

**Mill Valley Oral History Program**  
*A collaboration between the Mill Valley  
Historical Society and the Mill Valley  
Public Library*

**MARGARET “KETT” ZEGART**

**An Oral History Interview  
Conducted by Nancy Emerson in 2017**

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In this oral history, longtime Mill Valley resident, artist, and retired teacher Margaret “Kett” Zegart recounts the story of her life. Born in Michigan, Margaret grew up in East Lansing in a family with Scandinavian roots. She attended Cranbrook Academy of Art and Michigan State University. After college, she moved to New York City, where she worked for magazines and made art. Margaret recounts living as a young artist in New York City and the people she met, including the likes of Andy Warhol and E.E. Cummings. After a number of years in New York, Margaret moved out to San Francisco with her husband. She completed an MA degree in painting at U.C. Berkeley, where she also got a teaching credential. When her fourth child was born, Margaret and her family moved to Mill Valley. Soon after, Margaret began a 25-year teaching career at Tamalpais High School. Margaret describes her active life after retiring from teaching, including her return to artmaking, travels, involvement in the Outdoor Art Club, and civic participation around the issues of housing, transportation, and environmental preservation.

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## Oral History of Margaret “Kett” Zegart

### Index

- Alexanian, Joe...p.10  
Ancestry...p.1-2  
Angiulo, Joe...p.10  
Atelier 17...p.23-25  
Beattie, Cy...p.3  
Boston, Patti...p.15  
Boussy, Henri...p.3, 36  
Broner, Sari...p.11  
Brown, T.G....p.4-5, 33  
Camping...p.39  
Center for Learning and  
Retirement...p.8  
Chandler, Jeanie...p.10  
College of Marin...p.11, 37  
Condé Nast...p.22-24  
Cranbrook Art Academy...p.19-20  
Crawford, Chuck...p.3  
Cummings, E.E...p.26  
Daughter...p.3  
Faber, Phyllis...p.10  
Father...p.7, 18  
Father’s garden...p.18  
First Unitarian Universalist Church...p.8  
Fullbright teaching exchange...p.2, 37  
Greenwood, Bob...p.3, 5, 10, 36  
Hewett, Peggy...p.3  
Horse Heaven...p.2  
Ihle, John...p.37  
Marin Philosopher’s Association...p.8  
Marin Retired Teachers  
Association...p.8  
Michaelian, Don...p.3  
Michigan State University...p.18-19  
Milley award...p.10  
Mother...p.2  
Museums...p.19  
New York City...p.10, 21-27  
Nicholson, John...p.13  
Outdoor Art Club...p.4, 7, 12-13, 15-16  
Prather, Bob...p.6, 13, 35  
Printmaking...p.8  
Schooling...p.17-19  
Sherman, Bob...p.3  
Sluser, Ruth...p.14  
Sonjantan...p.14  
Tamalpais High School...p.3, 5-6, 13,  
14, 33, 35-36  
Teaching...p.34-37  
Traveling...p.38  
University of California, Berkeley...p.4,  
30  
Warhol, Andy...p.23-25, 28  
Wasserman, Abby...p.10  
Weaving...p.3, 36  
Zegart, Benjamin (son)...p.5, 30-31, 34  
Zegart, Harold (ex-husband)...p.6, 29  
Zegart, Jamin (son)...p.4, 32  
Zegart, Jonathan Morris (son)...p.31  
Zegart, Kathleen Anne (daughter)...p.31  
Zegart, Liana Leah  
(granddaughter)...p.11

**Oral History of Margaret “Kett” Zegart  
May 1<sup>st</sup>, May 8<sup>th</sup>, and June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**Editor’s note:** This oral history was conducted over three sessions. The transcript has been reviewed by Margaret Zegart, who made minor corrections and clarifications to the original with assistance from Nancy Emerson.

**Part I: May 1, 2017**

**0:00:01 Nancy Emerson:** This is Nancy Emerson. On behalf of the Mill Valley Historical Society and the Mill Valley Library’s Oral History Program, I’m here on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 with Margaret Kettunen Zegart, a long time Mill Valley resident, who has made so many contributions to our town. We are in Margaret’s home, at 118 Highland Lane in Mill Valley. Margaret, I’m so glad to be here so that we can add your oral history to our collection, and I hope you’re ready to tell us all about yourself. Before we get to the details though, will you please tell me first about your name?

**0:00:38 Margaret Zegart:** I was born Margaret Jean Kettunen. K-E-T-T-U-N-E-N is a Finnish name. N-E-N means belonging to. “Margaretu” means fox. I didn’t realize it was originally “Margaretu” and then the “nen,” N-E-N. It meant like a fox. My ancestors were actually people who were well placed in Finnish society and contributed a lot to the small country.

**0:01:24 Nancy Emerson:** Great. And how did it turn out that you go by Kett rather than Margaret?

**0:01:30 Margaret Zegart:** Kettunen, short for that is Kett. My father was always called Kett. Until I went to college and began signing my artwork Kett, I was always still Mar Jean which was the family name for me, because an aunt came and she thought Peggy Jean was not sophisticated enough when I was not even yet one.<sup>1</sup> So they changed my family name to Mar Jean. All my high school friends and early college friends still call me Mar Jean.

**0:02:05 Nancy Emerson:** But you adopted Kett as an artist and then you’ve kept it?

**0:02:09 Margaret Zegart:** Yes, because in the art department they called me Kett. And when I went to New York City, I signed my artwork always Kett.

**0:02:19 Nancy Emerson:** Great. Well, since we’ve touched on it, why don’t we start with your early days? So where were you born and what was your family like?

**0:02:29 Margaret Zegart:** I was born in East Lansing, Michigan, a college town. My father was the state 4-H club leader by the time I was born — its offices were on the campus of Michigan State College then. He had gone to the school when it was a

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<sup>1</sup> Peggy is a nickname for Margaret.—Editor.

Michigan Agricultural College and now it's called Michigan State University.

**0:02:55 Nancy Emerson:** Great. And your parents emigrated from Scandinavia?

**0:03:02 Margaret Zegart:** My grandparents, the Kettunens, came from Finland. My mother's grandparents came from Sweden. There were too many Johansens and so they would say at immigration, "Where did you live?" And they said, "Almer." So they took the name Almer. He was a minister from Sweden. First took for two years his congregation to Minnesota, and then they moved to Gresham, Oregon, where he had a church for many years. My daughter and I first visited the site of my mother's home. She would say that when she visited her grandmother, she could see three mountains from the home. It was nicely sited near the Columbia River. Gresham is just outside of Portland.

**0:04:09:** My maternal grandfather was a really significant person in his community.<sup>2</sup> My grandmother and grandfather met in Oregon, in Salem, at the first mental hospital where they both worked. He was sort of a gallivanting, always entrepreneurial person, searching out new things. My great aunt Mary was the first woman graduate from Willamette University and [my grandfather] also went to school in Willamette, though I'm not sure if he graduated. But in any event, he became superintendent of schools in a town called Shaniko. He ran a ferry across the Columbia River; he mined for gold in Alaska; he engineered on a railroad — many different kinds of things. He ended up owning large portions of land, including a dry wheat farm called Horse Heaven.

**0:05:31:** And so that's where my mother was born in Kennewick, Washington. She would spend about three years out on the dry wheat farm. When I first visited there, it was 126 degrees in the summer. One of her stories is that when she was a little girl it was very hot, she was very tired and wanting to get cool, so she jumped in the horses' trough.<sup>3</sup>

**0:06:02 Nancy Emerson:** This is recording number two with Kett Zegart.

**0:06:07 Margaret Zegart:** When I lived in Mill Valley, I had memories of all the things I did in San Francisco, and then all the things I did back in New York City. And when things always were very dim for me — a lot of different pressures — I would think, "Oh, I could go back to New York City and pick up where I was and be an artist." But then I decided, "No, I'm going to stay here and enjoy Mill Valley because it's a wonderful community to live in." I went at the end of my teaching career. One of the highlights towards the end of my teaching career was a Fulbright teaching exchange when I went to England and I taught at Testwood, which is a river on one side of the Southampton sound. On the other side, the Itchen side, that's where I lived on grounds that had been a stately home converted into apartments. And the exchange art teacher that I had did not place me in her home, which is what they usually do. I had a barren apartment, a new apartment that was furnished with an army cot without anything and a set of dishes. So it was kind of a different experience for me, because I had envisioned the kind of England that I had seen when I had visited there.

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<sup>2</sup> On her maternal side, Margaret's ancestors have been in America since 1640.—Editor.

<sup>3</sup> Consequently, new water had to be hauled for the horses to drink.—Margaret Zegart.

**0:07:49 Margaret Zegart:** On that trip I had gone first of all to Finland — the summer after my daughter died — at the advice of Henri Boussey, who was a wonderful teacher that I had in the art department at Tamalpais High School. He and his wife Jean were wonderful people, supportive people and gifted, both of them. Henri suggested that since I would be teaching weaving — because he was leaving and there’s weaving program — that I should go to a weaving program in Scandinavia. So I went to a weaving summer program in Finland. The only thing is that they draft just backwards from what we do in America. (Sweden is like we have here in America, but not in Finland.) But I did learn how to weave. The surprising reason that I was doing the weaving is because I went in the second half semester of teaching at Tamalpais High School, and there were no roll sheets in my little cubicle. And we always got these role sheets. It said instead, “Please see the Principal.” I thought, “Oh heavens, what’s happening now?”

**0:09:16 Nancy Emerson:** Can I just ask you what a roll sheet is?

**0:09:18 Margaret Zegart:** The roll sheet has all the students’ names which are for each class, and we usually had five classes. Some teachers had an extra session, but we had five programs a day and they were always varied. I taught everything in the art department except art metal which was very well done by Don Michaelian, who had also early on had done ceramics. In those days, the glazes were just done here at Tam and they didn’t have any concern about their safety. I think that was part of his problem when he was ill for so long and then passed away. He was a mentor to me, Henri Boussey, whom I mentioned. Then we had the music people, Bob Greenwood, and he later became the art department chair. A lot of different people over the years at Tam were exceptionally gifted in their area. Bob Sherman in social studies, and Chuck Crawford is a special person. He was a counselor for one of my sons, John, and became his lifelong friend. Wonderful man. For one year, he was an assistant principal, but he decided he really wanted to work with young people.

**0:11:00:** We had many neat people. Just the other day I met a son, Chris, who was the son of one of my colleagues in the counseling department, Cy Beattie. Chris was just a student, a friend of a neighbor, and a friend of my children. So the whole Mill Valley scene has a beginning and an end — and a middle — and I’m glad I didn’t leave and go back to New York City. But my dream is still to go back another time and to visit the museums. A friend has given me the *New Yorker* magazine for the last two years. I have a pile of them. I can’t keep up with them. If they maybe came once a month I might do better. The *Smithsonian* comes once a month and I can get that read.

**0:11:56 Nancy Emerson:** Let’s pin down your time at Tam High School. You started there in what year?

**0:12:02 Margaret Zegart:** Well, I began teaching I think in 1961 and I retired from the classroom in ’81. But then for five years I was what they called a mentor and that began in 1981. Yesterday, met a wonderful person at a service for Peggy Hewett, who was a secretary to the social studies department. Peggy later became a chamber of commerce

for Mill Valley leader, and then she was very active in the Outdoor Art Club, which I joined. At the end of my teaching career I said, “I’m either going to belong to the Outdoor Art Club or the League of Women Voters.” I wanted to go to the outdoor Art Club because they have teas. My mother used to have teas in our family garden. I perhaps mentioned my father’s rock garden, but I didn’t mention the flat areas. My father had bentgrass and that was very unusual in Michigan. It was always weeded and always a lovely carpet. At the college, special things often were in my parent’s backyard.

**0:13:14 Nancy Emerson:** And their beautiful garden was a good venue for these.

**0:13:17 Margaret Zegart:** Yes. The flat garden and the rock garden on the hill slope were visited by horticulturalists. I wish I could have something like that here. I do have birch trees. Skipping way back to when my children were little and I was pregnant with my last child, I lived in San Francisco for three years in two marvelous places. One was at Hyde and Green Street, 1201 Green Street, and the other was a “floor-through” apartment facing over the Broadway tunnel. I had already graduated with a teacher’s credential from UC Berkeley with an MA in painting. I had these small children, so I taught in Oakland and Claremont Junior High School, and then at Oakland Tech High School.

**0:14:32:** But I had to have something that was not during the day when Harold would have been busy. So I worked at night, in between pregnancies — oh, you know, the crucial months of pregnancies — at Bank of America. We had check proof computers and they were huge. They were almost the size of my Chickering square grand — 1864 — piano, which is a treasure to me. They were very big and we worked at night. And by “we,” I mean most of the people working there were wives of musicians who were there for the same reason that I was. They wanted some kind of a steady income, not just gigs, or else they were interested in having a night job. And we walked to the job but we came back in taxis from the Bank of America office down on Montgomery Street. But when I came from San Francisco to Mill Valley, my almost daily trips into San Francisco’s Hospital, UCSF on Parnassus Street, was by public transportation.

**0:16:00:** I didn’t learn to drive till after my fourth child, Jamin, was born in 1959 — four weeks after I started taking a driver’s training course at Tam High School. The teacher was someone who had been born in the town Negaunee, adjacent to the small town in Michigan where my father grew up, which is called Ishpeming. So, there’s just so many ways things cross. They had given me always the first appointment, but when I had four little children not just three, they decided that I should have T.G. Brown for my teacher — I mean, not my teacher, but my doctor. T.G. Brown charged me the same rate that I was getting at the clinic, so she made no profit on me, but I could call up T.G. Brown as I was going to school. If one of my children had something she’d say, “Well, bring them down before school. Let me check the mouth to sure they don’t have strep.” For many years they were getting strep and it turned out we had a carrier, a strep carrier kid whom they played with, because at Kaiser they gave them pills rather than inoculations and they continued to be a carrier. She said, “Bring them down and we’ll give them all shots.” [laughs]

**0:17:37 Nancy Emerson:** So we should clarify that T.G. Brown was a physician who was located here in Mill Valley, right?

**0:17:46 Margaret Zegart:** Yes. She was located in Mill Valley. She was a beloved physician for many, many years.

**0:17:50 Nancy Emerson:** Many years, yes. She made it easier for you to get your kids to the doctor?

**0:17:55 Margaret Zegart:** Yes, she was a wonderful doctor. Dr. T.G. Brown gave my oldest son Ben the opportunity to buy, very reasonably, her car, which was a Volkswagen bug that had an open section. And this rocking chair you see over here by the piano that I treasure, was brought by my son from Arizona, with part of it sticking out of the car. It's a treasure for me. [chuckles] But there's so many great things that she did for every family.

**0:18:36 Nancy Emerson:** Wow, yeah. Fortunately for you. Before we leave Tam High School, you taught there for 20 years, during the 1960s and 1970s, when it was really an interesting time of social change.

**0:18:53 Margaret Zegart:** It was. It was a special time.

**0:18:56 Nancy Emerson:** Any stories about those times?

**0:19:00 Margaret Zegart:** Well, for an example, Mead Theater was sort of a drug hangout, and Bob Greenwood once said — when we went to the service for Dan Caldwell, the commemorating service for him — “You know, I really don't think that everybody knew what it was like. We overlooked many things so that we were able to help so many other young people.” Another thing that I must say about that time, the Methodist church welcomed and assisted many young people. The Catholic church also had meals for them. The Mill Valley Library kept them occupied. In those days at the library, you had to check out through a machine to be sure you weren't taking books, because many of the people, the kids, this was part of their ethic, that they would take books. Some places they even ripped pages out — especially in New York and San Francisco, they did that. I don't think too many of them did that in Mill Valley, but they had no place to be, especially in inclement weather, so they'd hang out at the library. I taught in Phoenix Hall, they now call it, it was one of the first rooms when the school was built, I think it 1904 or 1906.

**0:20:36:** One of the first buildings was Wood Hall, and then the building that they call Phoenix now went up in what later became known as the Freshman Court. There was the classroom and there was a space outside. When the kids came stoned, instead of saying they couldn't come to class, I had them go to the patio. We had cement that people had gotten breaking up roads and repair. I think my children and I picked up some of the cement slabs, but the kids did also. They made a patio and they could sign in for class and then do the work outside of the classroom. And whatever work they could do, we did



outside of the classroom. At that time I also taught some classes in ceramics and the other day I was thinking the pipes. They made pipes. But as long as they did the assignments, they could come in at noon time and do things like that.

**0:21:43:** So you knew things were going on, but in order to keep kids in school and to keep them stable — we were critical of some of the things they were doing, especially the drug use. Some of our faculty had different ideas. But basically, we were always very supportive of our students. When I first was there, we really had a faculty run school because we had a principal who was a marvelous man, and he really let the teachers do the curricula. We had Bob Prather. He was a very good principal. Don Kreps and people had a different administrative focus, but we were very fortunate. We were a great, collegial and leadership-driven faculty.

**0:22:56 Nancy Emerson:** Now was that true for the entire 20 years you were there? Or did it change?

**0:23:00 Margaret Zegart:** No, just during Bob Prather.

**0:23:00 Nancy Emerson:** So the next principal who came started changing things?

**0:23:04 Margaret Zegart:** There were lots of principals later. And the reason we had lots of principals is because we had a committee and anybody who gets an excellent recommendation after two years, or two or three years as a leader in a school, beware. Same thing for ministers. You beware. Because they get these excellent recommendations if they've been there a short time because they want to have them move on. And so we had some very strange principals in terms of what we had had before, but always the highest standards. When I got my teaching credential at University of California at Berkeley, there were three districts that we were told were the excellent districts. One of them was Tamalpais High School, one was Claremont, and one was East Whittier. And when I did begin teaching, my first year of teaching was in East Whittier. But then there was an opening up here in Mill Valley, my home. We'd already had my home here that we rented out for a year. So I was able to come back and bring my family back here, where I'd lived before Harold and I separated. We didn't get a divorce for over 10 years but we separated just because I really had all I could do with four children. [chuckles]

**0:24:41 Nancy Emerson:** I didn't realize that you were a single mom to four kids and a full time teacher.

**0:24:49 Margaret Zegart:** For many years.

**0:24:50 Nancy Emerson:** For your children, most of their lives.

**0:24:53 Margaret Zegart:** Yes. But their father came every weekend, it wasn't that he wasn't involved in the family, but he literally was an artist. One of the things I told my students — in fact I think I told them two things — was, "If you want to be an artist don't ever marry an artist." That is a very true thing. They should remember that all their lives

and tell their own children that. [chuckles] It's strange because I think my grandchildren maybe are going to end up to be artists and so [chuckles] I think it's going to go on. I think for some of it is DNA. Creativity is a very strong DNA to be passing on.

**0:25:47 Nancy Emerson:** Must be. Because you have talked about how much in your family it is.

**0:25:51 Margaret Zegart:** And so I have that. My father also was very organized. He was an excellent administrator. In fact, because he was involved with young people in agriculture, he wasn't drafted during World War II. But many of the firms that used to help fund his programs wanted to have him as their executive, but he always refused. He was a founder of the International Farm Youth program and recognized by the United States government. After the war, he was sent to different countries to evaluate their programs for agriculture and how they could relate positively to world sustenance goals.

**0:26:47 Nancy Emerson:** Do you know which countries he went to?

**0:26:50 Margaret Zegart:** Well, certainly Scandinavia. I remember him saying that, "You would have a young person from the deserts of Africa go to Australia" — I mean Arizona. And then the Arizona kids would go to Africa. He recognized the values of existing cultures and then ways to look to the future. My father started the programs in the 4-H Club, which is an international program. He started the conservation programs, as I mentioned before, and he was involved in working with other departments. One of our close family friends was O.E. Reed, who later became the head of the dairy program for the country.

**0:28:12:** One year my brother would go to Washington, D.C. and another year I would go. And so I did go to the National Gallery of Art and I did go to Chevy Chase's home. O.E. Reed that was next door to Hoover, Edgar J. Hoover, and the thing I remember about Edgar J. Hoover's home was his fish pond. I had never seen koi, these wonderful fish. They were as large as they are at the Oakland Art Museum. [chuckles] All these kinds of things were great memories that I have always associated with art. Also, I took an art class probably when I was in fourth grade from Miss Getch and Miss Winkler who were teaching art at the college of Michigan State for youth. I don't think I took it for very long, but I remember that they always wore smocks. I must not have liked them very much because when I became pregnant I never wanted to wear a smock.

**0:29:21:** So I never wore a smock. In those days, if you were pregnant you almost always wore smocks. But Miss Getch and Miss Winkler had this wonderful house that I visited later. It was a Franklin Lloyd Wright house and it made me always wish I had the money to have a contemporary home. [chuckles] But I never have. I've seen so many of them, and especially in *Marin* magazine. I'm not able to go on the Outdoor Art Club garden tours but the Outdoor Art Club is the thing that I chose instead of the American University Women. But I have benefits. I get their magazine.

**0:30:09 Nancy Emerson:** So you can stay up with their activities?

**0:30:11 Margaret Zegart:** Yeah. So I do get their magazine.

**0:30:13 Nancy Emerson:** Let's segue into talking about you as an artist. We talked a little bit about your printing, and you also said that both you and your husband couldn't be artists at the same time.

**0:30:30 Margaret Zegart:** No, you can't.

**0:30:31 Nancy Emerson:** You had to put that on hold for a while.

**0:30:32 Margaret Zegart:** I did. And I haven't done anything like I used to do in New York City, but I still do a little bit. I've been on the art committee for many years at the church that I go to, which is the First Unitarian Universalist Church in San Francisco. And I belong to a wonderful organization called Center for Learning and Retirement. Initially, we were given tuition-free courses at the University of California extension. Then we were given special rates to take a class in the ordinary faculty taught programs. The extension programs gave us free rooms. It was a group of maybe over 250 people. Now I think maybe there are 40 people left. The draw for having young people is always to have something that they can have profitably to themselves. The courses for us when we were young people were the ones that were offered by the University of California. Then we had peer classes taught by our members. Most of all of them were very professional people. Initially I went to the program that San Francisco State had, but it was mostly teachers and not professional people, and there is a difference in the kind of ongoing learning that elementary school teachers generally have.

**0:32:21:** Now I enjoy teachers. For many years, I was on the board of the Marin Retired Teachers Association. And I still try to go to at least one meeting of their four meetings a year, sometimes more. I'm now going more to things like Marin Coalition. And recently I've started going to the Marin Philosopher's Association because they have very interesting programs. I'm always interested in learning.

**0:32:57:** I think that's one characteristic of mine that may be significant. But in addition to that, I hope to finish projects I have started. After I was done teaching, I began doing more prints again. First of all, I used the printing studios at schools and at San Francisco State University, I was able to go in. You could spend the whole day there. You could work at night, as long as you wanted to in their print room. So I did lithographs there. Not true lithographs. I use lithograph inks and did monoprints there, on their lithographic presses. So I did some series' there. I did a series called, "Creation." I did a series which was the Book of Genesis. One of the things that I have not done — that I wanted to do when I retired, when I had time — I was going to read the Bible, because growing up in that interdenominational church that I mentioned in East Lansing when I was a freshman in college, I just didn't have much time.

**0:34:25:** That's an interesting thing. I've tried to figure out how I was using my time. I spent 20 years at the church teaching classes and all kinds of things. Then I just stopped

having anything at all to do with the church so that I could do these other things. But then when I started having a family, Harold was Jewish and I had this very loose economical, no, ecumenical —

**0:34:56 Nancy Emerson:** Ecumenical. I think it's the word.

**0:35:00 Margaret Zegart:** Ecumenical. All the 'icals.'

**0:35:01 Nancy Emerson:** Yeah.

**0:35:02 Margaret Zegart:** I had that program, and so I was on the art committee almost ever since I joined. One of the other things I did especially there was I worked on the stone soup that other people were having initially. And if you know the story of the stone soup, it's about a little boy that had brought a stone to put in the soup so everybody could bring something. So they had soup instead of everybody hoarding and thinking only of themselves. Well, people began to not bring the best vegetables and the best things, but as they got older they were bringing the things that weren't quite so fresh. So stone soup sort of evolved to the point where you would go out and buy the ingredients for the soups. Then I added to the people who were on the program aspect of that, and we would have outstanding speakers on different subjects. That became the forum at the program at our church, which is just before the service. And our stone soup was after the service. I began doing this myself. I would buy all the things. Fortunately, I was driving in those days. I would get the Jack and Jill, I think it's called. Wonderful. Oh, I can't think of what you call it. [chuckles] It's these marvelous desserts. What could it be? Generally, it's a large circle. Cheesecake.

**0:36:57 Nancy Emerson:** Jack and Jill, huh? Something to do with cheesecake.

**0:37:00 Margaret Zegart:** It's not quite Jack and Jill.

**0:37:00 Nancy Emerson:** Okay.

**0:37:02 Margaret Zegart:** It's Jack and something or another, or Jill and something or another.

**0:37:04 Nancy Emerson:** Okay.

**0:37:04 Margaret Zegart:** It's right near the Humane Society.

**0:37:09 Nancy Emerson:** Oh, the name of the bakery where you could pick it up?

**0:37:11 Margaret Zegart:** Well, it isn't a bakery. They only make cheesecake.

**0:37:18 Margaret Zegart:** In San Francisco?

**0:37:19 Margaret Zegart:** No, in San Rafael.

**0:37:21 Nancy Emerson:** In San Rafael?

**0:37:22 Margaret Zegart:** No, north of San Rafael, almost near Novato, where the Humane Society is. I would get large cans of things like tomatoes or shrimp, and I would make a salad and a soup and then the dessert. Initially, we would get day-old bakery things, but the group became larger, and the bakeries would have less day-old things they would give away to the church. That's one of the things I did at the church, as well as many other things.

**0:38:02 Nancy Emerson:** Just to touch back on art for a second, because you were the recipient of the Milley award —

**0:38:07 Margaret Zegart:** Oh, yes.

**0:38:08 Nancy Emerson:** Tell me about that. When did that happen?

**0:38:12 Margaret Zegart:** Bob Greenwood was one of the initial people that started that program. Abby Wasserman was another. They were significant people in our community in the arts. Joe Angiulo was also early on working with Bob Greenwood. He had, at the middle school, a very strong music program. And there were other people that were very strong in the community like Phyllis Faber, who still is actively involved in West Marin. And there's another person called Jeanie Chandler, whom I have gotten to know quite well through conversation. She is a great creative person, a flautist, and for different reasons she became interested in art. She's a very proficient representational artist who spends many, many hours working out details in her watercolors. Of course, I have an entirely different background because, in addition to the program that I had at Michigan State, I was in New York City during the heady '50s that Hans Hofmann influenced. I didn't know Hans Hofmann, but all of my friends around Eighth Street knew him. When I went to New York City, I didn't really know anyone. I had an aunt that wasn't really close to my family who had been an artist for *Vogue* magazine many, many years ago, and she lived in New York City. But for some reason or another, the aunts and my father weren't close.

**0:40:37:** Although my father had worked as a teacher in order to help put the girls through school, the art school, his whole feeling about me going to New York, about becoming an artist — well, he actually disowned me. But we had a great family friend named Joe Alexanian, and these rugs from my family are from his store. He had an Armenian background. Uncle Joe went to visit me, and apparently he went back and told my father that I hadn't changed a bit. I was the same Mar Jean. I hadn't become a corrupted artist. [chuckles]

**0:41:44 Nancy Emerson:** He reconciled with you, then?

**0:41:45 Margaret Zegart:** I guess, he recognized that I was alright.

**0:41:49 Nancy Emerson:** That's good.

**0:41:50 Margaret Zegart:** And my mother, to my dismay, published the letters that I had written to her and the information, like social occasions, in the Lansing newspaper. It turned out to be quite useful because I had no idea of the different things I'd done over the years that I was in New York City. I didn't keep track. But she had kept track through the newspapers. I had a wonderful friend named Sari Broner, who was the daughter of one of my colleagues. She and also my oldest granddaughter, Liana Leah Zegart, the daughter of my son Benjamin. They organized all my prints, and enabled me to make my website. Most of the work is from the time when I was in New York City. But then I did work, as I mentioned, right after my daughter passed away. Also, I went to courses at San Francisco State and used their press. I've now spent many years also using the press at College of Marin.

**0:43:35:** I like being around young people so much that this was to me a great thing to do. So, I did the printing there until about four years ago. And then they changed and you couldn't enroll in the programs. The state had made different requirements, and I didn't want to go to the community courses, because they were just old people. [chuckles] I wanted to be around young people. But the nice thing was that I did have the opportunity to use the press, so I could continue doing my print making. My print making basically is engraving on copper. You told me of one venue where my work is held. When I left New York, I probably left a lot behind. I think I was in 35 different museum exhibitions over a few years. So, I have had a good background. Here, people to be nice have suggested that I have a show in a store or something, but that is not what I want to do.

**0:45:06 Nancy Emerson:** Now you are involved currently with the O'Hanlon Center, right?

**0:45:11 Margaret Zegart:** No. At the O'Hanlon Center, they have juried shows.

**0:45:14 Nancy Emerson:** Okay. And have you showed —

**0:45:17 Margaret Zegart:** Just this last year, I've shown this print and two of my recent prints.

**0:45:26 Nancy Emerson:** This print is the triptych on her beautiful piano.

**0:45:28 Margaret Zegart:** The triptych on the piano. And my Milley Award is up there. It's a wonderful little sculpture.

**0:45:34 Nancy Emerson:** Yes.

**0:45:35 Margaret Zegart:** I also have up there a weaving, a very fine silk weaving from China. Nixon was given one of those after he went the first time. I went to China before that. My mother who was adventuresome like her father was. She was also strong-willed. She wanted to go to China because her sister, my aunt, had been traveling all

around the world as the first lady ham operator. In 1936, when we visited, she had a tower in her backyard. At the time, we also visited one of my Kettunen aunts who lived in Pacific Grove. And the thing I remembered most about her house was that she had an organ, a real pipe-organ. So, I have all kinds of memories. My children say I should write a memoir. They'll be glad to know that I'm doing this. [chuckles]

**0:46:57 Nancy Emerson:** It's a good start.

**0:46:57 Margaret Zegart:** I am picking up different strands as I recall things. I traveled a lot after I left school in addition to doing the printing and the artwork. I would go on trips. Once we counted up the Elderhostels that I went on, and I'd gone on 17. What I would do is go on an Elderhostel to meet people. And then I'd travel by myself to places because very few people want to spend a lot of time in an art museum or go to places where painters had been.

**0:47:48 Nancy Emerson:** But you do?

**0:47:49 Margaret Zegart:** But I did. And the other thing I did, and I hope people still do, is — universities offer summer programs. And you're around young people. This is the thing to do. You go to a summer program. I went to one through University of California in Paris, and we had the head of the Sorbonne — who was our leader, our coordinating artist — from the art department. It was a wonderful four week program. Then I went to Hayward University which is now East Bay University, I think, and the program there was a six-week summer program. We had to take a full semester course. Economics was one of my classes, and then something else. We got there just when the Euro started. The teacher said we had to change the whole course. So we read the *Economist* as our textbook. Then I had art courses and we had membership to all the city museums. I would go to the Monet museum, which was a private museum, two or three times. I've been to Giverny maybe two or three times. I have these wonderful memories about all these art experiences. When I was traveling independently from different Elderhostel programs, I went across into Belgium, and I went to a small town which had a wonderful art exhibit.

**0:50:02:** It was the first time I saw a painting like my painting. I always painted in a little different way than most people painted. I only painted for one year, but that year — I think 1953 and then 1954 — I had an invitational showing of my art at the Legion of Honor, in the Achenbach collection. They purchased one or two prints early on. Then I've given them prints over the years, which I have printed since I left New York.

**0:51:04 Nancy Emerson:** Can I just clarify, these classes and seminars that you took, the month or six weeks or wherever, were those after you retired from Tam?

**0:51:16 Margaret Zegart:** Oh yes, absolutely.

**0:51:17 Nancy Emerson:** So you were very busy in your retirement till now.

**0:51:18 Margaret Zegart:** I always am busy. I keep very, very busy. Now the Outdoor Art Club has wonderful programs, and I've always been on the Civics and Conservation Committee there. I hope you become a member. Are you interested in becoming a member of the Outdoor Art Club? [chuckles]

**0:51:37 Nancy Emerson:** We'll have to talk about that.

**0:51:38 Margaret Zegart:** If you are, the Outdoor Art Club has a waiting list. They have over 400 members. If you find a woman's organization that has 400 members in it these days you know that there is something really wonderful in it. In addition, it's in the Maybeck building.

**0:51:52 Nancy Emerson:** Yes, there is something special —

**0:51:53 Margaret Zegart:** It is a wonderful organization. We have brilliant young people coming in. Of course, Mill Valley has changed a bit. Someone today said, "Mill Valley is an entitled community." I think that's the difference. We have a different attitude in Marin County now. We still have wonderful people who are here, but our *Marin Magazine*, for example, shows you the level of living style that many people can afford. Fortunately, there is still the balance of the old timers who lived in the community and who give their homes to young people of their own, so we have those young people coming in that have the values that we have always had in Mill Valley. There is a nice balance. And Tam High School — of all three schools in the district — I think was the best school possible because, as I said, we had Bob Prather for the initial principal. And we had an opportunity to have the kids from Bolinas, who were a different strata during the '60s and '70s. They had names like Heather and Summer, you know, and they had wonderful parents that were very free and creative. Their schooling program was very creative.

**0:53:34:** They were always very capable. When the tide was up, if it was a beautiful day, there wouldn't be the boys in school, because they would be out surfing. Then they would come the next day. We had the most responsible Teixeira boy, and his family, and others, that had the Portuguese ranches. They'd get up at 5:00 in the morning and help milk the cows, and then they'd come into school, and then they'd go home. So they weren't able to participate in the school activities, but in the classes they still contributed.

**0:54:17:** And I remember Bob Sherman —no, it wasn't Bob Sherman. It was John Nicholson, another outstanding teacher, who said, "We have streaming and it's wrong, it's wrong because you segregate kids on your expectations for them" and I'm afraid they're going back to this again and it's a wrong thing to do, because as John Nicholson said, "You have someone from Marin City who has insight and experience and actual life encounters that you won't get if you've been brought up in a middle class or upper class environment." You know this stratification — we didn't have that at Tam. We had an integrated kind of population. I'm living in unincorporated Mill Valley. My address is Mill Valley, but we never had the real estate pressures that they had elsewhere. From the time my children were three and four, we had two families on my street of maybe eight



homes, two families that were Asian. They were wonderful, wonderful families.

**0:55:47 Margaret Zegart:** Blanche was a designer for one of the department stores in San Francisco. Her husband was a gifted sculptor who had worked with Isamu Noguchi, a very prominent and well-known sculptor. He worked in his studio. Another one was an architect and his wife had worked for an outstanding ceramist in Corte Madera and she was from Korea and had been in Japan during the Korean problems. She has been a neighbor for many years. Sonjantan passed away recently. Their children now are middle-aged as my children are. They are important in their different fields. But they all started out as a part of Mill Valley. You asked about Tam High School then. This was at the time when there were the riots. One summer a message was sent to the black students of Marin City — now they call them “people of color” — and others not to do any rioting or parading. The president was preparing naval and military housing for demonstrating or rioting people, and the warning was passed around by the students in advance.

**0:57:54 Nancy Emerson:** Was that the '60s or the '70s?

**0:57:57 Margaret Zegart:** This was the '70s, after the riots in the Los Angeles.

**0:58:04 Nancy Emerson:** Oh right, okay.

**0:58:06 Margaret Zegart:** We had two teachers, Ruth Sluser and I, and we would break up the fights of the girls, because they kept razor blades in their hair. The men and the boys had chains. The girls would fight because the black boys now were dating white girls. There were many young people who were really adventuresome and liberal and courageous. That's why I like young people so much. That's why I don't want to be in groups of old people. And that's one of the nice things about the Outdoor Art Club. There are both mature and young women, all ages. And that's why it was so great to have the Center for Learning and Retirement here close. This April was the last of the meetings. They had to close. They only had 40 people left and we started out with maybe 250. But the Outdoor Art Club is growing because it is welcoming of all ages. I used to be on the board some years ago, and one of the things we decided then was that some people were joining so that they could have the rent adjustment as members for weddings and funerals and special occasions. So we decided that they couldn't have those until after two years.

**1:00:01:** They also had to do service. Often they work in the kitchen. And they have these teas and luncheons that are once a month. The teas — you can't believe the teas. I have a friend with whom I have done many, many happy things, who lives at the San Francisco Towers and she would take me to special events that the museums and the symphony would have, for which she was a special level donor. And these OAC [Outdoor Art Club] teas outdo their teas. They are fantastic. You can't believe them. Our last luncheon was the most exquisitely prepared, visually and tasty wine luncheon. But I'm sure if you had it out in the public at large, it probably would have been a \$300 experience. It was just astounding.

**1:01:25 Nancy Emerson:** And these are prepared by the women members?

**1:01:27 Margaret Zegart:** By the women members.

**1:01:28 Nancy Emerson:** Not paid chefs?

**1:01:29 Margaret Zegart:** Oh no. Outdoing chefs.

**1:01:32 Nancy Emerson:** It sounds like it.

**1:01:33 Margaret Zegart:** People bring things, you know, but they seem to outdo each other. We have one person —

**1:01:52 Nancy Emerson:** Patti Boston?

**1:01:53 Margaret Zegart:** Yes. She does these fantastic flower arrangements. They all are outstanding. If you're very fortunate, you might be able to take home for five dollars one of the centerpieces and feel that you were really lucky. There may be six or eight people at the roundtables, so you would not necessarily be able to take one if somebody else had gotten their dibs first. So, it's been a very interesting program. As I said, I've been on the Civics and Conservation Committee. We have the most wonderful thing that we read when somebody passes away, and there are many, many wonderful members that have gone. But we also have many goals. There was a shift maybe two or three years ago with young people, and so we're becoming more up to date. We still are a volunteer organization. We're not a profit organization; we're nonprofit. So, we have some constraints because of that, but our new focus is to go back to the original goals of the Outdoor Art Club in 1902, one of which was to become involved in the community. The first things they did, for example, was start the first library. And they had a World War II hospital facility in their building. When there was an earthquake, they are an earthquake shelter place.

**1:03:29:** So they are now trying to be more actively involved. This is their goal. They're actively involved with the different community organizations. And this year they have received publicity for it. I don't think you should have to have publicity for doing good things, but to them it's important. For the young people it's important to have the publicity. But we've been doing good things all along. For example, we had a clock that we helped restore, and then they had publicity about it. This is a way that they pass on the original intention and relate to the community. So, we're having a meeting next Thursday of our Civics and Conservation Committee to find more ways to relate to other organizations. We have an outreach program where we give major and minor gifts to organizations. So that's a monetary thing that we do. Principally, we don't take — and I hope we never do but we probably will end up doing it — donations to our club from other entities, like the Chamber of Commerce.

**1:05:14 Nancy Emerson:** So currently you're fundraising is within the club?

**1:05:14 Margaret Zegart:** Right now the Outdoor Art Club raises the money within

the group. We have a garden tour every other year. They just had a garden tour. I hope you've been able to go on those. And then on alternate years, we've been having an art program — an exhibit with sales — and so we'd raise money that way. This is for the artists. So, you do all kinds of things. One of the things you do as a new member is you come in and you sit around a table and you meet new people. A new member of maybe two or three months has started a boutique — pattern drafting fashion, making garments. We have a knitting and sewing club. I mentioned that one of my neighbors was really involved with the sewing club. She told me about it. So they bring in new ideas and new things. It's a growing institution that isn't dying. We have people on the new membership waiting list.

**1:06:57 Nancy Emerson:** Tell me again: when did you join it? After you retired?

**1:07:00 Margaret Zegart:** After I retired. I made the decision between the university women and the teas.<sup>4</sup> I mentioned perhaps that my mother had these teas in our backyard and I always helped. And to be at a tea and not having to help —

**1:07:16 Nancy Emerson:** Being the server or the baker. [chuckles]

**1:07:18 Margaret Zegart:** The other thing that my family did — they only entertained, really, once a year on Easter. We probably had 40 or 45 different people come in groups, because there would be a sunrise Easter service, then there'd be an early Easter service, and then a later service, depending on what service you went to or what church. Some people went down to Lansing, Michigan to their Episcopal Church, or they went to the Catholic Church, or the Baptist Church, or People's Church. My mother would bake quantities of blueberry muffins, and my father would squeeze — we didn't have orange juice in those days. He would squeeze oranges for a whole day ahead of time to have fresh orange juice. And then we would have Canadian bacon and eggs and blueberry muffins, and I would help serve. [chuckles]

**1:08:26 Nancy Emerson:** So I'm hearing that people, depending on what church service they went to for Easter, afterwards they would come to your house for brunch.

**1:08:33 Margaret Zegart:** Yes, or before.

**1:08:34 Nancy Emerson:** Or before.

**1:08:35 Margaret Zegart:** Before, yes.

**1:08:36 Nancy Emerson:** You had a very busy day.

**1:08:36 Margaret Zegart:** So that's my mother. And then my family always had bridge clubs. Here in Mill Valley, some of the people that I really admire, play bridge.

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret refers here to the American Association of University Women and the teas regularly hosted by the Outdoor Art Club.—Editor.

## Part II: June 20, 2017

**0:00:01 Editor:** This is part two of the oral history interview with Margaret “Kett” Zegart. It was recorded in two segments on May 8<sup>th</sup> and June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017. You will hear the June 20<sup>th</sup> segment first as it revisits a portion of the interview lost due to technical errors. Topics covered in this segment include much of Kett’s early art career in New York. It is followed by the May 8<sup>th</sup> segment, which details Kett’s life in both the Bay Area and Mill Valley as a teacher, artist, and mother.

**0:00:37 Nancy Emerson:** It is June the 20<sup>th</sup> and I’m here with Kett Zegart. Hi Kett.

**0:00:43 Margaret Zegart:** These are in sequence but I’m going to reflect a little bit about my schooling, which began at East Lansing’s central school. It was formally the only school in East Lansing. There were desks that were very high that we went to for assemblies. They had been for the high school age people. The other thing that I especially remember was a chute, which was a fire escape, that was a great, big chute. It was much fun to go down and the playground, which had teeter totters. As far as education goes, there were four of us that were in the class, one right after the other all the way through, alphabetically seated, that had our work done early.

**0:01:25:** So we were often out of class. After we would help the teacher, then we would go help the principal and then that sort of gave us free time. It was a pleasant experience. The only sad thing was in kindergarten. A little boy was killed crossing the main street. After he was killed they started having safety patrols. I never was the safety patrol person, but I was always glad to see them. Then we went on to junior high school and that was seventh, eighth and ninth grade. This was East Lansing Junior High School. The high school was in the same building. We had our assemblies and we had a balcony. That was the first time I’d ever sat in the balcony. I’ve sat in many balconies since then, because they’re in the price range, but for the sixth graders that was where we would sit. We had outstanding teachers in high school.

**0:02:30:** And at our 55<sup>th</sup> high school reunion — I only had gone to the 50<sup>th</sup> before — we talked about our favorite teachers. Every one of us said, “Miss Hawks was our favorite teacher.” And not only that, most of us said she was the best English teacher we ever had, including in college, because she taught us grammar, she taught us ways to use references, and she expected us to do as much as we could possibly do. I must’ve been a very precocious, insufferable person, because I remember reading the *Rigveda*. That was the thing that I wrote a report on in seventh grade. I researched at the college library and used footnotes from our family’s *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

**0:03:19:** We didn’t ever buy any new books, because this was during the depression years, but we always used the library and we had the *Encyclopedia Britannica* new book that came out each year. Our library was really a marvelous place for me, because we had a fabulous librarian. It was a small library. The children’s section I went through, and then I went through the junior high school section. We had this librarian who helped me

go through the other sections. And there was one book I never read that was always on my mother's shelf. I don't recall her reading it either. It was called *Anthony Adverse*. Someday, I want to read and see what *Anthony Adverse* was about, because now when people say there's a negative impact on some element of planning, I keep thinking, "It's not negative, because negative means it's positive. It's *Anthony Adverse*'s word, "adverse." The documentation uses the word adverse.

**0:04:28:** It was an easy transition into Michigan State, which was in the same town, East Lansing. But I lived in a dormitory, so I didn't live at home. The dormitory had two wings, Mason and Abbot, and was used as housing for the Air Force that was located there. This was the year that they were downing troop size and so our wing, Mason, was used for girls. We went off to college to a room that had triple bunk beds and two mirrors and no closet. [chuckles] Many of us had a great time. We had a very strong person who was the — I can't recall what you called her, but she was sort of overlooking all of us on the floor.

**0:05:33 Nancy Emerson:** A house mother maybe?

**0:05:35 Margaret Zegart:** Well, it was not a house mother.

**0:05:36 Nancy Emerson:** Counsellor?

**0:05:38 Margaret Zegart:** No, it wasn't either of those, but whatever it was, Ruth Mikee became a really long-term friend. And later, she came back to East Lansing and sold real estate, and became a good friend of my mother's. My mother had teas for different organizations, and this was because my father had this fabulous backyard. It was really, really nice. We had a bent grass front yard. Perhaps I told you about the bent grass. One of the people that was at our 55<sup>th</sup> reunion, Burton Edelson, came up to me and said, "You know, I'll never forget — " and I thought, "Oh, what wonderful thing won't he forget?" — "your father's front yard." [chuckles] Because it had a front yard of bent grass with no weeds. One of the things that we did was hand weed out all the clover and dandelions. And sometimes there were four-leaf clover. There was a small patch that had four-leaf clover, so every once in a while there was that pleasure about weeding between strips that my father placed.

**0:06:55:** The backyard had a very natural landscaping. My father, as I probably mentioned, had four sisters who were artists, and one that was a doctor. He had a strong sense of nature and artistic design, which, actually, one of my sons inherited. But the thing about high school and going into college was that I was familiar with the campus, and it was ranked as one of the most beautiful campuses at the time. Lovely landscaping. It had a tower and chimes, and the carillon that played music. I was reminded about my time in high school because just recently there was a meeting at the GGNRA [Golden Gate National Recreation Area] Cavallo Point Lodge in Marin County for people who had gone to Michigan State, the alumni. There were maybe seven of us there. We had a very nice conversation, and we remembered things about the campus.

**0:08:13:** The schooling that I had was most unusual at the time for a state college, as we called them then. University of Chicago had a new program called “Basic Skills” — I think it was — that we adopted. Having the basic skills, you could read a textbook, and if you could pass the exam with a very high score, then you didn’t have to take the other terms. You had to take one term, but maybe not the other two, because we were on the term basis. So by doing that, I was able to graduate after three years of three terms and one summer school. I was going to be in the class of 1948 because I entered in ’44, but I actually was in 1947. This past weekend, or past week rather, my fifth-grade grandson had a graduation ceremony, and I recalled that I had never been in a graduation ceremony except at high school. So my high school years terminated with pleasure. I was very, very busy.

**0:09:35:** We had a yearbook that I looked at it the other day, and I was in almost every kind of an organization. In college I was very active. The first term of my freshman year I helped at the People’s Church across the street from the campus. It was actually a WASP town by law, which I had never known about. There were Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Congregationalists. At the college, they built this large, very nice church with a wonderful organ in it, and for 25 years no other church could be in the town. At that time there were no black people and my mother used to say — I really probably shouldn’t say this because it made me always angry — “Well, some of the Jewish people are my very best friends.” She was in many organizations and they were in the organizations that she had been on different boards. Once during my freshman year, I sat down and realized I didn’t have any time at all. So I charted out the hours. I was not in the sorority at that time, but I spent 20 hours at the church each week. So I just stopped going to church. Just cut it out altogether, stopped teaching Sunday School, and all of the things I was doing, and became very active on campus. I started off in the Home Ec department.

**0:11:23:** The people that I really knew were in the arts department. The thing that I liked about the Home Ec program was the draping and fashion design and color, things like that. But then we had to do something with nutrition. In the nutrition class, the first thing we did was we were given a rat. At that point I decided I wanted to change, and I went into the art department. That was not particularly pleasing to my parents because they had both been working with young people, giving them opportunities and extension work throughout Michigan, and their friends were in the department. My mother was an extension person before being a parent, and they were based in the Home Ec department. My father worked originally in agriculture extension. And then when he was still in the Northern Michigan, he became involved with the 4-H club and became the 4-H club state leader.

**0:12:27:** In high school, perhaps even in junior high school, every other year I would go to Washington, D.C. with my parents and the outstanding 4-H club boy and outstanding 4-H club girl. So I was familiar with art museums from there. And then our exceptional fine art teacher that we had who took us to art museums like the Toledo Art Museum and the Detroit Art Museum.

**0:13:07:** Recently, I found out that I had actually been in two different exhibits, from college art work, at the Detroit Art Museum. So I really was involved and really liked art. The artists had very good discussions, and we spent a lot of time discussing things over tables as I think most young people do when they are interested in ideas. My experience at Cranbrook Art Academy was phenomenal. My basic teacher there was a man from the Bauhaus. He'd been teaching at the Bauhaus.

**0:13:51:** My family actually paid for this, going to the Cranbrook Art Academy, although this was the tail end of the Depression. They paid for this because it was a Finnish man, Eliel Saarinen, who was the director and had designed the campus. Leonard Jungwirth did sculpture there. He was Swedish and my mother was Swedish. Eames had just finished his time there.

**0:14:30 Nancy Emerson:** This is Eames, the furniture designer?

**0:14:35 Margaret Zegart:** Yes, the designer. And Robert Sailors, as I remember, was a weaver; and Maya Rose John was a superb ceramist. So this was an opportunity to be around professional people.

**0:14:49 Nancy Emerson:** Where was Cranbrook located?

**0:14:50 Margaret Zegart:** Cranbrook is by Bloomfield Hills, which is near Detroit, Michigan.

**0:14:54 Nancy Emerson:** Detroit, okay.

**0:14:56 Margaret Zegart:** It's north of Detroit.

**0:14:57 Nancy Emerson:** And when was it that you went to that academy?

**0:15:00 Margaret Zegart:** I went between high school and college in the summer. I may have mentioned that I worked as an employee for a gift shop. I worked there from the time I was 12 until I was 18, I guess. Did I tell you about the summer that I went to Lansing, Michigan?

**0:15:32 Nancy Emerson:** This was the factory that you worked in, yes.

**0:15:34 Margaret Zegart:** Yes. The next summer, I worked at a realtor — it was just on the tip of my tongue and I forgot, but I worked in a realtor's office. I did line drawings. I don't think they ever used them, but it was very nice.

**0:15:52 Nancy Emerson:** Line drawings of the houses that were for sale or buildings?

**0:15:54 Margaret Zegart:** No, just for advertising for realtors.

**0:15:58 Nancy Emerson:** Okay, so you were using your art skill.

**0:16:02 Margaret Zegart:** Somewhat. And I did the general things you do in an office to help. I spent the next semester at Cranbrook. And then I went to Michigan State and I graduated after my third summer in college. And I've mentioned that before I lived in the sorority house when I was a sophomore, I went into the Kappa Kappa Gamma house and lived there, and made several friends there, but not ones that I really kept up with, because I didn't keep up with hardly anyone actually until recently. We had a friend who sort of revived contact for all of us. We have more time as seniors who are retired, and she had a correspondence loop. But I think most of us had died since we started this maybe four years ago, or were in very poor shape. One of my special friends in high school just has passed away. So maybe there's five of us left that I keep in touch with. That's part of being 90, you see many people are gone.

**0:17:28 Nancy Emerson:** And you're here in Northern California, keeping up with these people you met in Michigan 70 years ago, right?

**0:17:38 Margaret Zegart:** This was interesting, too, because I just met, two weeks ago I think it was, the group of people who are trying to get you to donate large sums of money. Michigan State gives scholarships to young people who wouldn't normally be able to go to school and that does seem to me to be a very strong point because that's what my father offered through the 4-H program. These young people would come and stay at our house, maybe two or three weeks until they got a place to live. Usually, they went to a co-op, and sometimes during the Depression they'd only had one set of clothing that they came with. It was always a very good thing, and so I've always been interested in community and the right of everybody to have an education and to have opportunities.

**0:18:39:** Currently, I'm interested in housing and in advocacy, so that people are not given the worst building sites that are going to be flooded. I'm sure that that may be happening because those sites that have been selected, but our planning department says that they'll probably never use these sites. By state legislation, if a developer comes and says, "I want to build here," there's not much you can do about it because it's tied to transportation and housing development for affordable housing. Instead of being integrated into a project, inclusionary housing is not the choice of the developer, but it should be a requirement.

**0:19:32:** This latest development on Miller Avenue by Vonderwirth is exempted by sale and reduced to nine units because he began his development six years before they made it a requirement. So the general trend is that for all opportunities like BCDC [Bay Conservation Development Commission] they are having nine meetings, and they have the eighth meeting trying to get fairness added into their program, social equality and conservation. When I was in New York, this was not an issue for me, because I actually had a very nice place to live in New York.

**0:20:28:** I went into Sage House, which was a girl's residency between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. I was on the top floor. There were five of us in the room. It had been a private home that was built in 1820, a sandstone home on Ninth Street. That had the residence of



where servants lived, so we had a great big space. We weren't confined in a small room or anything. Even in the sorority house, the college experience had been amazing. Space was very nice to have. We had straw mattresses at Sage House. No one would believe that, but we did. We literally had straw mattresses.

**0:21:17 Nancy Emerson:** I'm glad that you brought us to New York, back to New York. But could you just fill in, after you graduated from college, how was it that you ended up going to New York?

**0:21:29 Margaret Zegart:** Well, the reason I think was because I took typing in high school and in my junior year I entered a competition through *Vogue* and received a second place. So possibly that had something to do with it. They never said anything, but I did write three letters of application. When I decided I wanted to go to New York City, I'd already been offered a job to be an interior decorator designer. But instead, I wanted to go to New York City, because the year before I'd gone with a friend, Mary Loring, who lived in the Alpha Phi Kappa House opposite our house. I'd known her because she had taken a few art classes. Well, Mary and I went to the Museum of Modern Art and we also were taken out by one of her friends. I was extraordinarily naïve. I thought the blue plate special was something really special, not realizing that the blue plate special was probably the most economical meal that anybody could offer me.

**0:22:52 Nancy Emerson:** A learning experience, huh? [chuckles]

**0:22:54 Margaret Zegart:** But anyway, when I went to New York, I lived at Sage House. The Ladies Christian Union gave teas every so often. You'd think that would be sort of for the poor people, but it really wasn't. The secretary for David Rockefeller lived there and the librarian for the Cooper Union lived there and my roommate Anne up on our third floor was the secretary to the doctor for the mayor of New York. And Barbara had a position at Columbia University.

**0:23:46:** So we were a varied group of people. And to be given a tea by these people, these ladies were treating us as though they were doing us this big favor. It always made us laugh. There was one woman that would come in and raise her little baby finger and say, "Cup of tea? Cup of tea? May I serve you a little cup of tea?" [chuckles] And the other thing I recall that made us laugh was that we had a woman who ran the program on site. She ordered all her groceries from Gristedes, which was one of the more expensive grocery stores around the corner and towards the end of the month we would sort of go downhill on what we were eating.

**0:24:30:** Our breakfasts and our dinners were always challenging. We would have orange and onion salad. Now, of course, that's not a bad thing at all. In those days it seemed a very strange kind of a salad. [chuckles] In New York I worked at *Glamour* magazine. I had applied, as I mentioned, writing three letters — to Batten Osborn advertising firm, *Mademoiselle*, and then Condé Nast. Condé Nast was the first place I went. It was my first interview and I got the job. I didn't realize how difficult it really was to get a job in New York City and I stayed in New York for seven years and worked

at Condé Nast with some outstanding people.

**0:25:37:** Tina Safranski Fredericks brought in many major artists that were just beginning. She had a good eye. She'd come from Germany. She no accent because she said that when she was learning English she was told to put a hot potato in her mouth and talk with the hot potato. She lost her accent immediately. [chuckles] So I don't know whether it was because she didn't want the hot potato or whether it had something to do with how you were supposed to feel when you spoke.

**0:26:07 Nancy Emerson:** Can I just ask you a couple of questions? I think you said that you got an interview with *Mademoiselle*?

**0:26:16 Margaret Zegart:** No.

**0:26:16 Nancy Emerson:** Oh, with *Glamour*.

**0:26:18 Margaret Zegart:** With *Glamour*, that was my first job.

**0:26:18 Nancy Emerson:** And they made the offer?

**0:26:20 Margaret Zegart:** I'd written the letters of application because that seemed to be a good thing. I always told my high school students later that at *Glamour* I was sure I got the job because I could type. I was the assistant to the art director, Tina. That enabled me to go out and meet different people. I think I've already told you about meeting Andy Warhol and Gordon Parks and Diane and Alvin Arbus, who were both photographers, her husband and her. Of course, they separated and she went on to become a very recognized and unique kind of a photographer.

**0:27:04:** It was a very wonderful experience. We sometimes had very short lunch periods. But when the magazine had been put to bed, then we had a little bit longer. so I was able to go up to the Museum of Modern Art. I first went there with a woman called Peggy Berlin who worked as a copy art person. We wrote very luxuriously. We set out the type, which was Bodoni. For the headlines, we'd just put down "dummy type," as we called it. I helped sometimes doing the paste up. Very rarely I did any artwork. The copy department had to write copy to fit the layout. Peggy was writing copy and her husband was a well-known painter who taught in a university in the Midwest. She had extra time, and so she would take me to the museums, where I saw my first Paul Klee.

**0:28:14:** A year before, or two years before, I saw Max Ernst's *Celery Stalks at Midnight*. It was something else. I believe, in retrospect, the work that I saw of his probably influenced the kind of shapes I used when I worked at Atelier 17, which was Stanley William Hayter's studio on Ninth Street. A great many fine printmakers and well-known artists were working there at the time, like Louise Nevelson, who later on became a sculptress. She did prints there. Many people. Fred Becker taught summers when Hayter wasn't there. I worked year round, every night and on the weekends. Then I would eat supper at Stage House. That was on Ninth Street. Actually, sorry, Atelier 17

was on Eighth Street, I misspoke.

**0:29:37:** So it was just a short walk, two block walk. Another short walk was to the New School of Social Research, which was on 12<sup>th</sup> street. The old Whitney used to be just a block away. I'm really skipping around. I'm almost 91 years old. I want to go back and see the new Whitney Museum because apparently it's just something else. It was a surprise for them when I walked in with an artist pass, maybe 20 years ago, because I had had work exhibited there, and in those days they give you an artist pass.

**0:30:18:** It's something that I would really, really like to do, and maybe I will if I get more mobile in my life. The last time I was in New York I was able to go to the Metropolitan Museum. The first time I was in a juried show was at Atelier 17. Hayter said to us, "Everybody has to bring in their work!" Well, I said, "I don't have any work." And he said, "If you don't have any work you don't belong here." So I went home, and I had pastels and I took a big sheet of paper home from the studio, and I did a flower drawing, and brought it in and put it in the pile. It was accepted at the show, so that's the first place I exhibited at a New York show.<sup>5</sup>

**0:31:12 Nancy Emerson:** Do you still have that piece?

**0:31:14 Margaret Zegart:** The one in Detroit Art Institute must have been an invitational show or a group show.

**0:31:19 Nancy Emerson:** That piece that you did for the show at Atelier 17, do you still have that?

**0:31:24 Margaret Zegart:** No I don't, because I traded it for a vacuum cleaner. And Julia Bovasso who was one of the —

**0:31:37 Nancy Emerson:** Writers?

**0:31:38 Margaret Zegart:** No, no. She was a performer. She was married to Bud Ortman, and Bud Ortman used to come to the apartment and lived with Barbie for a while. And while I was living with Barbie, he would come and take showers because where he was staying he didn't have showers. But after this, I needed a vacuum cleaner. He had one because he wasn't staying at a place where he needed a vacuum cleaner. When they divorced many years later, he became a teacher at Cranbrook, actually. She apparently, in the divorce proceedings, got this drawing. I don't know what's happened to it. But anyway, I signed my work as Kett, K-E-T-T, which I still do. Other things that I did in New York — after the intermission you'd get into the operas free. And New York had an uptown YMCA. I think it was, YMCA. It had marvelous programs. And then there were concert programs where I heard Wanda Landowska play on the harpsichord at the Frick Museum on Sunday afternoons.

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<sup>5</sup> The New York Public Librarian of Arts told me that I had been in 32 museum exhibitions.—Margaret Zegart.

**0:33:08:** Everything I did was on the lower end of the price scale, because I really didn't have any extra money. *Glamour* magazine was a part of Condé Nast. That was a prestige organization, so you didn't have a high salary rate. Also, people didn't leave. It had a very stable group of employees, and over the years. Alex Liberman was our art director. He was the art director of *Vogue*, but he was also the art director of overseeing all of Condé Nast. Tina was our editor, and Gerry Stutz — I think I've probably told you about Andy Warhol. Gerry Stutz was the shoe editor. Andy's initial drawing for a little job's column didn't work out too well. We really wanted to help him because he obviously had skills, and he was given shoe drawings to illustrate. This relationship with Gerry Stutz sort of started him off, and then he went on to performing arts and different kinds of things. Did I tell you about his letter to me?

**0:34:46 Nancy Emerson:** I don't think so.

**0:34:48 Margaret Zegart:** Did I tell you about meeting and seeing his portfolio?

**0:34:52 Nancy Emerson:** Yes, but I don't know if it's in the transcript.

**0:34:55 Margaret Zegart:** He'd written me a letter with wonderful cat drawings on it, and apparently I had saved this because I have a photostat of it. I also had a colored reproduction of the drawing that I bought from him because it was not appropriate for a fashion portfolio. So, I'm trying to do something with that, because I made photostatic copies of this letter a year ago. At Fort Mason, I found they have seven wonderful presses. I was working quite at different school presses, because I never have had a press. I always have continued doing the copper engraving that I did at Atelier 17. I prefer that as an art medium.

**0:35:55 Nancy Emerson:** Maybe this is a good time to ask you, was it your work at Atelier 17 that got you into printmaking?

**0:36:03 Margaret Zegart:** Yes.

**0:36:04 Nancy Emerson:** Because that's been the focus of your art career.

**0:36:07 Margaret Zegart:** After that first day, I came back and [laughs] — I don't think he thought I would, but I did. And in the evening, after working, they would go to either the White Horse or the Red Cedar. Dylan Thomas and two other poets would come in there. I remembered Dylan Thomas was on his decline. He was drinking a lot, and he also was going around campuses giving readings at that time. And his wife Caitlin was in kind of a peculiar state. Later, after I left New York, I probably told you that I came to California, came by train. I must have stopped in East Lansing because my mother had had a lot of copper plates that I have in the basement of my house. I came upon a great big large piece of copper, so I'm going to do a large copper engraving, 8x10 copper engraving. I'm going to continue doing the copper engravings I began doing in New York.

**0:37:32:** The first place that a print was purchased from me — Alex Liberman suggested I go to Betty Parsons, who was a dealer, and Betty Parsons looked at my work and she suggested that I go to the Museum of Modern Art. I had not done very much work at all, probably just been maybe a year or two years engraving. And the museum was the first place that bought a piece of my work, the Museum of Modern Art. There was a lot of exciting things going on for me.

**0:38:42 Nancy Emerson:** Let's just take a break for a second. [pause in recording]  
Now we're back.

**0:38:47 Margaret Zegart:** Well, I probably forgot to tell you something about my first several days in New York City when I lived at Sage House on Ninth Street. The Christian Union Girls Club was a block away from the Detention Center for Women in New York at that time. In college, I hung around with some of the writers on campus. I must have done a lot of poetry writing because I did several things incorporating poetry with linoleum block images. One day Hopey — a friend from college whose last name I can't recall — said to me, "I want you to go and meet E.E. Cummings." So I said "Okay, how would I do that?" And he said, "Well, you just go into this bar." I can't recall the name of the bar, but it was the next block beyond the Women's Detention Center. I went in and sure enough there was E.E. Cummings, and he said, "Please, come to my home."

**0:40:05:** So after I talked with him a little bit at the bar, I went to his nearby apartment, which was down at a lower level below the street, and it was filled with books. It was just wonderful to see all these books around, but it smelled so badly from cats that I just didn't want to have anything to do with E.E. Cummings, which shows you how naïve I was. Another thing that happened to me was a friend from Michigan State gave me the opportunity to meet the editor of *New Directions* who had grown up with her as a child. She had this older friend in high school when she was already in junior high school and so she gave me his name, but I never followed through on the relationship with *New Directions*.

**0:41:00:** So I must have had some kind of an interest in writing poetry. I recall going and staying overnight at Anaïs Nin's home in Cambridge. And then there were a group of poets, and I went to their meeting at a cold water flat without any electricity because they hadn't paid their electrical bill. I was just too conventional from Michigan; I did not want to have that kind of a lifestyle. I know I must have been interested in poetry because I remember programs that I'd gone to at the YMCA uptown in New York, but then the whole episode of writing in my life sort of disappeared.

**0:42:02:** Sometimes I hope to go back to things I wrote maybe 40 years ago. I have done all the prints for a project called *The Book of J*, and I have half-written it. There's the five books of the Bible, because when I retired I was going to read the Bible. I never got beyond redacting in poetic form these five books of Bible, five chapters. And so I have this poetry kind of thing written. I married somebody who was Jewish, and so it seemed a reasonable thing to go to a Unitarian Universalist Church to raise our four children.

**0:42:54:** A writer called Freedman said that his book was in the poetry form using the style of Emily Dickinson. I really knew that was wrong [for *The Book of J*] because the oral tradition would not have been in the style of Emily Dickinson. My granddaughter was probably two, not even two, and she was memorizing works from her mother playing Celtic music. She remembered all the words because they were in a pattern, a poetic, linear pattern. Anyway, that's the only writing that I really have done since then. When I first came to New York though, I did do some poetry writing, because I have some poems that were published in *Contour*, which was a literature magazine at that time out there. So that whole phase of my life disappeared when I became a mother and a teacher.

**0:44:13:** New York was a wonderful experience and I often wish I were able to go back and see some of the places. The Metropolitan Museum was the first place that I exhibited the work that I had done that first day at Hayter's Studio. The first place that purchased my work was MOMA. Betty Parsons had been referred to me by my art director, Alex Liberman, who was certainly a really recognized artist. First of all, he was the art director, then he was a photographer of books because he knew so many painters. Then he painted and did work himself. The reference was to Betty Parsons's gallery and she referred me to go to the Museum of Modern Art. They were very interested in my work and that was the first print that I had purchased.

**0:45:14:** Later on, I was in group shows. Atelier 17 and I had purchase awards from different museums. One of them was the Rockefeller purchase award for Sao Paulo, Brazil. Apparently, I was in some group shows and never collected the work. So, I had a lot of work that has been sold. One piece was sold for \$90 recently. But most works approach \$1,000. So I really should do more art work. I seemingly do not, but that was my sort of my special times in New York. I was fortunate to live by Riverside, between Riverside and Broadway, on 107th Street, I think it was. That was the place where I was able to be along the water and the trees, which were something that I enjoyed as well as Central Park.

**0:46:30 Nancy Emerson:** That's great.

[pause in recording]

**0:46:34 Nancy Emerson:** This is Nancy Emerson with Margaret Zegart, resuming our interview on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Margaret, do you want to finish up those days in New York?

**0:46:50 Margaret Zegart:** Well, yes. The days in New York, I remembered, when I first went there that I met some wonderful people. One of them was Dodo. She was a fashion artist. She brought in her portfolio and she was unique, did her own kinds and styles of things. So we used her often in *Glamour* magazine. Actually, the elongated fashion drawing, was later copied by many others commercially. The nice thing about knowing Dodo was that she was going with a young doctor, who was a resident in psychiatry up at the Columbia Hospital, and his friend, Joe Stein, became a friend of mine. All four of us would go out to eat in the Lower East Side. I'd never known about

dairy restaurants, and I'd never known about meat restaurants, and the fact that you had holiday plates. Later, I went with another young man. His mother wanted to follow the traditional Jewish ways of cooking. Allan Halpern's mother was nonplussed when they brought home ham for one of the meals.

**0:48:22:** She used the holiday plates. The restaurant served just uniquely dairy food and then uniquely meat foods. And on the Lower East Side, they were classic with waiters with the white napkins on their arms and the mid-European characteristic grace. That was kind of an experience. Again, people were trying to introduce me to a more sophisticated, or even in this case, a more specific way of life. But one thing especially significant was that Joe Stein worked at Bellevue hospital in the ward where they found Lead Belly. I had Lead Belly records and they knew I was interested in him. And because they were concerned about how close he was to death and how uncomfortable it was there in the ward, they were able to get him released to go back to his own apartment, where they looked in on him. They took Dodo and myself to visit him, and he actually took up his guitar and played, probably the last time. He did play the guitar. He didn't think he could, but he did.

**0:49:42 Nancy Emerson:** Wow.

**0:49:42 Margaret Zegart:** I really enjoyed that opportunity and he still is a favorite. When I hear his songs, I get nice memories.

**0:49:52 Nancy Emerson:** You had a private performance.

**0:49:54 Margaret Zegart:** A private performance for the four of us. [laughs]

**0:49:57 Margaret Zegart:** So that was another way that I began to know New York in a special manner, through the people that I had met through *Glamour*. I mentioned Andy Warhol, who was then Andre Warhol. Tina Fredericks sent me out to review the portfolio, and I purchased a drawing from him that I didn't feel was appropriate for fashion. And then we had him, at *Glamour* magazine, drew small illustrations for our job column, but that didn't work out very well. So Tina, with great insight, suggested that he do shoes and he did some neat drawings. Again, unusual for our fashion editor Gerry Stutz and for the magazine. He wrote me a letter thanking me for the tear sheets, which is what we call the sample sheets from the magazine, and I have that letter copied, but unfortunately when I needed money once again — I've sold my Kathe Kollwitz, and I sold my drawing, and the man said, "What about the letter?" "Well," I said, "you can have that."

**0:51:30:** Just because I wanted to really, sort of, get rid of him. It wasn't anything significant to me then. I was busy being a young mother and a new teacher, and so fortunately we had made copies of those. I do have those and we'll do something with them at some point. Another person that I met was someone called Howard Low. I did have an exhibit of prints with Howard Low's drawings and mine, as well as other exhibits and galleries, and I had acquisitions of prints from shows in museums. Apparently, I had traveling shows around the country as well, and I do know I have some purchase awards.

I'm not sure if I told you about David Rockefeller's purchase award, but that was one that was significantly important to me. And at Smith College they had another purchase award, as I remember, and when I visited Smith College later on with one of my friends — I think perhaps the time my daughter was maybe interested in going to schools — I looked in their catalog and they had my prints in their art collection catalog.

**0:52:50 Nancy Emerson:** What was that like to win these awards and to be shown?

**0:52:54 Margaret Zegart:** Well, it was nothing, because I was busy doing my job, my new work. And the thing about prints, you make editions, and I was optimistic. Now, for example, I have a print here that I've had hanging up. Some images, I only have three or four prints of. For some, there is only one left that is printed. These are the ones of value, except I'm still living. As long as I'm still living, I can have more prints done because I've saved the plates, and they're not cancelled yet. So when I die, they'll be cancelled or authorized in some way to have more prints made. The interesting thing about choosing to go to the San Francisco area was, I didn't know where I would live —

**0:54:04 Nancy Emerson:** Let's stop for a second. Let's back up. So you met the man who would become your husband.

**0:54:10 Margaret Zegart:** By going through his portfolio. Actually, he had more interesting photographs than some of the other major people. However, he never did become a fashion photograph person. He had accounts here in San Francisco. He had worked with Fred Zinnemann on a film called *Teresa in Italy* and had photographed some very significant pictures there. He'd grown up in Chicago. After the war, he had gone to school at — not the Chicago Art institute, but Chicago School of Design. Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy from the Bauhaus were instructors there. He was just very good. You would say he would have a good eye. When we came out here, he went to the California Institute of Arts, and also finished off a degree there.

**0:55:19 Nancy Emerson:** So he was from San Francisco and happened to be in New York when you met him?

**0:55:27 Margaret Zegart:** No, no.

**0:55:27 Nancy Emerson:** Okay.

**0:55:28 Margaret Zegart:** He was from Chicago.

**0:55:31 Nancy Emerson:** Right.

**0:55:32 Margaret Zegart:** He had worked in the Hollywood area. Then he had gone with Fred Zinnemann, the director of films, to do special publicity work, and became a good personal friend of his in Italy, working on this film, *Teresa*. I think at that point he was transitioning back and had thought he might like to do work for Condé Nast, so that's when I saw him.



**0:56:00 Nancy Emerson:** I see.

**0:56:00 Margaret Zegart:** They actually took more photographs of his work than of Avedon, who was a very well-known photography artist.

**0:56:11 Nancy Emerson:** Photographer.

**0:56:13 Margaret Zegart:** And Bruce, who worked in our department, later became a close friend of Avedon's. So there was some intertwining of events. I did, though, have other interesting relationships with young men. I wasn't really interested in just going to all kinds of special, fancy things. I was more interested in doing my work and being employed and seeing everything, because there was so much to see in New York. Any spare time, I went with people that would want to go to art things and to go up to the Metropolitan Museum or to go and hear Wanda Landowska. And on my lunchtimes, I would go to Pierpont Morgan Library, which always had an interesting show, and still does.

**0:57:25:** I gathered all of my things from my aunt's apartment, but I had to leave my tables. I kept two chairs from the dining room chairs, two Eames chairs. I took them on the train with other basic things, stopped at Michigan, left my copper plates at my mother's house in East Lansing, Michigan, 323 Marshall Street. There was no place I planned to go, but I was shown the neighborhood around where the Phoenix studio was, 802 Montgomery Street. I worked 20 hours a week at 802 Montgomery Street, went to school, and the second semester I was on a fellowship from the university.

**0:58:39:** I found a place at 1201 Green Street. In those days, there were enough places that you could have "For Rent" signs in the neighborhood you liked, and then you'd find a building that had an available place. Ours was a nice building. You walked in and there was a place to sit down in the lobby. We were on the second floor over a laundry. On the block up to Union Street there was an ice cream cone place. I would get on the bus, take the bus down to the Embarcadero, and get on a ferry that went to Emeryville. Then at Emeryville, I'd get on to the Amtrak train. I'd get the Amtrak train to Berkeley. At Berkeley, I'd get off and I'd walk all the way up with a painting, oil, fresh oil sometimes, for my classes. I took five different classes at the University of California, including those for a secondary teaching credential.

**1:00:00:** There were outstanding people. Hans Hofmann had been there before and so the whole New York school was transitioned in a way to new young people that were in our classes, like Paul Wonner. Not Diebenkorn, but most of all the other painters of that era of the San Francisco, the West Coast, evolved there. In San Francisco, then, I lived at 1201 Green Street. I completed my MA in Painting. I kept remembering my father had always said, "You should become a teacher," and I said I didn't want to. I had had a few teaching courses in Michigan State, so I took enough others to get a general secondary teaching credential, which I had at the end of a year-and-a-half. I remember that the test was given in the school classroom, and I was so pregnant with my first child that I could

barely fit into these desks [chuckles], which were the old fashion kind of desks.

**1:01:23 Nancy Emerson:** Do you remember what year that was?

**1:01:27 Margaret Zegart:** What year this was? Well, this would have been, probably, the spring of 1955, because Ben was born early. I almost had a miscarriage. I got off the train and at a funny hotel I went into the lobby and laid down until I felt better was able to get back on. But Ben did come in early. The reason he came down is because of the poor conditions of the Highway 101. We went down to meet his father and the highway along the bay shore to the airport was all bump, bump, bump, bump. I moved around the elevator, and Harold had gone to get the luggage, and his father and I were standing in the elevator and my water broke. He was so sweet. He knew just exactly what to do. The next thing I knew, I was in the hospital, in the admitting room. I heard the young resident, maybe a young doctor say, "Hell, it's a breach." And the next thing I knew after that was that I held a little baby boy. I was so amazed. [laughs]

**1:03:04 Margaret Zegart:** That was my first son Benjamin Arne Zegart.

**1:03:06 Nancy Emerson:** Benjamin.

**1:03:07 Margaret Zegart:** He was named Arne after my father. My next child was Kathleen Anne. Benjamin projectile vomited all the time. He had a problem because he was a preemie. Kathleen Anne was always sick. At that point Francis said, "You're going to have too big of a family." They told me about a wonderfully spacious floor-through apartment over the Broadway Tunnel. The floor above us was the landlady and her husband who had amassed a lot of money as a butcher during the war years. Because it was a steep hill, there was another apartment, a large apartment where the woman who was the first president of the Chinese Bank of America lived, and they played mahjong, all day long and all night long it seemed. Our playground was Nob Hill. And then I had a third child there named Jonathan Morris.

**1:04:40:** When we came to San Francisco, we had no idea that we'd want to move and leave, because it was such a nice location and life. Harold used to go down to the bookstore City Lights that was so famous right nearby. He worked down there to keep a steady income, which we needed because you get large contracts with advertising, but the photograph assignments would come in spurts. So I decided to get a night job. I worked at night at the Bank of America in the check proofing. We had huge computers about twice the size of a large refrigerator, and I sorted out the different accounts. And there was something called the Chowchilla. Many, many years later I found there was a Chowchilla off of Highway Five, when they put Highway Five through. [chuckles]

**1:05:49 Nancy Emerson:** Named after the Chowchilla town.

**1:05:51 Margaret Zegart:** Yes.

**1:05:52 Nancy Emerson:** Interesting. So that's three children.

**1:05:55 Margaret Zegart:** So my days were very busy and I didn't do any painting after my year of painting. But apparently, I was in two different exhibits at the Legion of Honor — paintings of mine that I had done during the year. I have still quite a few. Many of them I traded for things, like we traded with the warden at San Quentin. His wife's father had made handcrafted wooden furniture and we traded for a little side table, a bureau and a very large bookcase. We went down to the antique stores along Market Street and I saw a table upside down that had wonderful legs, so I said, "Well, let's get that," because it was just discouraging to shop. But this table was a wonderfully square oak table, and now we use that up at the cottage. But we had that here and we had to get rid of all of our nice rugs that I'd purchased at the store that —

**1:07:27 Nancy Emerson:** At Gump's?

**1:07:28 Margaret Zegart:** Gump's. I had to get rid of those because of my children's allergies. Well, it turned out that Ben's problem was allergies. Kathleen Anne was extraordinarily allergic, but basically she was an infant diabetic. They could not figure out what was wrong with her, and I was pregnant, again, with Johnathan Morris, my third son. A woman was going to come to take care of the other children while I was in the hospital and I was trying to tell her that I'd been told that the children should have fruit juices not sugar drinks.

**1:08:12:** But in any event, she didn't understand and she gave sugar drinks. And when I got home, Kathy's bowel movements were very small like a little rabbit, and I told that to the doctor because I'd read that as a symptom in this general book that they gave to new mothers. I said, "I think my daughter's a diabetic." And it turned out that she'd been an infant diabetic and that was the problem. Well, then John turned out to have allergies, food allergies to milk, so we had soybean milk. And then when Jamin came along he just started that, we never did ever have any milk for him.

**1:08:56 Nancy Emerson:** So Jamin is your fourth son, your fourth child?

**1:08:58 Margaret Zegart:** My fourth child. I had him in Mill Valley. We moved to Mill Valley after deciding that we didn't want our children to go to the Chinese school in the neighborhood. We didn't want them to be around two languages (Chinese). They'd get very confused, these little kids. So Benjamin was probably four and we moved out to Mill Valley. I wanted this house because I didn't drive then and I was going to the UC hospital maybe two or three times a week. One of the small children's pleasure was walking around the square dining room table saying, "Paging Dr. Peter Cohen. Paging Dr. Peter Cohen. Paging Dr. Peter Cohen." What they did was let us go as the very first patients so that we wouldn't have to wait all day long because I'd have these four little kids.

**1:10:04 Nancy Emerson:** Now, I have to say —

**1:10:05 Margaret Zegart:** My husband had our cars because he needed them for

business. We had some splendid cars. The first car we had was a wood paneled station wagon. The second one was a Volkswagen Bug. There weren't any, hardly any then, and you'd honk the horn and wave at someone if you saw someone with one. But because the family was growing, we got a Borgward. No one seems to know what a Borgward was, but it was a German car. The design was the prototype of the Hondas and the Toyotas and all the ones that are still going around. That was our final car when we separated. But Harold took the car and I took the deed to the house. I don't think that was finalized till years later when we were divorced, but that was informally how we handled things.

**1:11:06:** After my fourth child Jamin was born, I took driving courses at Tamalpais High School where I was going to be teaching later. It turned out the person that I learned from was also born in Ishpeming, Michigan — no, born in Negaunee. Ishpeming was my father's birthplace. My father would take us there on February 22<sup>nd</sup> when they had the first ski jumping tournaments. There's always a coincidence some way or another. Negaunee meant "Hell" and Ishpeming meant "Heaven" in the native language of that area.

**1:12:02:** In San Francisco, my route was always by cable car and then the N-Judah train. Somehow we'd get to the N-Judah train and get off at Parnassus where the University of California Hospital was. My children were all born there. Jamin was the last child. When he was born I looked at his feet and I said, "Oh, there's something wrong with his feet." And, of course, there was. So he had a bar and casts and he got so maneuverable that he could climb out of his crib and then walk around.

**1:12:48 Nancy Emerson:** So you're saying these bars connected his feet to help —

**1:12:51 Margaret Zegart:** His feet were in casts.

**1:12:53 Nancy Emerson:** I see, to help turn his feet a certain way.

**1:12:55 Margaret Zegart:** Yes, in the sense of a growth pattern. One time at the hospital he started crying when the man was sawing the cast. I said, "You're cutting my child. My child does not cry. You are injuring my child. You stop right now." The resident was upset, but I was insistent. And he in fact had just begun to cut into my child. If he had gone any further he would have cut tendons. At that point they decided that maybe I should have a doctor in Mill Valley, so they referred me to Dr. T.G. Brown who charged me the same low rate of the clinic at the hospital. Dr. T.G. Brown was just a dream and a wonderful person. When my children had a spell, when they would be always sick and they would get strep, she would call up and say, "Bring them down before school, get the blood test, and then after school call us and we'll see if we need to give them shots if it is either Coxsackievirus or strep."

**1:14:22:** We had just as long, maybe a year or so cycle, and finally we found out why they were getting strep all the time. It was because of a neighbor with whom the kids all played. We had the Highland Hill kids and the Rising Road kids, and I could stand on the back deck and see the kids and call them in. They played together, they threw apples at

each other in warfare, they did all kinds of things. But one neighbor's kids had Kaiser, and Kaiser physicians only gave pills. They didn't give inoculations when you had strep, so they were carriers of the strep. We finally found out why, and our doctor got them to give their children shots so then they could not be carriers. So that ended happily. But that went on for far too long. That was how obliging doctor T.J. Brown's office was. She always put herself out.

**1:15:32:** When my son Benjamin graduated, she offered to let him buy her car at a reasonable rate. It was a Volkswagen and he drove from Arizona with that rocking chair you see over there all the way back here. Ben loved to drive. I think probably it's because I like to drive, having just learned how to drive when I was probably 33. Twice we drove across Canada and returned through the States crossing the country. And the first time we went, my good neighbor who lived on Rising Road and whose husband also taught at the Tam High Art department — after the one year I taught in Whittier. My friend moved down to that area and he had a family of maybe four or five children. He went out and looked for a place for me to live and he found one that was similar to the Eichler home in design. It was on a cul-de-sac, and at the other end of the cul-de-sac, about a block and a half away, was an elementary school. So Benjamin went into first grade and Kathy was in kindergarten.

**1:17:16:** It was at a fenced yard and was an ideal place to live. I taught school. Unfortunately, I had five different preparations because I was a new teacher. It was a brand new school. The first month or so I was teaching ceramics in a room that didn't have any water connection yet, so I had to use a hose outside. Then I had to mop the floor afterwards. Perhaps the first week we had no real supplies. There was this huge box that somebody brought in full of leather scraps. What are you going to do in a crafts class with leather scraps? Well, you certainly are not going to do crafts with a mess, so I had all the students sort them. We had these empty boxes for the storage areas and the kids in this particular class just started throwing all these colors into the boxes across the room.

**1:18:20:** Everything was happening all which way. The principal came in to pull one of the kids out of the class for some other prior problem and the kid said, "This is a stupid class. All we're doing now is throwing stuff. I don't mind leaving" — you know, in conversation. So the principal came back with the kid and the class was completely in order, all the pieces were sorted, and the kids were happy and well-behaved, and the class was going to end. He looked around the room, then he looked at the kid and he didn't believe the kid. He thought the kid was lying to him, but he wasn't. [chuckles] I said, "We were sorting leather." And he said, "Well, I have to tell you something when this class ends." So the class ended and the kids left. He said, "This class you have is composed of the worst kids in the Los Angeles district. We broke up their gangs, and so you have the worst L.A. gang kids in this period. You never, never want to have confusion in your class. You always want to be at the back. You keep them in a circle, and you always walk around the circle so that you always can keep your eye on them." These things that were completely contrary to the way I believed in teaching.

**1:19:54:** The person who was the art department had sorted out all the classes. I had the

classes with the least abled people and he had the students who were supposed to be so special. And the great shocker to him was that I had these kids who weren't the most special, but we did some rendering of a pitcher and fruit still life, and I taught them to use an improvised edge and to blend the colors so they had a chiaroscuro rounding traditional appearance for the fruit and for the still life objects. I put out the drawings from everybody in the class. That's always been my philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

**1:20:53:** You don't just take the very special things, but you always have everyone's work exhibited. I was pleased to see last year at the art show of Tamalpais High School that every single student's work was up. That really pleased me because that's the philosophy that I had developed. By teacher training courses, I trained at Claremont junior high school in the English program for my minor, and I trained at Oakland Tech with a very excellent teacher for my arts program. I never had to do a lesson plan or anything for the art teacher. But for the junior high school English teacher, I had to write out a lesson plan. I had to say what I was going to ask, and I had to write down the replies that the students were going to give me from the questions that I ask. It was a completely controlled, entirely different approach, and I managed pretty well in both of them. [chuckles]

**1:22:22 Nancy Emerson:** Good training.

**1:22:23 Margaret Zegart:** It was the fall semester and Benjamin was to be born in April, so the students at the middle school gave me a shower and they said, "You know you are the best teacher we ever had." One thing I really enjoyed was when I discussed Robin Hood. I did not know much about Robin Hood, but I had a strong background after all my reading for this program about the life of Robin Hood. He actually was a person. I didn't realize that. I was prepared to teach well. The three schools that we were recommended to try to teach at were Tamalpais High School, East Whittier High School, and the Claremont High School system. Tamalpais High School was considered, statewide, one of the three best schools.

**1:23:43:** So I was pleased to teach at two of those. I think the unique thing about Tamalpais High School was that we had a very collegial group of teachers and we had a principal who had a very good open philosophy. Robert Prather was not a directional leader, so the teachers could co-direct their own departments within the framework of an excellent school system. I think that was one great thing.

### **Part III: May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**00:01 Editor:** This is part three of the oral history interview with Margaret Kett Zegart, recorded on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

**00:12 Nancy Emerson:** We are resuming our interview with Kett Zegart. In this segment we're going to talk about what she's been doing post-retirement as a high school

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<sup>6</sup> All the faculty at LaSerna commented on how great their work was.—Margaret Zegart.

teacher up to today.

**00:25 Margaret Zegart:** Several days ago, I met someone who said that they left Tam High School District in 1981. And I said, “Well that’s just about the time I was given a program of mentorship for five years after I left the classroom.” I stayed in the district of Tamalpais High School for 25 years. She, on the other hand, was not able to get a job, and so she stopped teaching and found some other field. Because at that time there was a way to reduce the teachers who had higher income. They’d been in the district longer, and there was this new program that the state and the school districts were following. We were given \$5,000 each year as a mentor. Of course, that wreaks havoc with your social security. As a teacher, your social security is minimal because the state teachers voted not to have social security option. Marin County, as opposed to San Francisco, decided to have our own retirement program.

**01:53:** The mentorship gave me the opportunity of having \$5,000, and I sort of used that as gold money because I didn’t have the responsibility of my children who were quite well grown, or else they were in school. My daughter was going to school, so I was able to travel. One of the last years that I was teaching, the chair of the fine arts department was Bob Greenwood. But my former chair was Henri Boussy who had retired. Henri had been teaching a weaving class, so I had to teach weaving, and I told them I couldn’t unless they would get me a student teacher that knew how to draft and pull a loom. And they found one, a student teacher; I thought they wouldn’t. So I was teaching weaving without a real background in weaving, because the only weaving I’d ever done was on a loom that was already set up in a church summer school program. However, there were lots of excellent books, and I had the wood shop make plank looms. The first thing the students did was they came into the classroom and made a finger loom with four fingers, like when I was small and we had a thing with thread —

**03:30 Nancy Emerson:** A spool.

**03:31 Margaret Zegart:** A spool. And you had little nails that went through the spool. What you do is you use your hand as the nails and you can make a long cord. The boys and the girls in the class did the same thing. My classes were always coeducational in opportunity and in expectations. And I had basic expectations. The kids often had been put in my class by counselors because they weren’t really very successful in terms of learning in a linear fashion, which would be like words following words. They were more holistic in how they approached a problem. They were good problem solvers. They’re the kinds of kids that were very good in shops. They were not dumb, but just not academic linear learners. And so those were the kids that helped me out when I didn’t have a film that worked or something. When a machine or something broke, they could always fix it.

**04:47:** And we had a lot of interesting kinds of things that we did, because as a teacher you had all kinds of disciplines in an art program that you had to cover. Weaving was not one that I’d ever anticipated. So Henri Boussy suggested that I go to Finland, because I am Finnish, and learn weaving. Well, I don’t think he knew that they draft backwards. Sweden is like all the other nations of the world, but the Finns are doing just the opposite.

But I learned how to draft, how to pull a loom. And then I also took courses at College of Marin. So I was able always to learn ahead of my students, and that's what a good teacher does. Because you don't want to just stay with the same things. About every 10 years in those days, opportunities and learning challenges changed. There was just a pattern.

**06:01:** You always were doing something different, and to me that was what made teaching such an exciting thing. You worked with all different kinds of kids. But there was always a kind of a general mode in which you approached the classroom. My very simple category of discipline was when you come in the room, you get your folder out, and in your folder should only be your own work. If you ever take other students' work that you like, and erase their name and put your name on it and turn it in — some highly achieving kids did with all the pressures to succeed. Some of the kids wanted to be better than they thought they were. So you don't take anybody else's work. You get kicked out for that. And you get kicked out if you throw clay in the classroom. Those were the two things. I never expected to have boy scouts — the boy who has all the badges.

**07:25 Nancy Emerson:** An eagle scout?

**07:33 Margaret Zegart:** Eagle scout. Once my tools were taken in this carving class. The tools weren't all turned in. And so I said, "Well, you'll all have to stay in the classroom till the tools get turned back," because they were sharp. And everyone kept looking around. Finally they said, "Ms. Zegart we will be late for the next class. We'll lose credit." I said, "I'm sorry, but this is your responsibility in the classroom." Well, it turned out the tools were turned in by an eagle scout. Word got back certainly to the principal how I had embarrassed this child. Also, the principal told me that I should not be using tools that could be dangerous. So I turned in all the tools, and I got saw blades. Saw blades have a smooth edge and a jagged edge. But they're not dangerous. You can saw away and you can smooth out. So they worked just fine.

**09:14:** When I teach, I get clay on myself or I get paint on myself. By then we were using acrylic paints. I always got the professional Utrecht acrylic paints. We always made our own canvases. I'd bring in board and then I'd get linen canvas from Utrecht and the kids would make their own little things and then stretch their own little canvases. Then if they wanted to, and they had the money or they were more interested, they could buy stretcher bars themselves and make a stretched canvas.

**09:55:** So after my demanding days of teaching — and my most pleasurable days of teaching, because I really like young people — I began to take classes at College of Marin. They had a printing press. The very first year I went and took courses with John Ihle who had been a member of California Society of Etchers and Engravers, and who taught at San Francisco State. This was his final year of teaching, so I wanted to take a class with him. I did quite a few prints there. And then the next semester I also took classes. The neat thing about the program in those years was that we could stay all day and all night. The room was open to us, and so we stayed late at night. I did quite a bit of work. I did some monotype printing there. I moved over to College of Marin because it was closer. It was much better to be at College of Marin.



**11:23:** So I've been taking courses ever since in all places. When I was at Tamalpais High School I received an opportunity to teach overseas in an international exchange Fullbright program. In England I learned to appreciate theater and other programs. I began to incorporate those into my post-college, post-teaching new career of being a retired person. Retiring wasn't something in my bones, because I'd been working since I was 12, and I had this strong sense of responsibility to your community.

**12:20:** I continued doing a little bit of art and traveling as much as I could. I went to some splendid places. I had 18 Elderhostel courses that I had taken. I would take a class like that, and then I would travel independently. I would use that as a way to meet people and to have an opportunity for interchange with adults that I could speak to, because I was never good at languages. I had no language proficiency at all. I once tried to learn French, spent a lot of time, and when I went to turn in some photographs, the processor said, "No, no, no, no speak French." [chuckles] That's when I stopped speaking French completely. But I took two wonderful programs in Paris. One of them was through the University of California. The head of the Sorbonne was the teacher. I have a small drawing or image that he made when he gave us the opportunity of buying some of his work. Of course, I had to find the least expensive one, but something that is nice. It's a little rainbow.

**13:58:** The next time I went, I went through Hayward State. A six-week summer program, you take the full 20 units, or 18 units I guess it is. One of my units was economics, something that I have absolutely no interest in, but that was an offering. And when we got to Paris the teacher said, "I'm sorry that I had you do any pre-reading. We can't use the text because they've just changed over to the euro." So we read the *Economist* as our text. [chuckles]

**14:40:** The opportunities were fantastic for me. I've been to Germany two times. In Paris most of the museums, since we were students, were open to us, if they were the government museums. Of course, Monet's weren't. I'd still went to his museums two or three times because I really liked his work. I still like to go to museums. The current Monet show now is very special, because it's of works that aren't really shown anywhere. Avail yourself of seeing the gifted eye of a wonderful painter who was already, as a young person, knowing where he was going.

**15:32:** The opportunity is more limited now that I'm mobility-limited at 90 years old. I still consider myself quite fortunate that I have friends who go. I have Whistlestop, but much to my chagrin, you lose about two hours. You can never be sure about the transportation because of the traffic congestion, which is getting worse and worse. When I was driving I could go almost anywhere, and I did. I have a family cottage. I would go with my children to it many times, but then I began going by myself as well, driving up and enjoying being out there along the Smith River.

**16:15:** And in Del Norte County, it's a very reactionary or conventional or limited community. It's one of the two poorest counties in the state, and until they had the Pelican

Bay Prison, which is the worst prison inmate composition, it had really no employment opportunities. The saddest thing is Walmart has come in, and all the private businesses, the ones that had been struggling for so many years, are now closed. All of them are closed. The concerns there for a small group of people, not the community leaders, is to retain the wilderness. Long ago, I would identify things that I thought should be saved in my immediate neighborhood of the Douglas Park community, which is like five houses. One of my close friends goes in convulsions over a sign outside because it says “Congestion ahead,” and then there are just five houses. [chuckles] This is on a road to Stout Grove which is in the Jedediah State Park.

**17:53 Nancy Emerson:** How did you happen to get a cabin up in that area?

**17:56 Margaret Zegart:** The reason we got one up in that area is that I traveled across the United States twice with my children, and we would camp at campgrounds. The first year, my colleague and his wife said, “Margaret, you really, really ought to get out, get away from Mill Valley for summer. Do something.” I said, “I can’t possibly afford to do it.” “Yes you can. When anything’s on sale, there’s three for two, or two for one. Put the second one in a box.” And so that’s what I did, following her suggestions. We had boxes of Argentina beef, canned beef, tuna fish, canned chicken, which we didn’t like so much, and then canned vegetables. And we plotted out with AAA exactly where we were going. We were going to stop up north on the coast in Washington State where my mother’s brother’s wife was still living.

**19:17:** It worked out to be a benefit, but at the time it seemed disastrous. We had a new Volkswagen bus, 666 miles on it, and a deer jumped in front of the car and smashed the entire front. This was the Fourth of July weekend. Actually, it was while I was still teaching that I began doing this traveling with my children. This was the first trip, but I had to tell you how we happened to have the place up in Del Norte County, which was a treasured place for all of us. It’s on the Smith River, which is a designated wild river, and there are all these groups of people trying to log off and utilize areas that should be saved. I’d see something that I thought that the Save the Redwoods League should work on, and I’d let them know. Fortunately, they were able to buy a part of land right near the forks, the meeting of the forks.

**20:24:** I had conversations with people that had lived there early on, and one of them was a man from whom I had found out that Jedediah Smith had crossed the river at a different place than the one the park had said. Jedediah’s journal was found, and it verified what the Native Americans had told the man whom I first had spoken with, an informal historian of the area. Jedediah had crossed at the Peacock Farm area. And I became interested then in Jedediah Smith. My kids aren’t even aware that I am, but I’d done a print that I had given them, the Jedediah State Park Society. Chuck Crawford — who was a wonderful counselor and a very, very good friend, especially of my son John, but a good family friend and neighbor — I gave him a print called “Serpentine Cliffs,” because on top of the Serpentine Cliff, Jedediah’s scouts, Rogers and another man, had walked ahead and had looked out and decided they didn’t want to go inland. They wanted to go north, up a creek called Myrtle Creek. And then Jedediah wasn’t with them, but just

beyond up in Oregon is where a number of his people were killed.

**22:14:** But there were two different stories that this man had gotten from Native American transcribed oral history. History, I think, is transcribed orally. The rewriting of the first five books of the Bible were done in the manner of Emily Dickinson, which really irked me. This was about 26 years ago. I still have the images. But I only have done half of the writing. So that's something I'm going to do if I live long enough.

**23:41 Nancy Emerson:** You're going to write about these —

**23:44 Margaret Zegart:** No, I'm going to trans —

**23:47 Nancy Emerson:** Oh, you're going to transcribe?

**23:48 Margaret Zegart:** I used the Aramaic, and at the time I was using Aramaic, there weren't any English translations, only one book, but that was Genesis. I got that copy at the Mill Valley Baptist Seminary library, which has the most marvelous view. One of their professors was an archeologist, who had set up a little museum. Just a wonderful place to go. So I did things like that after I retired, but always related to art or something that I had inquired about. In Del Norte County I became very aware of land use. Save the Redwoods League did acquire some of the land up there and I'm even leaving a portion of my very small estate to the group of people in Del Norte. They are working against fantastic odds. And the Coastal Commission for the whole of California up there is always opposed to anything liberal. They want to build and make money, because money is so desperate. They want to build against the coastal preservation, though it has been preserved through effort.

**25:14:** In Mill Valley there is a significant problem, because our available nice building sites and old properties are being acquired by affluent people who have large incomes and have this concept of having vast large homes, not necessarily to live in but as an investment, I think. When I was teaching school, I had a young girl whose father was interested in land preservation. He was a community planner. There was a discussion of having at the end of the high school football field a marsh made into a parking lot for cars. And we had the Almonte community long before I was here in 1952 build their own clubhouse. I was on the board of that Almonte District Improvement Club for quite a few years.

**26:26:** So I decided that I was going to make up a petition and informed everybody about how awful this was. I had a letter copied from many years ago, and fortunately we have enough people in our community and the school itself who didn't really want a parking lot on the land that was adjacent to the football field. There was another time when they wanted to build housing on the school lands because the school was getting rid of property. Elementary schools were selling or renting out buildings for a number of years until the enrollment changes.

**27:21:** The enrolment right now is at a peak and they're getting portables again at

Tamalpais High School. They have a terrible plan. I am still involved because their terrible plan is to build a three-level parking garage with access from Almonte Boulevard. Probably the most terrible personal problem is that because I live on a non-county-maintained road, our road has been absolutely demolished. GPS puts everyone on our road, because it's a straight road, even though Lark Lane is so narrow there's no parking. People on our road are parking and making it difficult for me to back out of my own driveway. We had had an agreement between the woman across the street who used to live there, who had trouble getting out of her drive because she had to back out straight. I used to have three cars in my driveway. Now there's only one. But it's difficult for my friends who are now older to back out. The road however is getting worse and worse. I was just told several days ago that we're going to pay \$2,000 to repair the road again.

**28:52 Nancy Emerson:** It's hard, isn't it? It's not fair.

**28:54 Margaret Zegart:** It's not being done by the tax of the community, because everybody thinks they pay for the roads and they're not. Well, that's the kind of issue that revolves around land use that I'm interested in. The very first time, I think, was the Almonte marsh, and we saved that. Now my big plea, if you want to know —

**29:19 Nancy Emerson:** I do want to know.

**29:19 Margaret Zegart:** Is to get ponding areas in every single parking area. They're against the creeks. There's one in downtown Mill Valley. It was put in through the program. I suggested that maybe three years ago, because I have been following BCDC, which is Bay Conservation and Development Commission — BCDC and SPUR, which is San Francisco Planning and Urban Research, and Plan Bay Area. There are three groups that have been planning for people. These are people who are not voted in. These are people who are appointed. They make programs. And many years before this, I worked with a transportation group named TransForm, going into their annual meeting and taking attendance.

**30:33:** Anyway, they were talking about doing exactly what's happening now, but it was 15 years ago. We only had two people from making the whole Bay Area decisions. And, of course, my voice isn't very loud, because I'm speaking against all the other people who were planning on getting money for improved transit and transportation by linking it with the housing development. Well, this is something that I can go on for hours about. I am not only interested in land use and management, but in the relationship between transportation and population growth, as well as separation — which I think is wrong — between the affluent and the low income.

**31:29:** A developer wants to make money. He comes in from the Midwest; he comes in from the Bay Area; he comes over from China, buys up land. There was a time when much of our land was purchased by Chinese. Before that the Persian affluent people came fleeing disruptive times. So we have a variety of people who do not understand the kind of values that I was brought up with by both my mother and my father in their extension work. Later, my mother, who returned to get an MA and wrote a new way [of recovery]

for post-heart attack people. My mother would be delighted. I've got heart problems now, and I don't lay in bed all the time. The first thing they do is try to get you up out of bed to do things and become more able, and not just give up after the first heart attack nor stay in bedrest for two weeks.

**32:36 Nancy Emerson:** Let me ask you again about these issues that you're passionate about.

**32:41 Margaret Zegart:** Well, what I'm passionate about — we have to think about the rights of the people involved and not have manipulation.

**32:50 Nancy Emerson:** Right.

**32:51 Margaret Zegart:** It's political manipulation. For an example — and this probably will not be happily received by the supervisors — about seven years ago, in one of the discussions about housing, Marin City had their own housing authority. Then they were merged into a larger group, so they only had a two-person vote, I think. The housing authority wanted to have the buildings torn down that were designed by Mr. Green, an associate of Frank Lloyd Wright. They wanted to have them torn down because they could get credit for having new housing. If it's renovated housing, they won't get the credit. So, they didn't repair the buildings. They decided to do that seven years ago at a meeting when I was attending.<sup>7</sup>

**33:53:** So I'm discouraged about the well-meaning people who are always cancelled out. Not always — sometimes they are successful, but then they get stuck where they were. Now, there's a wonderful woman called Phyllis Faber, and she has a very strong responsibility and interest in West Marin. Everyone loves oysters. I'd never eaten an oyster till half a year ago. Ah, they're marvelous! I can see why everybody wants to have more oysters. [laughs] But the national park, by having gone to national parks with my children all across the country, I realize that internationally and nationally national parks and the international parks are the thing that keeps the culture of the community or places where you live. Otherwise everything looks like a strip mall; when you go into a town it's all the same. But when you have a national park, you have the opportunity to go back and recreate or preserve or interpret what was there before. So that's a strong commitment.

**35:10:** I have a commitment to equality and opportunity for everyone, because I taught those kinds of kids and I know how important each child is. They work hard. Now I'm using Whistlestop all the time. It's incredible the kind of wonderful people that work the buses on Whistlestop. Often they are people who've had successful careers. Yesterday, the person had been in management, working with funds, one of the very important funds that sort of went down during the last thing. He's past retirement age, and he still wants to keep working a bit. To be retired now at age 65 is silly, because people are energetic and live longer. And like myself, you outgrow whatever assets you had.

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<sup>7</sup> Recently, at the first community meeting, it “ballooned” four times. They included, I believe, the use of new buildings added to guarantee present residents in low cost housing an interim period. Thus, the county and developers would have new transportation funds.—Margaret Zegart.

**36:35:** So, I use Whistlestop. I could take advantage of a nice program they have called Catch-A-Cab that your doctor signs you up for if you can no longer walk down to the public transportation. I live on a hill, so I can't walk down. The neat thing about my house which is near Tam High School is that it is flat. It never occurred to me that a flat driveway was anything better than for the little kids to play on when you're just looking at a house. But you never think of yourself. I am now dependent on either Whistlestop or friends. Often friends take me home after a meeting, because you never know how long the meeting is going to last. I still try to go to as many meetings as I can. And the current problem is that at Tamalpais High School they are making a master plan and are planning on having a three-story parking garage with a fourth level to have tennis courts on. Well, my daughter played tennis and there were lots of stray balls, so I don't know how they are going to handle the stray balls, or the people watching the tennis meets.

**37:51 Nancy Emerson:** So you went to a city council meeting about that topic last week?

**37:55 Margaret Zegart:** I did, because I kept telling the city council that I had read about it in the Tamalpais High School magazine. In January, there was this plan and the presentation. The plan for Miller Avenue, which was just being developed when I came here, was to build out a Southern California style yacht-harbor — homes on filled Richardson Bay — by Engineer Prasker. His wife later became a mayor, elected by the city council. He had designed this whole master plan of filling in upper Richardson Bay. Bothin Marsh was a dried area. I can't recall his name, but the man that lived up here on Morning Sun, who was a specialist in marshes and water, had a channel open so that the marsh could be flushed again. So Bothin Marsh was revived. Now there's a group of people called One Tam, and I worry about the fact that with this incoming climate change, the water, which has gone up eight inches, will go up perhaps 60 inches by 3000.

**39:33 Nancy Emerson:** Sea levels?

**39:33 Margaret Zegart:** At the garden gate, eight inches. It's a really literal thing. The ice flows are melted, the whole environment is changing. But not only that, we're changing our environment in many other ways. You know cutting down the trees. We need the trees, we need the oxygen, we need to plant trees. I went to a meeting and I said, "You want to cut down the bay trees because they are the ones that are harboring the Sudden Oak Death." The Marin County forester at the time hadn't read the information that I'd read. I read a lot of information. I don't remember it all. I file it. I have files that are just going to have to be thrown out, but some things are really important to keep. Some things now are back in the public knowledge. Now they know that rhododendrons, which are beautiful, and bay trees around the area need to be removed, especially when we have damp times, for the oaks.

**40:58:** TransForm met in Oakland, but they were from entire Bay Area. And the relationship [between population and transportation] was that you had the two things tied together, so that you didn't have people building more suburban homes. Because after the

federal government stopped giving the grants for building at the Reagan years, you didn't have public housing. And public housing is not a curse; it's a blessing to a community, because it keeps funds for public housing balanced. Right now, transportation and housing opportunities in San Francisco aren't balanced, and they certainly aren't balanced in our area, because we don't have much space. In many areas they keep building out, but we really can't build out. And large parcels are being used for affluent developments.

**42:01:** So those are the kinds of things that still concern me. Another reason that I started — I think when my children were still little — to become interested is that I was on one of the first groups that the supervisor Peter Behr appointed. We evaluated housing, because there was a moratorium. We had a checklist that was a model, and people came from Hawaii and other communities to see our model. And one of the model communities that won in this competition was Whiskey Springs. The other one was the Baptist Seminary. Very few people remember why this was set up the way it was. The buildout that had been planned and allowed for has already been made. There is space there, but that space is there because it's such a significant place, and spot, that overlooks the entire Bay Area.<sup>8</sup>

**43:20 Nancy Emerson:** That's right.

**43:22 Margaret Zegart:** So that's the kind of thing that I'm doing as I get older. I'm almost too old, but I still go with my cane and walk up to the microphone. They know me and I forget to announce at the city council that I'm Margaret Kettunen Zegart, who lives at 118 Highland Lane, Mill Valley and who used to teach in Mill Valley.

**43:55 Nancy Emerson:** I'm going to thank you for this wonderful, extensive oral history and discussion. It's so clear to me that you've been passionate all of your life about many things: art, people, and teaching. And your care about the environment and the people around you, I think, just comes through so clearly in this interview.

**44:20 Margaret Zegart:** Well, I certainly love the Mill Valley Library. I started to say, confessionally, that I didn't have any money to contribute any place. I didn't have any social life that I had to spend money for. Most things you have to spend money for. But I wanted to interact with people, and so I spent the money that I had to travel and interact with different cultures, never expecting to live this long. I'm continuing to do things [like the five years of mentoring]. And having a car was just a wonderful thing, but I don't think I should really drive anymore. I've convinced myself, because when I sit down now I fall asleep. [laughs]

**45:08 Nancy Emerson:** Well, I look forward to seeing you at the library or around town for another decade at least.

**45:16 Margaret Zegart:** Oh, I don't think so.

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<sup>8</sup> Marge Marcus and others kept the huge lines from development to contain the different towns. As a major transportation corridor, Highway 101 was to contain new "urban development."—Margaret Zegart.

**45:17 Nancy Emerson:** Thank you so much.

**45:19 Margaret Zegart:** Well, thank you.