

Laguna Woods History Center  
Community Oral History Project  
Transcript

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**ABSTRACT:** Joan shared about her transition as a stay-at-home mom for nineteen years to working at Leisure World. She joined the Recreation Department from 1968 to 1975. She saw growth in program offerings including the building of a new fitness center. Her role as a community liaison allowed her to learn about the needs of the community and to manage programs for them. She retired from this role to become a realtor from 1984 to 2011. Joan began volunteering for the Leisure World Historical Society in 1978 and supported the membership program by managing the dues. She currently serves as a Laguna Woods History Center Board of Trustee.

00:00:00 **Introduction**

JK: “We’re here at the Laguna Woods History Center on May 30th, 2018 with Joan Long.

My first question is, “When and where were you born?”

JL: Well, where was I born? [laughter] I was born in Akron, Ohio. And I have to tell you when, obviously. March 4, 1928.

JK: And what was life like in your childhood community?

JL: Yes, my early childhood community. Shall I go on?

JK: Please. You shared with us about some of the domestic chores of milking cows and farm life. Would you mention...?

JL: Yes, it wasn't too long after I was born, probably about two years that the Great Depression was taking hold of the whole country and my dad, a young guy, two little girls, lost his job at Firestone along with a lot of other people. He was one of the younger employees, so they went first. And when he couldn't find work, we packed up and moved to our grandparents' farm. And we lived there for several years. I think I was about ten years old when Daddy was able to buy our own farm and stock it with a little herd of Jersey cows and everything that went with it. The hard work getting up at five o'clock in the morning to milk the cows. People say to me, "Oh, you don't milk cows." I said, "Well, not anymore, but I certainly did." And we stayed there on our beautiful little farm, beautiful little house until the war started.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after the war started, my dad was hired back at Firestone which pleased him because he never enjoyed being a farmer. He did what he had to do to support his family. We moved back to Akron and that's where I went to finish my last two years of high school and began my college at Akron University and met a beautiful, young man by the name of Bill Long and I never got my degree. I got married instead.

JK: Would you share a little bit about Bill, about your first encounter?

JL: With my husband?

JK: Yes.

JL: [laughter]

JK: "Maybe how you met? Did you meet in class?"

JL: I will. Akron University was bursting at the seams the second semester with all the returning GIs and he was one of them. A Marine, twenty-one years old and I was seventeen, that was a big difference in age at that time. So, one day we were in the student lounge, several of us sitting around, we were learning to play Bridge. And somebody sat down beside me and said, "I see this girl doesn't know how to play Bridge. She bids the Grand Slam." I said, "I do?" He said, "You do." And I did and I made it. And his goose was cooked. [laughter] Um, that was Bill Long. He wouldn't tell me his name. He said I'm incognito here, so I'm not telling anyone my name. My husband Bill, his dad and Clark Gable were cousins. My husband looked a lot like Clark Gable except he was better looking and he had beautiful ears. Clark Gable had big ears. You don't know because you are too young to know, but I know. So we went together for a couple of years and we got married. We were married for seventy years. I lost my dear man last October and I won't be able to say much more about that for right now. Ok.

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<sup>1</sup> World War Two began on September 1, 1939 and ended on September 2, 1945.

JK: You journeyed to California together.

JL: I'm sorry.

JK: You moved out of state eventually to California.

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### **Moving to California**

JL: Well, we moved to California in 1964. We moved to Orange County, Tustin. We had friends who were living in Whittier and when we told them that we were moving to California. Also, they said, "You're going to like the Tustin area. It's rural." And it was with orange trees and orange groves everywhere. And so we did. We rented an apartment, nice brand new apartment. Lived there for three years and then we bought our home in Mission Viejo, which was also brand new. Mission Viejo was a new community at that time as was this community here in Laguna Woods. It wasn't Laguna Woods then, it was Laguna Hills and it was called Leisure World, the retirement community. And that's a story in itself how I became involved with this community. So, you know, every story has a beginning and my involvement with this community began over the dinner table one night in August of 1967. My son John had just turned 16 and he had gotten a job here at Clubhouse 2. There were only two clubhouses then, one and two. And...so I announced at dinner that I was going to find a part-time job. And I think they all said in unison, "What can you do, Mom?" I said, "I don't know, but I bet I can do something." So, I did apply for a job at Leisure World and a couple of months later I was offered [a] job at Leisure World three days a week. The hours were not what I wanted because my youngest was ten years old and still could not be left alone. So, we arranged, the family arranged that he would be looked after the two evenings that I worked. And then my old friend, Diane Edwards, who lived across the street from me, looked after him on Monday afternoons until everybody else got home. Diane Edwards features very huge in this community. Shortly after, oh a few years after, I began working here. I started out at Clubhouse 2. And in 1971, excuse me, 1971 our beautiful Clubhouse 3 Theatre was completed and someone was hired to manage the theatre. And the Theatre Guild had been very instrumental in getting the clubhouse built in the first place. And they had definite ideas about how they wanted things to be run. And the person that was hired did not fit their plans. So, Vera Johnson, who was the manager of Clubhouse 1, was appointed Theatre Manager. Vera had a background in theatre because her grandparents had been silent movie stars from New Jersey. And when they came to Hollywood, their New Jersey accent did not allow them to, to continue their careers in, when talkies came in. So, anyhow, Vera did have a background in theatre and I was hired as the office...front office manager. And our recreation director set a new need to get the box office organized. He said, "You're good at organization." So, between Vera and me we did. We got everything up and running and our programs became, excuse me, very successful. We did a lot of

movies to fill time and the biggest movie requests were two old musical stars by the names of Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy.

JK: Mhmm.

00:09:21

JL: Dear Lord! I don't think I would ever want to hear them sing again. [laughter]  
 The most popular people who came to the theatre to perform were the Lawrence Welk Troop.<sup>2</sup> And they came quite often and everybody loved them dearly. We had, we had the West Point Cadet Choir coming, I remember, big choir. They had commandeered a plane to bring them into L.A. Orange County airport was nothing, couldn't handle a big plane. And about two days before they were to arrive, Admiral Beery walked into my office and he said, "Dial this number." And he said, "Get on the other phone. I want you to find out how the Navy handles things." Well, as it turned out, a general had commandeered that plane and they weren't going to come. Well, Admiral Beery, I don't exactly remember how it went, but by the end of that phone conversation a new plane was on...was going to be on its way. And the cadets came and, oh my goodness, they put on a great show. They were very noisy because they were 18 to 21 years old. And backstage was bedlam. So, I had to go back to see if I could quiet the boys down and one of them had shimmied up the pull, the rope pull that opened the curtains and closed the curtains. So, I said to him, "What do think you're doing up there?" He said, "Having fun." I said, "You can come down right now." He had an accent and he was an absolutely adorable boy. He said, "Don't be mean to me or I'll tell Papa Marcos on you." Papa Marcos, of course, was the president of the Philippines. And we found out later that his...this cute kid's dad was [in] one of Papa Marcos' higher echelon. Anyhow, I gave him the dressing down and he came down the pole. So, that was that little story, but we did do some beautiful programs at Clubhouse 3. And then not too long, I guess I was there about two years, once again our supervisor said to me, "I want you to go to Clubhouse 1." He said, "I need someone to run Clubhouse 1 for me." So, I said, "Okay." And I did. And I was there, the supervisor, at Clubhouse 1 for quite some time. And then I decided I'd had enough of senior citizens shall we say, getting close to being one myself by then. So, I'd left to pursue a career in real estate. And I was away from this community for several years when an old friend of mine said, "You come back over here to sell real estate. We're making money." And...so, I did. And the rest of that story is history. I sold real estate in this community for 28 years. And during that process, I sold [one to] myself. And so I do have a nice little home that I've had for 30 years here in this community.

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### **Recreation Department**

JK: That's great! Let's go back a bit to more of the Recreation Department.

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<sup>2</sup> The Lawrence Welk Show people performed Big Band music with an orchestra.  
[https://youtu.be/95sluopO\\_Bk](https://youtu.be/95sluopO_Bk)

JL: I'm sorry?

JK: Where...you had mentioned in...about the Recreation Department, setting up services for the Presbyterian church.

JL: Hmm?

JK: You did set-up and diagrams for set-up for the Presbyterian church. So, some more of your roles and responsibilities. Would you share about programming, maybe some more about parade planning?

JL: About what?

JK: And...programming and parade planning.

JL: The parade?

JK: You have a great story about the parade [that] I don't want to miss, so...

JL: The parade? Oh, I was at Clubhouse 2. The first year that I was at Clubhouse 2, our supervisor, Zola Arnold, who became a very dear friend, decided we were going to do a Fourth of July parade. Well, it was a big undertaking and we had to find a grand marshall, which we did. We found a man by the name of Harry von Zell. Harry was, I think, Jack Benny's announcer and he was happy to be a part of this parade. And it was a huge success. We were allowed to close off El Toro road, if you could imagine. And our parade was held from Clubhouse 2 on Moulton Parkway, which was a two lane Macadam road at that time down El Toro Road and into Gate 1 back to Clubhouse 1. So, and everybody in the community was happy to take part in it. They decorated their golf carts, they decorated themselves. They marched. We had a marching band. It was a real Fourth of July parade, huge success. So, next year we decided we would do it again. And, so it was kind of left up me to find a grand marshall. So, I started scouting around. I had met and knew Marian Knott of Knott's Berry Farm. Just an adorable lady. And she said, "I know somebody that would be perfect for your grand marshall." She said, "But don't you tell him I told you." So, it was Andy Devine, old time movie star and she gave me his phone number. So, I called and Mrs. Devine answered the phone. So, we had a nice little visit. And then she said, "Honey." She said, "I'm not even gonna tell him you called." She said, "He's old and he's sick and if I say they want you, he'll say, 'Oh, I'd love to.'" And she said, "No." So, okay back to the drawing board. So, I contacted...his name is escaping me.

JL: So, I contacted Harry Babbitt. Harry had been the singer with Kay Kyser's band on

the radio for years. And he did have a connection with this community more or less, I think, public relations, but I'm not sure about that. He said, "Yes." He would love to. So, anyhow, my husband owned a used car lot in Santa Ana. And he had taken in a convertible, beautiful convertible that belonged to June Allyson because he also had a little sports car that June Allyson's son had seen. He, my son, John, and June Allyson's son surfed together. So, he loved that little sports car so she bought it for him and used her convertible as a trade. So, okay, my husband said to me, "Well, you can use the convertible to put the grand marshall in for the parade, okay?" Well, we got ready to leave the Clubhouse and here's this big, long car and I said to Harry Babbitt, I said, "Harry, I don't think I can drive that car." He said, "You want me to drive it?" I said, "Oh, that would be wonderful!" So, anyhow, Harry drove himself in the car, his wife in the backseat, me in the front seat waving to everybody. "Oh, hi, Joan!" You know, so that was one of our cute stories.

JK: That's great!

JL: And that parade was our last one because they'd decided that the insurance company had not been aware of all that was going on with the sheriff closing part of El Toro Road and the liability. So, no more Fourth of July parades.

JK: Sure.

JL: But it was a fun time.

00:18:58

### **Part-time Supervisor at Clubhouse 2**

JK: Certainly. Some of the other programming you did as a recreation director was set-up for planning for Presbyterian services and doing some planning for them. Would you share about some of the...just the daily roles?

JL: The church?

JK: Sure.

JL: Not too much to tell about that.

JK: Okay. Were...just, they were present and there [were] Monday night Globe Twirlers.

JL: Oh! Uh-huh. Well I was a part-time supervisor at Clubhouse 2. I worked on Monday night, that was my...we had the clubhouse open from eight in the morning until ten at night. And so my job was to keep the clubhouse open on Monday night until ten. And there were two groups that met at the clubhouse every Monday night. They were the

Roundaliers.<sup>3</sup> They did round dancing. They came on first and then the Globe Twirlers were the square dancers. And Herb and Barber Leshner for many, many, many years were the directors for the Roundaliers and the square dancers. And I got to know so many of those people, so many of them. We actually became good friends. And I remember when...couple...he was a retired judge and they would come into my office to visit before the Globe Twirlers started. And he said to me one evening, he said, "Joan, dear." He said, "You know what perception means, don't you?" I said, "Well, I think so." He said, "Do you know what apperception means?" I said, "Well, I guess it just means a little more." And he said, "My dear..." He said, "You have what we call apperception mass." And I said, "What in the world is that?" I said, "Is that a good thing?" He said, "It can be." He said, "It depends upon how you use it." Well, that was something that I've never forgotten. I have no idea what I have that is this apperception mass, but whatever it is I have tried to make sure that it's a good thing.<sup>4</sup> So, that was one of my interesting encounters. I had many, many encounters. I had three gentlemen that would stop by my office for a little chat. My office door was always open. I had the coffee pot going. I encouraged the residents to feel that this was *their* clubhouse. And they could come in to the office and if I had to do something I would say, "Okay, got to go now." And everybody understood that, but my three gentlemen that would stop by every morning. They did not come together. They took their walks and they came separately. One was Admiral Beery, one was General Schaeler, and one was Judge May. And as it turned out, Judge May was from Akron, Ohio and one day I was looking at my old marriage license, Judge May had signed my marriage license many, many years ago. However, I was telling my husband one evening, I said, "You know what an interesting job I have." I said, "I've got three people that are dear friends of mine, one's a retired judge, one's a retired admiral, one's a retired four star general. So, the next morning when General Schaler stopped by, I was telling him the story. And he began to laugh. And I said, "What's so funny?" He said, "Thank you for the promotion." What a wonderful gentleman he was. Just some of the little interludes that happened that made my job extremely, extremely interesting.

00:22:50 JK: Absolutely. You shared about a party that Ross Cortese was present at. Would you share that again with us?

JL: Excuse me. [Cough] Ross Cortese, of course was the builder of this community along with many others throughout the country. Seal Beach was the first one. It was the prototype and then he bought Moulton Ranch, which is where we are located. And he could realize his real dream of a huge retirement community with everything that went with it. And I had never met him. I've seen his picture. I'd seen him on television, but he

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<sup>3</sup> Roundaliers Dance Club

<sup>4</sup> It is a psychological term that was defined by William James as, "the act of taking a thing into the mind." <https://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Pajares/tt14.html>

had...arranged to have a dinner dance at Clubhouse 1 while I was the supervisor there. And it was a beautiful affair, beautiful. They had some kind of champagne, lighted champagne dispenser that was like, you know, up in the air and cascading down and over ice and it was...couldn't drink the champagne, probably be too flat. But it was beautiful. That was the centerpiece for the bar. They had huge lighted candelabra everywhere. [The] entire Clubhouse 1 dining room was lit by these beautiful candelabras. So, I went in to check the party, make sure everything was going well and I saw those lighted candelabra. Well, that's a no-no. You cannot have lighted candelabras in a community place like Clubhouse 1 dining room, main dining room. So, I went back to my office and I called our fire marshall, Herb Alberty. And I told Herb the story and I said, "What am I gonna do?" He said, "You don't have to do anything. Just sit tight." So, here came Herb pretty soon in his full fire marshall uniform and I went with him, but I stayed back by the door because I just wanted to observe. I didn't want to be a part of this confrontation. So, he went up to the main table and told Mr. Cortese that the lighted candelabra would have to be extinguished. Well, Mr Cortese was a very handsome man. He [had] very dark, dark eyes. Kind of like a Roman nose, I would say. And he became so angry that he actually looked like some kind of a very angry bird. I thought, "Oh, my gosh. He looks like a mad eagle." But the candles were put out, of course, they had to be. Well, shortly after, at my clubhouse arrived boxes of candles, globes, sort of like so, that candles, yes, could be on the tables and on the bar and...but, they had to be encased in the glass globes. So, we know how that happened. Yes.

JK: Wow.

JL: So, that was my only encounter with Mr. Cortese.

JK: Would you say that was probably around 1968, near kind of the beginning?

JL: That would have been 1974.

JK: '74. Okay.

JL: Mhmm.

JK: That party happened.

JL: That would have been 1974.

JK: Okay.

JL: Yeah.



JK: Did you interact with other management of the community? So, like Bob Price and other central leaders of the community with your role? Did you interact with other management leaders?

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JL: Well, you know, I was not involved with the community as such as you know who the Golden Rain, who was in charge of the mutuals and that sort of thing. I simply was not involved in that. My job was recreation.

JK: Right.

JL: Making sure that everybody had a good time. But one day a gentleman stopped in my office and he was from the south. And down south they say some things a little differently from what we say in the north. He said, "We've been having a problem with teenagers jumping over the wall off of Moulton Parkway." It was a low wall at that time, going down to the golf course and taking the golf carts for a joy ride. And they were creating real problems. They were, you know, making a mess with the greens and upsetting the golf carts. It was a problem. So, apparently, he was a part of the Golden Rain and I don't really recall his name, but I do remember him. So, he said, "I said at the meeting that we're gonna have to put bob wire around the fences." And he said, "Nobody likes the idea because they say it would be like putting us in a prison." And he said, "I just said to them, 'Now listen Queen Elizabeth's got bob wire around Buckingham Palace so we can have bob wire also.'" Of course he meant barbed wire, but I thought that was cute. His bob wire and, yes, the community did approve and, yes, ever since we have had barbed wire on all the fences and, of course, the wall on Moulton Parkway leading into Clubhouse 2 area was raised higher. Also, another really cute interlude, this was early on when I first started to work. I went to work one Saturday morning and two gentlemen were getting ready to tee off on the 10th tee, which was just outside Clubhouse 2's back office door. And I heard one of them say, "I hope my ball doesn't go in the road." And the other one said, "Well, you better hope it doesn't go in the swimming pool." 'Cause he said, "Last week I hit a ball into the swimming pool and it hit a guy on the head." And, so yes, there was...that created a fury. So, shortly after that, you know, needs must, this was still a fairly new community and as problems arose, they were taken care of. So, shortly thereafter the big, huge, high telephone poles came in and went around the tenth tee and volleyball netting was stretched between 'em so that no more errant balls could go in the swimming pool. So, I thought that was a very, very cute story. We had lots of 'em.

JK: And...course you've seen new club and activities introduced over those years.

JL: Hmm?

JK: New clubs and organizations formed for the residents during those years at your direct involvement with recreation. What changes, other changes in the community maybe by population, maybe interest, did you see in recreation in itself? I'm curious about interest, change in interest in recreation.

JL: About what?

JK: New, maybe new sports, new clubs, new activities, what kind of new things are being introduced these years?

JL: Mhmm. I'll have to think about it a minute.

JK: Okay. Sure. At any point, maybe interject.

00:31:44

### **Clubs & Organizations**

JL: As the community grew, of course, interests began to kind of manifest themselves. This group would get together and say, "You know, we need to...music is our big thing. And so we need to form an orchestra." Which they did and very successful under the leadership of Leota Peterson. Leota was in the...music instructor in the school system and a very able person. She was a violinist also and then there was a group who were interested in opera music. This all was beginning to come about after Clubhouse 3 was built. The theatre seated almost 900 people and beautiful, beautiful theatre. So, this group formed Opera 100 and that's what they did. They put on operas and huge success. Then the interest became more in the, along the line of activities like physical activities. So, you know, the lawn bowling green at Clubhouse 1 was extremely successful. And so they constructed one at Clubhouse 2, which was quickly filled up. They constructed, covered and enclosed, shuffleboard courts. They put in a bocce ball courts. I was calling it bocce and I was corrected by one of the Italians who was instrumental in getting the bocce court constructed. And as they came about they became very popular. People were interested in physical activity. My...at Clubhouse 1, shortly after I became the supervisor there, Clubhouse 4 was completed. And Clubhouse 4 was the arts and crafts center. So, all the arts and crafts that had been meeting at Clubhouse 1 moved to Clubhouse 4, naturally, leaving a lot of empty space, lot of empty space. So, our supervisor, our director at that time was Skip Stone. And Skip had been working with a doctor, I do not remember his name from L.A. His specialty was physical fitness for the geriatrics crowd. And so Skip said, "We're going to use the vacant areas down here. And we're going to try to establish a physical fitness center. We don't know if it'll catch on or not." So, that's what we did. We worked with this doctor. I believe his name was Doctor DeVrees, but I'm not certain to start with the equipment that would needed. There wasn't a whole lot of equipment, but there were a couple of stationary bicycles and mats. And the funny is they discovered

that a lot seniors once they get down on a mat, that's okay they can do their exercises. But how are they gonna get back up again. So, that was a bit of a problem there. There was also a stair climber and minimal amount of equipment. And then Skip said to me, "Now, Joan." He said, "We need someone to run this program." And I said, "Well, my friend, Diane Edwards, has her degree in Physical Education and she would like to have a part-time job. But it has to be part-time because she plays bridge twice a week and she bowls once a week. And she has to be home in time for her little girls when they get home from school." "Okay, well, we'll give her a try maybe." So, he interviewed Diane Edwards and the rest in this community is history. Diane did go to work and little by little by little she created an extremely successful exercise program. During the process, she went back to school got her Ph.D. She wrote a book. She appeared on national television. I mean she's considered a real expert in physical education for senior citizens. And she is an expert.

JK: Wow!

JL: She built that department into a huge success. People flocked into that facility. They couldn't get enough of it. And so when the new community center was built up on El Toro Road at Town Center Drive, another facility was built there and state of the art these facilities are. They're beautiful. And really the people who work there now are so capable and they really owe a vote of thanks to Diane Edwards for getting it going. And, so, that was fun having Diane work there with me.

JK: Wow!

JL: After all those years of her babysitting my Jaime while I was working at Clubhouse 2.

JK: I wanted to ask you about your initial thoughts about Leisure World. So, that very first visit here, [I] want to take it back to that conversation, first impressions.

JL: My first impression?

JK: About the landscape, the people, the community. Would you share about that?

00:38:24

### **Initial Visit to Leisure World**

JL: Well, I didn't know much about Leisure World except what my son had told me. And of course he added that evening at dinner when he said, "Why don't you go to work at Leisure World, Mom?" He said, "Those women don't have to know anything." And that tells you exactly what a sixteen year old thinks of his mother's abilities. By the time he was eighteen, he realized mom was pretty smart, but it took a while. So, I was new to the work field. I had been a stay-at-home mom for nineteen years. I had not worked and

wasn't sure what I could do. But once I was hired and once I started meeting the people who worked as the recreation supervisors and [saw] what great people they were.... And they loved this community. None of them lived here because you still you cannot [work] full-time here in this community and live here unless you're a real estate agent. But that's because they're independent of employment. There were just the two clubhouses. Clubhouse 1, our recreation office, was in the upstairs part of Clubhouse 1. And because the old glass, black glass building as we call it, which is...was out here where the big three-story apartment complex is now housed a lot of...it housed the newspaper, security, the physical fitness, I don't mean physical fitness, I mean physical properties. You could buy your carpets and your drapes and your paint and whatever else in your upgrades [for] your unit there. So, there was no room left until finally somebody moved out. Oh, I know who moved out. The carpet people moved out. They left. The carpet and drapery and paint people left, making room for the recreation department. And so that's when the office moved in there. The *Leisure World News* had a big office in there and they really did everything there except print the newspaper. They did all of the reporting, the editing. A couple of times they were running late and they did what they called lay-up. And so they had spread the paper out on the big tables and then they had lay it up, get it ready for the printer. And if they were running short on time, they could call some of us from the recreation department to come in and help them lay-up the newspapers. So, that was a part of the job that was unexpected, but it was fun. And I never really got into the community itself very much. I would be invited to lunch once in a while or, you know, some reason why I needed to get into the community. But I did not know how beautiful this community was becoming until 1983 when I came back here as a real estate agent and then I discovered what a beautiful, beautiful place this community really is. In fact, my husband wanted to retire and he was only 62 years old. And so I said to him, "Well, you can retire because we can sell our house and move into Leisure World." He had never been in Leisure World, except inside the gate to come to my offices. So, we came into Leisure World to look around and he said to me, "How come you never told me it was so beautiful in here?" I said, "Well, you never asked me." And so that was how I would describe it, too. Just a beautiful, beautiful community. And so my initial, my initiation, shall we say into the community was really just the two clubhouses and getting to know the people that were involved in running the organization. The golf course was in full swing by then and the stables. And we had the riding trails and we still do, beautiful riding trails. One little tennis court [there] wasn't much interest in tennis at that time. Well, now it's [a] huge part of the community. But, when I say, I, my only initiation was with the people I worked with which is true, but then began to get to know the people who lived here and the activities that they enjoyed and that's when the job became not really a job. It was just a place to go to have a good time and I got paid for it.

JK: And when you moved here yourself, did you become involved with any of the

clubhouses, any organizations, any activities? So, as a resident, were there things that you particularly liked?

JL: Not very much.

JK: No. Okay.

JL: No. When I moved in here I moved in...in December of 1988. I was still working, of course. My husband had retired so somebody had to work. He played golf every day for eighteen years. He was in heaven for eighteen playing golf because he was very, very good at it. In fact, he was one of the top golfers. Everybody wanted to play golf with Bill because Bill was so personable and a good sport, just enjoyed his activity. So, I really did not become too involved in anything myself because I was very busy, but after I decided to cut back on my work, that would have been 1978. And I decided, okay it's time for me to cut back and enjoy a little. And I felt, "What am I gonna do?" And then I thought, "Okay, you have been involved in this community for so many years, so why not volunteer at the Historical Society." And the Historical Society was an annex that had recently been added to the library. And before that it had occupied a little space in the old, black glass building, very tiny space as I understand. They were bursting at the seams as far as trying to archive all of the material they were collecting. So, anyhow I walked in the door one day and two ladies were at the desk out front. And I introduced myself and I said, "I want to become a volunteer." Well, the president happened to be one of the ladies. Her name was Evelyn Shopp. I didn't know Evelyn, never met her before. The other was a secretary. All I remember is Gene. I should remember more because I sold Gene's house when she moved back to Wisconsin, but I don't. So, they wanted to know what my interest was and I said, "Don't have any interest. All I know is that I've been associated with this community for so long that I think I could probably be of service." Okay, so I became a volunteer at the Historical Society. Eventually, I became sort of in charge of membership. And I did a good job at it because people would forget to pay their membership. Then we had membership dues. And once a year and they would forget. And so I would get on the phone one by one by one, call them, tell them who I was, why I was calling. "Did you forget us?" "Oh, yes. Oh, yes." "Well, it's not too late. So, we will expect to see your membership coming in very soon." Or something to that effect. And I made it sound like it was so much fun they just had to do this. So, I've been associated with the Historical Society, which is now the History Center, ever since. And it's just been a wonderful association. It filled the gap in not working every day, but more than that. Many, many people that I've become friends with over the years and I cherish that.

JK: That's great! And part of that was the club's storage fees that.... So, did you already

know a lot, when you were making these calls? I'm thinking you might have known [about] some of the clubs you were calling.

JL: No, individuals.

JK: No, just individuals. So, not for the storage?

JL: No, the clubs and organizations [were] also under part of my membership routine because the clubs and organizations over the years had been archiving their materials back here in our back office. And we charged them just a minimal amount of, for storage. And, of course there's always insurance and, you know, different little costs involved. And new presidents coming in were not aware that they were supposed to be paying a small fee each year. So, my job was to once again get on the phone, find out who the new president was or who was the treasurer, who was the person I needed to speak with and remind them very gently that they had not paid their storage dues. So, that was another part of my duties. I enjoyed it all. I enjoyed every minute of it. Of course, now we don't do membership any more. We rely on different programs and one of the programs that was hugely successful, but we don't do anymore, was the golf tournaments. Hugely successful! Brought in money to the Historical Society coffers, so.

JK: That's great! You also mentioned that you sold a property to Mrs. Tracy Strevey.

JL: Hmm?

JK: You sold a property in the Towers. Would you share about that, maybe, that sale.

JL: Well, I didn't know Dr. Strevey. Dr. Strevey was one of the early residents in this community.<sup>5</sup> He was a Golden Rain member. I think he might have been Golden Rain president, in fact I'm sure he was. And Dr. Strevey wrote a book about this community. I don't remember the title of the book.<sup>6</sup> Wonderful book, I read it, and I have it. And when he passed away...his name Tracy, Tracy Strevey, which is an interesting name. When he passed away, I became in contact with Mrs. Strevey through my work. And, so she listed her property with me in the Towers. They had lived in the Towers the last few years. I think he...well, I know he was in failing health. And she called him Trace, which I thought was very cute. I liked that. We all thought of him, you know as Dr. Tracy, Dr. Strevey because he was an important factor in this community for many, many years, very respected, very looked up to. And, so it was nice getting to know Mrs. Strevey. I met

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. Strevey was the USC Vice President for Academic Affairs. He helped develop Leisure World.

[http://lagunawoodshistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Strevey\\_197806\\_003.pdf](http://lagunawoodshistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Strevey_197806_003.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Strevey helped establish the Historical Society and wrote *Fulfilling Retirement Dreams: The First 25 Years*.

lots of wonderful people through my real estate work. Lots of wonderful people, to buy and to sell. And I enjoyed that. I was a natural. And I loved it. So, here I am!

JK: Absolutely!

JL: Retired 100%.

JK: What is it like reflecting about all the changes to present day. Is there anything you'd like to share about maybe contemporary experiences now as a resident?

JL: About the changes?

JK: Mhmm.

00:53:32

### **Community Changes**

JL: Well, you know, the older you get the more you resist changes. That's just a fact. That's the way it is. And yet if you're realistic, you know that change is going to happen. And as this community has changed, now I've been involved in this community in one way or another, for 50 years, since 1968. That's 50 years. Oh my goodness! Yes, many, many, many changes. Most of them for the good overall. Sometimes changes are proposed and they're...money wise they're completely out of line. And that's when the residents come into play. And put in their two cents worth in other words. "No, we do not want this. This is not necessary. We've gotten along so far without it. We'll get along without now." One was an amphitheatre to be built outside Clubhouse 2. And, yeah, an amphitheatre would be nice, but how many months out of the year are people gonna sit outside in the evening and enjoy a concert? Probably not that many. There was also some interesting building, a third center for...[a] fitness center. A third fitness center. This one was going to be extremely expensive, extremely state of the art. And the general public said, "No. We have two beautiful fitness centers. Yes, they are used practically to capacity, but we have so many other recreation activities." You know, the golf and the tennis and the riding and the bocce and the pickleball that's coming on big time now. I understand there's a new pickleball court being constructed and it's going to be expensive, but it's really something that the people want and so that's fine. That's the way it should be. And so changes that are to the advantage of the population as a whole. Yes, I'm all for it. Changes just to be enticing a different type of new resident, I see no reason for that. We got a fine type of resident right now and we don't need to entice anybody that... I don't understand that, to tell you the truth. I have heard that said that some of these improvements like turning Clubhouse 3 into a performing arts center. I have no idea how much it's gonna cost. It's gonna cost a fortune if it's done. I'm not sure that it will be done. But it was to entice, I was told, a different type of resident to come to

the community. The people...the theatres jam pack now when there is something going on, it's full capacity. So, that's all I have to say on that subject.

JK: Interesting. What about maybe change in residents?

JL: Hmm?

JK: You had...change with the residents themselves, so maybe [median] age, medium...just those sort of things that define a community. Any comment on those factors?

JL: When my husband and I moved into this community in 1988, there were many, many residents who were original owners from 1964 and '65 and '67. My cul-de-sac was finished in 1967 and many of the residents in there that I became friends with were original owners. And, so of course that was 30 years ago. One by one by one they have gone and new residents have come in. There is...we were the youngest in the community. I was 59, my husband was 63 and were the kids on the block, you know. Well, now we have new kids on the block also. They call themselves the Baby Boomers and the Rock and Rollers. So, that will tell you about that age bracket, same age bracket as my kids are in. So, but that's the way it goes. Out with the old, in with the new. And there's always been a change and as the age changes, the activity requirements change also. And so that's why we have things like the new pickleball center and why we have a huge new tennis facility. Because younger people still like to play tennis and a different type of entertainment going on at Clubhouse 3, quite a bit, too. So, yes, the community has changed in 30 years that I've been here. The residents, several of my neighbors, now are in their late 60s. And, so that's the way it should be.

JK: When the city was incorporated, there was all sorts of celebrations. It was quite an occasion. Were you present in those activities?

JL: When the town became a city?

JK: Mhmm. Yes, cityhood. So, do you recall that particular moment?

JL: I don't think I have much to say about that, Jennifer.

JK: No? Sure.

01:00:34

### **Cityhood**

JL: I knew about it, of course. And there was a huge faction that was anti-cityhood. You



know, if it ain't broke, why fix it. There was also a huge faction that was in favor of cityhood. And obviously that faction won out. Well, it's worked out fine. It's fine. We're a small city. Our city director is, I understand, the youngest in the county, happens to be a friend of mine. He was our curator here at the History Center.

JK: Wow!

JL: Before he became involved in city hall. And now...that's a success story. There was also a lot of debate going on at a time when El Toro Marine Base had closed. And there was talk about turning it into an airport. Now, we did have some very influential people in this community. We went to Washington, they met with people that mattered. They expressed the opinion of the community as a whole. And the community won. We have the Great Park instead. We do not have an airport outside our front door. That would have been very detrimental to the community, I'm sure. So, that was one thing that we were grateful to the people who really went to bat for that cause and won.

JK: And just any final thoughts for the History Center? So, you were very involved...

JL: The History Center?

JK: Mhmm. Just for...seems...

JL: Why, you know, we talked about change.

JK: Mhmm.

01:02:50

### **History Center**

JL: And changes do come about and our History Center here, which was always called the Historical Society, we had our president, Evelyn Shopp.<sup>7</sup> Evelyn was just a fabulous lady, loved her dearly. Didn't at first, but got to. Extremely competent and capable. And she had the Historical Society to heart. She wanted what was best for us. And after her, we elected a gentleman by the name of Bob Ring.<sup>8</sup> Bob Ring was such a powerhouse. He did transform this Historical Society into almost what it is today. There's new management now. They're absolutely top shelf. Bob Ring, everybody adored that man. He was a workaholic, no doubt about it. At one point, you know, I'm not computer literate at all. I don't pretend to be. And things were beginning to change and become different from the way we had done things before. So, I thought, "Okay, your day is done. You're going to resign." So, I wrote my letter of resignation to Bob and I said,

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<sup>7</sup> OH 02 Evelyn Shopp's Oral History: <https://youtu.be/DRKjc6VYwng>

<sup>8</sup> OH 03 Bob Ring's Oral History: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHRnHIMAN5E>

“Bob.” I said, “I feel like the old plow horse the day that the farmer brought home the new tractor. I feel like my day is done as far as contributing anything of value to the Historical Society.” So, I went on to comment on his abilities, which are just tremendous. And I said, “You know, you called himself Mrs. Ring’s little boy, Bobby.” So, I finished my letter by saying, “If Mrs. Ring’s little boy, Bobby, had chosen to become a juggler, he would of set Vaudeville on its ear.” Because Bob Ring could juggle all of these jobs at one time and do a fantastic job at all of them. He was the mayor several times.

JK: Mhmm.

JL: He ran the Historical Society. He belonged to different organizations in the community. Anyhow, my admiration for him is very deep. So, he called me that afternoon. He said, “I read your letter at the meeting.” “Oh, you did, huh?” “Yes, I did.” He said, “We are awarding you a merit status.” I said, “What does that mean?” “It means,” he said, “that you will always be a member of the Historical Society board of directors. What a compliment. So, Bob and his wife have retired and moved up near Thousand Oaks and we have new management. We have Dean and Gail [Dixon]. And younger, progressive absolutely forward thinking very, very capable. Everybody adores them. They are just two people that are a tremendous value to this organization. So, there’s some of the changes that have happened in our History Center. And all for the good, all for the good.

JK: All that legacy.

JL: Each and every change has been perfect for its time and its day.

JK: Reflecting on the community at large, what are your thoughts for the future for...

JL: This community?

JK: Community, yes.

JL: Wow! That’s a biggie.

JK: Any thoughts for it? Mhmm.

JL: Wow!

JK: You certainly been a part of many aspects of it. So, in any respect, any way you’d like to comment? Yeah.

JL: You know, I don't think I have a comment. I can just see this community going on in to continuity or perpetuity, I mean. It's well established, it's...we're in good shape financially. The people that...the caretakers of this community. And they change the Golden Rain board changes, the United board changes. The Third Mutual changes, the Towers is Mutual Fifty and, of course, they change. But they all have the interest of the community. And its financial stability at heart. And, of course, we the people have something to say about that also. We always do. The letters to the editor, we all express our opinions, you know, one way or another, pros and cons and kudos and otherwise. So, I see it going on, I do see some changes that will probably have to happen. Some of our co-op areas, the buildings are over 50 years old. And they were well built, well constructed and still hanging in there. But there are some problems, especially the plumbing problems that keep cropping up. And that's a problem that will have to be addressed. And it will be expensive, but it will happen. And so I see that as needs must then, it will be taken care of when it does have to be taken care of.

JK: Right. Any final thoughts about your life experience in California, in this community? You've just celebrated your 90th birthday. So, any reflective thoughts about that?

01:09:28

### **90th Birthday**

JL: Well, how many years has it been now? 54 years, my husband and I took a drive one afternoon and it was a cold, snowy afternoon in Akron, Ohio. And our son, John, was about 12 years old then, was having problems. He has severe allergies and he was sick that day. So, our daughter, Christie, was the oldest of the three. Jaime was little. He was like 5 years old. So, Christie said, "You know, I'll take care of Jaime, you and daddy go." And daddy and I went. And we talked serious business that afternoon on our little drive. Should we get John to a warmer climate because we'd gone through Cleveland Clinic, done everything we could medically for him. And it was beginning to not work anymore. So, we talked to our doctor about it and he said, "I cannot advise a family to pick up and move across country, but..." He said, "If you do, John will be 100% better." So, okay, the die was cast. We did not tell our family. We made our plans. It took us a year to make our plans and we did. And we bought ourselves a travel trailer. We had our dog, Spot. And the five of us and Spot traveled across country for one month. And what a wonderful trip that was. None of us will ever forget it. And we settled in Tustin where our friends told us we should. And we were there for three years, decided we loved California. Absolutely loved California. California was a, you know, Orange County was a lot different than it is now, no doubt about it. But we bought our new home in Mission Viejo in 1967. Yes, just before John turned 16 and went to work at Leisure World at Clubhouse 2.

JK: Full circle.

JL: So, the rest is history.

JK: It really is.

JL: Here we are.

JK: And you've done a beautiful job recounting.

JL: Hmm?

JK: You did a beautiful job recounting your years here. So, thank you for your time. Thank you for your contributions to this project.