Switzer

Over went the jars and down into the creek. We lost half a case of oranges and half a case of grapefruit — they went down the canyon. Chris Armbruster, the old dependable Mill Valley town carpenter, was at the Redwood Rest — that little refreshment stand under the trees, remember, where you came down the bottom of Devil's Slide? He was there, and he saw the buggy go. He came tearing down the hill because he thought he'd find us with our necks broken. He was so relieved! And you know — that darned horse just stood there with one shaft poking him in the head and the other hitting the side of his leg and he never budged until Chris could lift one leg at a time over it. Then we unharnessed him. Any other horse would have kicked the buggy into a thousand pieces. We finally got him unharnessed and got the buggy turned around. I had cracked a spoke and broke one little buckle — that's all that happened. Believe me, I didn't tell my mother. I never let on for years, because she never would have let me go again.

Mrs. Dreyfus

And your aunt didn't tell her either?

Mrs. Switzer

Oh no, I told her not to. I knew if we told her what happened she'd say, "Don't go again, that's all. No way! It's just too dangerous."

Mrs. Dreyfus

What was that little place that you mentioned? That little

soda fountain?

Mrs. Switzer

It was Grethel's.^{1/} They called it Redwood Rest. He used to serve sandwiches. His brother^{2/} owned the bakery on Miller Avenue, the one that was where the Wells Fargo Bank is now.

Mrs. Dreyfus

The old Eastland Bakery, that's right. The Grethel kids were in school with me. I was thinking just the other day that there used to be a place in there in the trees where you could get a coke or something. If you drive by there now you wouldn't believe there was room to fit it in.

Mrs. Switzer

It was built right around the base of the trees. It was built on stilts, and how it ever stayed there I don't understand.

Mrs. Dreyfus

I'll bet he made a rather good thing out of it.

Mrs. Switzer

He did, especially on weekends. It was so popular for hikers. After they'd stormed all the way over the top of that hill they were thirsty by the time they got there, you betcha.

^{1/} Bernard Grethel.

^{2/} Marcus Grethel.