

Memory Lines

An occasional publication of the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

Issue 1 • Spring 2004

NEW DIRECTIONS

IN ORAL HISTORY

Research news at
the intersection of
memory and history

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TEACHING AND RESEARCH AT ROHO: Notes from the Director

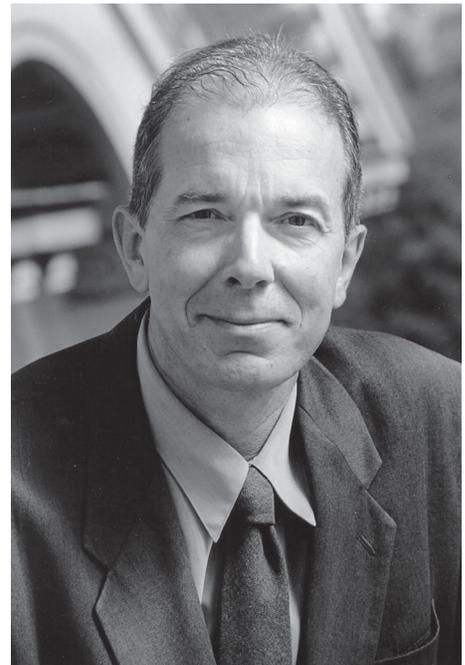
By Richard Cándida Smith, Director of the Regional Oral History Office and Professor of History,
University of California, Berkeley

The year 2004 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Regional Oral History Office. During the past half-century, over two thousand interviews have probed deeply into an amazingly wide range of topics. With an additional three thousand donated oral history interviews on deposit at the Bancroft Library, including those produced by our sister programs at UCLA and UC Santa Cruz, we have assembled a profound set of sources documenting the relationship of personal and social transformation in the state of California during the past century in a wide variety of fields: politics, University history, arts and culture, agriculture, food and wine, community history, and more.

Over the coming year, we will be sponsoring talks and symposia highlighting the work done in this office. As we honor a half-century of accomplishment, we continue to ask ourselves, what are the special responsibilities of an oral history research group to augment the research and teaching missions of the University of California?

Oral sources are a vital part of scholarly life because they allow us to see forms of collective life that are difficult to document in other ways. Today, just as in the past, people create and sustain a shared imaginative life wherever they gather and converse, be it at the kitchen table, the tavern counter, or university hallways. These informal collective understandings permeate every decision groups make—no matter how text-based the group may be—and they form the background of every interview. These accounts, at once both personal and social, provide evidence for reconstructing communities, their past concerns and past conflicts.

Oral history allows the recuperation of ideas that were important for many communities but which might not be well documented in print or literary sources. Oral sources reveal modes of collective life and consciousness that contrast sharply with the individualizing biases of literature and allow for new interpretations that keep people, their beliefs, their dilemmas, and their choices as an important part of historical processes without romanticizing the role of individuals. It is hard for me to imagine teaching US history without incorporating the perspectives that oral history interviews provide.



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I am of the firm belief that every activity in the university should connect to teaching. Oral history has three immediate practical benefits for students. First, oral history can give students an understanding of the connections between everyday life and larger social processes of transfor-

“Even in our highly technological society of the twenty-first century, there remain gaps in the written record. Oral history provides an ideal process for filling those gaps and enhancing our understanding of the past. It creates firsthand accounts of important events in history through tape-recorded recollections of the people who observed and participated in them. The personal and anecdotal material gathered in the interviews illustrates how decisions are made, what motivates actions, how individuals influence the course of history—behind-the-scenes information that might otherwise be lost.”

—Germaine LaBerge, Interviewer and Editor, Regional Oral History Office. From the newsletter of The California Supreme Court Historical Society, Autumn/Winter 2003

mation and conservation. Second, it provides a practical hands-on methodology that authorizes students to create original historical sources. That process teaches them that scholarship is never a question of going to the library and summarizing what you find there. It always includes that, but too often students don't get past that beginning point until very late, if ever. Finally, oral history speaks to one of the biggest challenges to education by encouraging students to think creatively about how to integrate their own backgrounds, interests, and experiences into what they are learning about the world at large. In “Invisibility in Academia,” Adrienne Rich wrote:

When someone with the authority of a teacher describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing.

Oral documentation challenges students to design a research project that describes the world as they have understood it, but then to relate what they learn to the larger image of the globe that the university has been so good at developing. Separation between teaching and research undermines the basic mission of the university and diminishes both activities. Working closely with students will benefit oral history research because it will open up new research topics, it will lead to resources that more comprehensively address the history of our society, all while providing students with practical research experience that will be valuable to them after they graduate. The most important questions facing everyone in education today are grounded in the everyday practices of oral history: How do we teach students to read sources for their biases, in particular to be aware of what has been silenced? How do we teach students to think through the foundations of arguments they encounter and to assess how logic, evidence, and emotion have combined into a conviction? How does one develop common languages for areas of shared need and interest without losing sight of continuing differences in experience and standpoint? What is the relation of knowledge and conviction, and how does education shape our understanding of public life and our responsibilities for the state of the world? These are questions that oral history research forces into consideration.

ROHO's Web site has added a new section on “Education and ROHO.” I urge you to check out the site to see how we are using oral history to enrich the learning experience of students and to read papers that students have prepared after having considered what one can learn about the past by putting lived experience in the middle of the picture. In this newsletter, recent Berkeley graduates Sayuri Stabrowski and David Washburn share their thoughts on what they gained from participating in ROHO's programs. 

Richard Cándida Smith is Director of the Regional Oral History Office and Professor of History, University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of many essays on oral history method and the cultural, intellectual history of modern America. His books include Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California (1995) and Mallarmé's Children: Symbolism and the Renewal of Experience (2000), both published by the University of California Press. Please see the staff news section of this newsletter for a list of more recent publications.

EDITOR'S NOTE

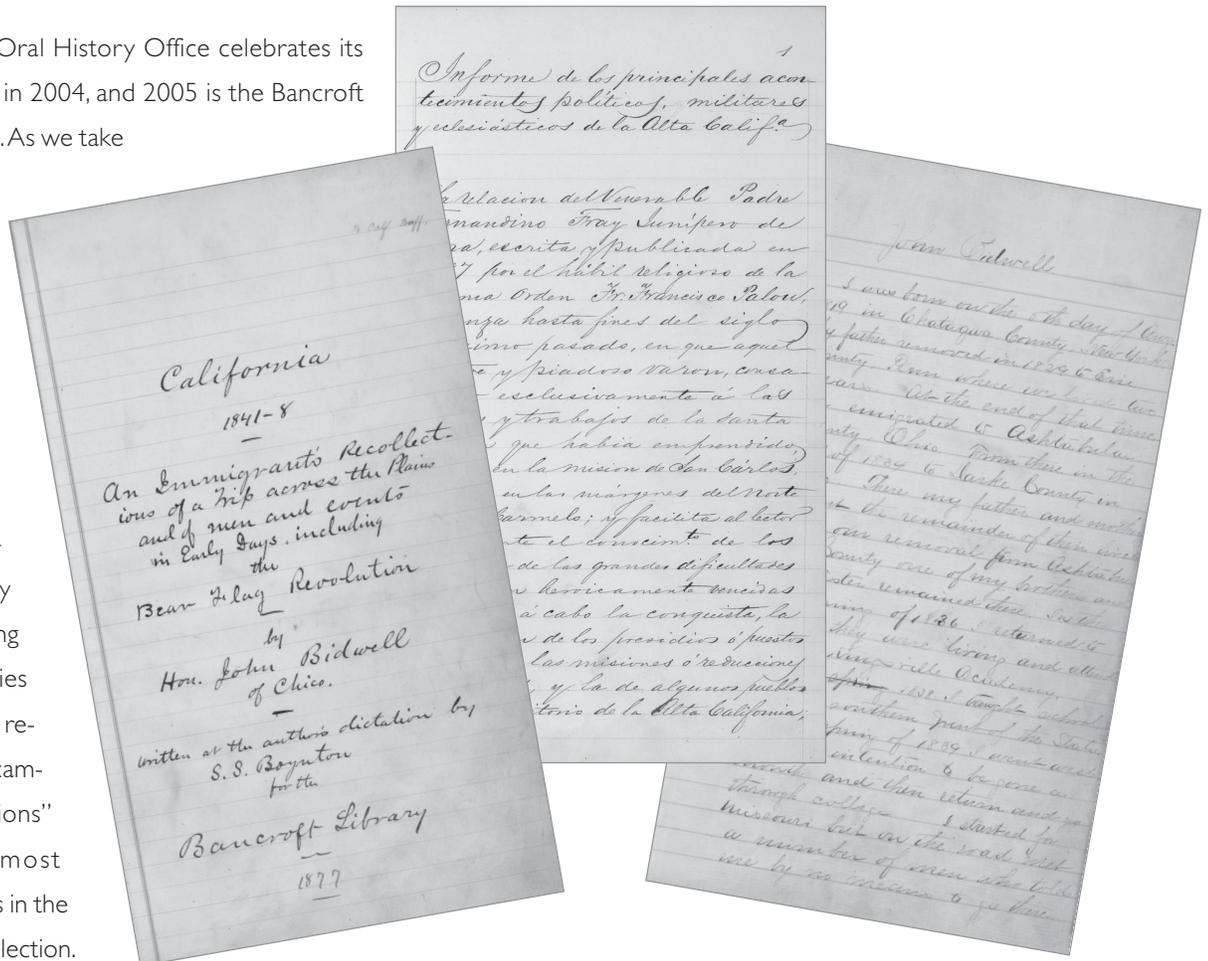
By Linda Norton

The Regional Oral History Office celebrates its fiftieth anniversary in 2004, and 2005 is the Bancroft Library's centennial. As we take

oral history into the twenty-first century with new technologies, we recall Hubert Howe Bancroft's nineteenth-century interviews with many of California's leading figures, oral histories that preceded tape recorders and video cameras. These "dictations" are among the most valuable documents in the Bancroft Library collection.

Bancroft recognized the importance of recording the voices of those who lived and made history in California. The Regional Oral History Office maintains and furthers this commitment to living history. ROHO's collection of more than 2,000 interviews is a crucial part of the Bancroft's rich store of research materials in many areas of California history and culture (the first interview in the collection, with Alice B. Toklas, actually preceded the founding of ROHO under the directorship of Willa Baum).

Today's technology allows us to record oral histories and digitize them in print, audio, and video forms. But the crucial encounter between interviewer and interviewee is similar to what it was when Hubert Howe Bancroft first set out to capture the memories of Californians in his day.



Selections from Hubert Howe Bancroft's "dictations."

Richard Cándida Smith, historian, professor, and director of the Regional Oral History Office, charts a new course for oral history on the campus at the University of California, Berkeley. In this issue of the newsletter, he outlines new initiatives for student involvement in the process of researching and interviewing historical subjects.

See future issues of the newsletter, and our Web site (bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO) for announcements of anniversary events, oral history workshops, new oral histories from ROHO, and student research opportunities.

For more information, or to be added to our mailing list, contact Linda Norton, Senior Editor, at lnorton@library.berkeley.edu or (510) 643-2106. *S*

SUZANNE B. RIESS—AN APPRECIATION

By Ann Lage

The work of Suzanne B. Riess at the Regional Oral History Office spans five decades, two centuries. For forty-plus years she has documented creatively and in depth the lives of an array of remarkable people. Her most recent oral histories, while displaying the command and the breadth of knowledge developed over the years, retain the freshness of her first ventures,



when as a young graduate student she was sent out to pry into the lives of some of Berkeley's towering figures with a new methodology called oral history. Suzanne approaches her subject and her methodology in her latest projects—video oral histories of the artist David Ireland and the baker and restaurateur Eric Sartenaer—with the same openness of vision as we see in her first, conducted in

1960, with photographer Dorothea Lange. And that first oral history, the most frequently cited of any ROHO volume, clearly demonstrates the insightful, probing, and artful questioning, as well as the careful preparation, that have always been her hallmark.

In the catalogue of Suzanne's work for the Regional Oral History Office, we find seventy-two volumes comprising more than 215 oral histories with figures in many fields, including arts and architecture, university history, anthropology, and the sciences. (Her interview with Charles Townes, the 1964 Nobel Prize Laureate in Physics, offers a sense of her range.) Readers of Suzanne's histories of the interview process will find evidence of Suzanne's own ambivalence, sometimes skepticism, about what we are doing when we do oral history. From the beginning she sensed her narrators' ambivalence about the process. In 1968, she writes about Dorothea Lange:

The transcript of the interview bothered her. For a long time she was unable to do anything with it. I have notes in my files on conversations with her that reflect her desperation. She said at one point that she had come nearly to throwing the manuscript into the fireplace... it gave a picture of herself that she did not like but that she thought not entirely false—just not true enough.

And, in 2003, in her interview history of photographer Wayne Miller, she revisits the same question raised in the Lange interview and others:

Wayne is a charming person, and a thoughtful, serious, and also sometimes a little jokey, teasing interviewee. I know he didn't tell me "everything." Later he and Joan and I had several lunches after the morning interview sessions during which I know that I was being interviewed a bit, and being "found out," and it gave me pause to realize how much I both fell in with and resisted that parallel experience. Was this what it was like to be constantly on the receiving end of a process and a person determined to get answers?

In his fond introduction Daniel Dixon speaks of a somewhat enigmatic Wayne Miller, and of course it is my hope that this oral history makes known some of the unknowns. But I did begin to wonder whether this testimony about a life that is elicited in response to an oral historian's questions is a final uncovering, or not. It isn't just immediately clear with a somewhat evasive subject. But the oral historian has the advantage of time, and there is a perhaps subtle grinding down to bottom truths. Thinking of Wayne's heartfelt commitment to individual dignity in telling his photographic stories, I hope the oral history is similarly humane.

I invite you to delve further into Suzanne's interview histories for more reflections on the oral history process, and more perspicacious descriptions of character and place, by a masterful oral history interviewer whose writing reveals her own quest to lead an examined life, and to assist others in examining theirs. ∞

Ann Lage is a Principal Editor and Interviewer in the Regional Oral History Office.

Support for Oral History and Scholarship at ROHO

The work of the Regional Oral History Office is funded through the generous support of individuals, private foundations, the University of California, and donors with a commitment to research at the intersection of memory and history. For more information about how you can support ROHO, please contact Shannon Page, Assistant Director, at (510) 642-7395 or spage@library.berkeley.edu.

From the Archives

Senior Editor and Interviewer Suzanne Riess interviewed Dorothea Lange for ROHO in 1960, as Lange neared the end of her long and productive life as one of twentieth-century America's most important documentary photographers. Lange's photographs from the Depression era, World War II, and beyond are iconic images of American culture, and many of them are in the Bancroft Library's pictorial collections.

ROHO's archives provide a portrait of the larger community in which Dorothea Lange lived and worked, through oral histories with her husband, economist Paul Taylor, and with many of her peers in the arts and at the University. Lange's pictorial records of the Bay Area during World War II are now supplemented with new oral histories in ROHO's Rosie the Riveter project, described elsewhere in this newsletter.

From the oral history *Dorothea Lange: The Making of a Documentary Photographer*:

Lange

You know what today is? Today is the first day of autumn. Have you felt it? Today it started. The summer ended this afternoon at two o'clock. All of a sudden. The air got still, a different smell, a kind of a funny, brooding quiet. Today it happened. I was out and I was just so aware of it. Can you feel it? And the cracks in my garden are wide. Today's the day...

I remember hearing my grandmother say one time when I was a child of six or seven—I'd been watching my grandmother sew—and I heard her say to my mother, in the German dialect that she spoke, "That girl has line in her head." You know what she meant? That sense I had very early of what was fine and what was mongrel, what was pure and corrupted in things, and in workmanship, and in cool, clean, cleanly thought about something. I had that. I was aware of that....

In Asia there are places where you have to look where you step because the sidewalks are unspeakably filthy and you never take it for granted where you walk. Well, on the Bowery, I knew how to step over drunken men. I had to do it, you know, and I don't mean that the streets were littered with drunken men, but it was a very common affair. I knew how to keep an expression of face that would draw no attention, so no one would look at me. I have used that my whole life in photographing. I can turn it on and off. If I don't want anybody to see me, I can make the kind of a face so eyes go off me. Do you know what I mean? There's a self-protective thing you can do. I learned that as a child in the Bowery. So none of these drunks' eyes would light on me. I was never obviously there. And you can see what equipment that was for anyone who later found herself doing the kind of work I do, or maybe it took me into it. I don't know. This



Dorothea Lange, 1936. Photo by Paul Schuster Taylor.

was a preparation, hard as it was, but it was a preparation....

I remember someone once saying to me as a child—we were looking out a window of a flat over the Hackensack Meadows and there were wash lines, permanent wash lines, something like our telephone lines. They're always there against the sky and sometimes there's quite a combination of sound because all the wash lines make a sort of funny line and on washday on whole blocks you could hear this rusty squeaking.

Well, at any rate, looking over the flats where there were yards between, wooden fences, wash lines, these red brick buildings that are still there, looking out over the west, over the Hackensack Meadows, late in the afternoon, I said to this person, "To me, that's beautiful." And this person said—I was a child, I was fourteen the—this person said,

"To you, everything is beautiful." Well, that startled me, because I hadn't realized it. It also helped me. I thought everyone saw everything that I saw but didn't talk about it, you see. But when this person said, "To you, everything's beautiful," that made me aware that maybe I had eyesight, you see. Curious, isn't it? I heard a woman say of me one time—she was a woman

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INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT AND ORAL HISTORY: An Undergraduate Perspective

By Sayuri Stabrowski

Sayuri Stabrowski was born and raised in Pasadena, California, and graduated from UC Berkeley with High Honors in History in May of 2003. She currently lives and works in the Berkeley area (as a substitute teacher and as a part-time transcriber for the Regional Oral History Office), and is preparing for an adventure to Ecuador on a Rotary Scholarship starting this fall.

As the summer before my senior year dwindled into the later days of July, I was forced to consider my options for the following year's final project: the History 101 research and writing class. The culmination of three years of crowded lectures and claustrophobic seminars, History 101 is the dreaded requirement that all history majors must endure, and its final paper, a 35- to 50-page opus, is the capstone to an undergraduate career here at Cal. That July, when the following semester's class topics became available, I had no idea what I wanted to research. I was not prepared to choose a topic that would keep my interest for an entire semester's worth of late nights and agonizing hours in the library or in front of the computer screen. I was stumped.

At the same time, at the other end of the state, my grandfather was struggling with his own monumental research and writing project. His project revolved around his desire to make his experiences as a Japanese American during World War II known. Having been misunderstood by the rest of the American and Japanese American populations, my grandfather rarely spoke of his wartime experiences. I was more than surprised to learn that he had decided to finally share his story, and even more shocked to find that his audience was an adversarial member of the Japanese American media. Shortly after I learned of my grandfather's latest adventure, I found that Dr. Richard Cándida Smith, a professor in American history, was conducting a History 101 seminar on World War II and its effects on society. Clearly I had stumbled upon something exciting and worthwhile—the opportunity to help my grandfather answer some of his questions about the past and its ties to the present.

Having little background in twentieth-century Japanese American history, I came to Dr. Cándida Smith with no more than a raw idea and a fire to unravel my grandfather's story. I began my project by educating myself on the basic timeline of American interior policies during World War II and by reading numerous pieces on the Japanese American internment. The more I read and the more I researched, the more I realized how much was yet to be dis-

covered. I took my ideas and excitement to Dr. Cándida Smith, eager to uncover even more about my family's history and to help my grandfather answer his own questions about his past. The Japanese American historical canon, I realized, was centered around one major turning point in American history: the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The events that occurred on December 7, 1941, had forced the entire Japanese American population to reflect on its ethnic identity and on its national affiliations. My grandfather was no exception to this population of confused souls inhabiting the United States' western coast. In an effort to explore uncharted territory, I decided—with the help of Dr. Cándida Smith—to base my paper on a contemporary rendering of the past: an oral history with my grandfather.

Dr. Cándida Smith and I decided to weave my paper around my grandfather's words. Under Dr. Cándida Smith's guidance, I planned and conducted multiple interviews with my grandfather. I learned to use the preliminary research as a basis out of which I formulated fundamental questions that the readings had left unanswered—gaps in the history that my grandfather could help me fill. ∞

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ORAL HISTORY AND UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION: A Self-Interview

By David Washburn

Editor's note: David Washburn is a postgraduate research associate at ROHO. Oral history was essential to his intellectual development as an undergraduate, and he made important contributions to ROHO's Rosie the Riveter project as an interviewer and researcher. His interviews with community members in Richmond, California, provided new material for his two senior theses at the University of California, Berkeley, and will be valuable for other scholars who are doing work in the area of popular and Latino culture in Richmond during the World War II era (go to bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO to see examples of David's research and the work of other students.) When I asked David to write something for the newsletter about his undergraduate experiences with ROHO and oral history, he provided the following self-interview:



David Washburn, 2004.

Interviewer

How did you first start to think about working with oral sources for your thesis?

Interviewee

Well, I was actually introduced to oral history before I took my thesis seminar. I took an oral history seminar with Professor Richard Cándida Smith in the spring of 2001. I knew very little about oral history on the first day of class, but I soon found that it really fit with my extroverted personality. The seminar gave me the key to doing research through interviews.

I talked with Professor Richard Cándida Smith about using oral history to research local community history in Richmond; he became my thesis advisor, and I ended up interviewing people in Richmond under the auspices of the Rosie the Riveter project at ROHO, a collaborative project with the City of Richmond and the National Park Service.

Professor Cándida Smith had actually introduced his students to this project in the oral history seminar I'd taken a semester earlier. This overview gave me a sense of the larger questions and ongoing nature of the project, and inspired me to consider researching the Mexican American community in Richmond during World War II, and the migration of other Mexican Americans from around the country.

Interviewer

What is the difference between working with interviews and sources that are already available?

Interviewee

For my thesis I also used newspapers that are available on microfilm at the library. I used a few dissertations written on Richmond, and also some books written on the World War II period. I enjoyed reading the material and of course I liked the process of digging through archives. There's a mystique to that.

But, using oral history approaches, you can take a more active role in going out and finding what you need, rather than having someone else find it and present it to you in book form.

There's a definite sense of investigation, especially when you're interviewing people in a community so close to the university, yet so different from Berkeley. You call people, you develop networks of potential interviewees. I would call churches to find people to interview, and someone at a church might tell me I should go talk to this person at this restaurant, or that person at the barbershop.

Interviewer

Can you talk about the history major and oral history as it appears in the curriculum?

Interviewee

I only took thesis seminars from Professor Cándida Smith, and he encourages students to use oral history. But Professor Kerwin Klein was also an advisor on my honors thesis, and he thought interviews were fantastic. However,

ANNOUNCING ROHO'S THIRD SUMMER INSTITUTE IN ORAL HISTORY



This summer ROHO will host its third Advanced Oral History Summer Institute. For one week (August 15-20) graduate students, faculty members, and independent and community scholars from across the nation and throughout the world will gather for a rigorous study of the methodology, theory and practice of oral history. The goal of the institute is to strengthen the ability of its forty participants to conduct research-based interviews and to incorporate oral histories into their writing and teaching.

This year's institute will be led by ROHO Director Richard Cándida Smith and two distinguished visiting scholars: Luisa Passerini, Professor of History at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy; and Ana Maria Mauad, Professor of History and Coordinator for the Laboratory of Oral History and Iconography at Universidade Federal Fluminense, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The ROHO staff will present lectures, workshops and multimedia demonstrations to showcase their own work and the problematic issues of oral history and social documentation.

Past participants praise the attention they receive to their projects and the collegial experience of sharing and developing their work. For more information, see ROHO's website, or contact mandres@library.berkeley.edu. *∞*

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he acknowledged that he doesn't use them that often because they are rather time consuming.

I think there are some professors who find oral history a cumbersome way for undergraduates to do research because in some ways it is a crap shoot. You can take all this time finding a person, setting up an interview, going out there and interviewing the person, and you don't really know what they are going to say. If they don't come up with the kind of evidence that you're looking for, then the time may have been wasted. Also, transcribing oral history takes time and attention to detail; you have to listen carefully to the tapes, to make sure you've got it right; sometimes I've listened to interviews two, three times. So there are obstacles to getting students to work in oral history, but it's worth dealing with these obstacles, because the research experience is great, and unique.

Interviewer

What was the most interesting interview you did?

Interviewee

I loved talking with Sal Chavez, who's a barber in El Sobrante. Oral historians approach plenty of people who say, "Who, me? Add something to history? I have nothing special to add." Sal Chavez acted that way when I first went into his barbershop. I asked, "Can we do an interview at your house?" He said, "No, but you can come by the barbershop." The barbershop seemed to be a safe space for him, and you have to consider things like this when you negotiate conditions for an interview.

So, I interviewed Sal at his barbershop over a period of four days, because I knew he had a wealth of information. He had grown up in Richmond and I really wanted to speak with a native Richmonder, someone with a lot of perspective on the city before, during, and after the industrial boom years of World War II.

I ended up going in there and hanging out in his barbershop, interviewing him between haircuts. It was fun to talk with him. He was really expressive and had a great memory. Guys would come in for a haircut while we were doing the interviews, and I kept the microphone on as he was talking with people. I taped a great conversation Sal had with someone who came into the shop while I was there. They were talking about their experiences with racism in Richmond and in Texas. Having another guy around, who was also Mexican American, the mood seemed to lighten. These guys sat and commiserated, but also laughed about how ridiculous it was to be in Texas and see signs on restaurant walls that say, "No dogs or Mexicans allowed." It was great to have been in his barbershop for a moment like that, and to record that exchange, which I ended up using in my thesis. *∞*

MARY'S GUYS: A RICHMOND STORY

By Esther Ehrlich

We are sitting in Mary Newson's living room. The light is dim, even though I've turned on all of the lamps in order to illuminate Mrs. Newson's expressive face. A big pot of beans is simmering in the kitchen, which is just a few steps away from us. Mrs. Newson turns her face toward the beans as if her gaze is the secret ingredient that will ensure that the beans will be delicious. While I set up my video camera and test my digital tape recorder, she explains that her grown son likes nothing better than her slow-cooked beans. I make a comment

about the joys of home cooking, and Mrs. Newson's grown daughter smiles. She has delayed going to work in order to meet me and reassure herself that her eighty-one-year-old mother is in good hands.

The daughter's relaxed departure, and the sound and smell of the bubbling beans, help lead Mrs. Newson and me into our interview. It is my first in a series of interviews for the Rosie the Riveter project, which is a collaborative endeavor between ROHO, the National Park Service, and the City of Richmond. The aim of the project is to document the wartime and postwar experience in Richmond, covering particular themes such as education, employment, family, housing, religion, and social life. We are especially interested to hear about Mrs. Newson's experiences as an African American woman migrating from the South, living in the East Bay and working at the Ford Motor Company.

Mrs. Newson, who says that everyone calls her Mary, looks a bit nervous at the beginning of the interview but, in response to a few questions, is soon talking eagerly about her upbringing on her father's farm in Teague, Texas. She is recalling the day a young man showed up on the farm with a fancy car and a handful of money, looking for a pretty girl to marry and bring back to California. She is explaining that after one date at a local country picnic, this young man proposed to her. Anxious to discover a life that didn't include grueling farm work, Mary accepted his offer and, at age



Mary Newson at the Richmond Ford plant site, 2003.

seventeen, left her family and traveled with this stranger-turned-husband to California.

Now we are talking about Mary's experiences at the Ford plant, where she worked for more than thirty years. Mary speaks with pride about the various jobs that she held. She shares stories about being challenged with difficult work and hanging on, even after the war when "they were really trying to get rid of us ladies." She tells me about friendships forged in company restrooms and on the assembly line. When Mary mentions a co-worker who encouraged her to study the Bible, I ask about her religious upbringing. Mary's eyes light up and she begins to talk about finding Jesus when she was a young girl. Her voice is eager. With her hands clasped in her lap, she talks about signs and moaning doves. She tips her head back, her eyes focused heavenward, and begins to sing:

I am coming, Lord,
Trusting in your word.
Keep me from the path of sin,
Hide me in your love.

Mary says that she ran to everyone she knew to tell them about her conversion. Though she is elderly, the expression on her face reminds me of a young child's.

"I saw my grandmother comin' from the well. She had two pails of water—one in each hand. I said, 'Grandmother,

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Esther Ehrlich and Mary Newson, 2003.

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the Lord has come into my heart. And I am happy. Grandmother set those two pails of water down! [laughing] And she starts shouting and hollering and you could hear her voice echoing through the woods.”

I'm leaning forward in my chair, deeply moved by this powerful woman's story. I want to listen to her for days. At the same time, I know that our resources for interviewing are limited. I'm aware that it's important to hear more from Mary about the Ford assembly plant, about her memories of Richmond. I remind myself that I am a researcher. Should I interrupt Mary and steer our conversation back toward our predetermined topics? Should I trust my intuition that says that this is too important a story to curtail? I decide to keep quiet just as Mary decides to leap forward through time and link her childhood religious experience to her experience at the Ford assembly plant with the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

After a bit more conversation, we decide to take a break, even though there is still a little time left on the videotape. We both know that we have covered a lot of distance. “I probably should give my beans a stir,” Mary says. Together, we walk slowly toward the stove. I stand quietly beside Mary while she lifts the top off of the steaming pot and stirs.

Our interview progresses for another hour or so, during which time Mary recounts details about life in the Bay Area during the war years. Near the close of our interview, Mary pulls out her scrapbook. She shows me pictures of herself and her co-workers at Ford in the 1940s, a photo taken with her boss during her retirement ceremony, and clippings from newspaper articles that chronicle other Ford activities. With a grin, she pulls out a packet of recent photos of several elderly African American men, arms around each other, smiling broadly. Mary tells me about each of the

men, all of whom worked with her for decades at the Ford plant. She explains that she organized a luncheon so that her co-worker/friends could visit at happy occasions and not just funerals. “All of them like me and I like them. And we just keep in touch with each other every so often,” Mary says.

While I pack up my equipment, I find myself wondering about the lives of these men. What stories might they tell? What perspectives might they have on the Bay Area during the war years? While Mary walks me to the door, I notice that I feel a bit shy asking her if I can have contact information for these men whom she has known for so long and holds so dear.

Mary reaches out and takes my hand. “I think they'll like to tell you their stories, too,” she says, smiling. “Just be sure to tell them that Mary sent you their way.” I leave Mary's house carrying three black bags filled with video and audio equipment, and a slip of paper with a list of names and phone numbers. Mary watches until I get into my car, then she closes her front door. While I drive off, I imagine her walking to her kitchen to stir her beans....

On Veterans Day, 2003, I accompanied Mary Newson to a series of events sponsored by the Ford Motor Company in affiliation with the National Park Service. She was honored, along with other women who entered the industrial work force during World War II. In addition to being wined and dined, Mary Newson was interviewed by CBS, appearing on the morning and evening news broadcasts. She was the enthusiastic focus of much media attention and appeared in articles in the *San Jose Mercury News*, the *Contra Costa Times*, and the *Richmond Post*. ∞

In addition to interviewing with the Rosie the Riveter project, Esther Ehrlich is a member of the Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement project team at ROHO. She is currently developing a series of interviews on artists with disabilities, for which she is seeking funding. A writer, Esther has most recently published in The Sun and is close to completing her first book, a memoir entitled Afloat: A Daughter's Story of Not Drowning. She teaches creative writing workshops in the Bay Area focused on the theme of “home.”

The Rosie the Riveter project is a collaboration of ROHO, the National Park Service, the California Coastal Conservancy, and the City of Richmond, California. See future newsletters, and our Web site, for information about the development of the new Homefront National Park in Richmond and the use of ROHO's interviews in new interpretive exhibitions and scholarship about the World War II experience in Richmond and across the United States.

INTERVIEWING THE INTERVIEWER: Dr. Sally Smith Hughes Talks About Her Work at ROHO

Sally Smith Hughes, PhD, is the historian of science at ROHO. She received her doctorate in the history of science and medicine from the University of London. She is the project manager for the oral history of biological science and biotechnology, and was the project director, historian, and interviewer for a large-scale oral history of early responses (by scientists, clinicians, and nurses) to the AIDS crisis in San Francisco. She has published some of her findings from the biotechnology interviews in *Isis* (the journal of the History of Science Society), and is the author of *The Virus: A History of the Concept*. She is currently co-authoring a book about the conditions that gave rise to the biotechnology industry in California.

Norton

I want to hear more about your work with pioneering AIDS doctors in San Francisco, especially at San Francisco General, where you have noted the strong commitment to community in crisis in the early and mid-1980s. Can you tell me about the challenges of interviewing people who are in the midst of a rapidly changing scene, rather than interviewing people who are looking back on their lives and achievements with some perspective, some distance?

Hughes

Well, I think preparation is probably the operative word. It's essential to establish credibility in an interview, because from credibility grows trust, and trust can help you to get a good, frank, comprehensive interview. I do as much research as time and money allow. AIDS doctors and nurses and scientists are addressing urgent matters, so I want to make sure that I ask interesting and useful questions, and not waste their time.

Norton

I wonder if you can talk about the value of a doctoral degree to a researcher and interviewer in your field.

Hughes

I certainly don't think that you have to have a doctorate to be a very good and competent interviewer. One does not lead to another. But it's important to have confidence in the research that you've done, because it helps you to guide the interview in subtle ways

There seems to be an approach that interviewees take, initially, if they've never participated in oral history. They may be used to talking to the media, and so they speak in sound bites, make points appropriate to media interviews. They're not used to being asked for the long view, the historical narrative. Initially, they think that I want the highlights, when, actually, I want to go deeper into the history. It takes some experience to know that the best way of handling that is to let them have



Sally Hughes interviewed Paul Berg, 1980 Nobel laureate, in 1997.

their say, which maybe goes on for the first ten minutes or so of the tape and then to say, "Well, now let's go back and pick up some of these strands."

Norton

Tell me about the tapestry effect of doing these interviews as a series. You prepare for the individual interviews within the context of the general overview of the series. Then you build up knowledge as you interview each person and start to see who the players are, the nuances, the networks of knowledge, power, relationships. Do you refer to other interviews explicitly or implicitly in your own shaping of the question?

Hughes

Oh, definitely implicitly. And sometimes explicitly, especially when you suspect that people may have diverging viewpoints. "I have heard it said that the way your team approached the AIDS vaccine was not as productive as it could be. What do you say to that?" (I'm inventing this example, to make a point about the importance of numerous interviews in one particular field.)

Norton

People must appreciate the opportunity to go on the record.

Hughes

Yes, I think they do. And, when people are reluctant to talk, I say, "Well, this is going to be different than what you're used

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Hughes, continued from page 11

to.” But I also say, “You’re a part of this important story, and if you don’t participate, then other people will be left to explain your contributions to this field.”

Norton

I would like to ask you a few things about the funding for the biotechnology series. Genentech provides the funding?

Hughes

Well, the biotech project actually began at UCSF in 1992, when the chairman of the Department of History of Health Sciences realized that there were some biotech stars on campus and they weren’t being interviewed. He had a little start-up money, and he knew that I had been working in the general field of biomedicine. He asked me if I would be interested in conducting some interviews, and I was. If you work in this field, you’re aware of the tremendous revolution that’s going on as we speak, first with the structure of DNA with Watson and Crick, and now this whole genomics thing. So I was terribly enthusiastic about doing it. Unfortunately the money ran out very quickly. I started with William Rutter because he was the powerhouse who nurtured molecular biology on the UCSF campus in a more complicated way than there’s time to tell now; he was one of the instrumental people in UCSF’s rise to real prominence in the basic sciences and clinical sciences. UCSF was a sleepy, adequate, but not stellar medical center as late as the late 1960s. Rutter’s is an institutional story. He was chairman of the department of biochemistry and built that up; he developed liaisons with the other basic science departments and the clinical departments. Was a master at it.

The second person was Herbert Boyer, whose first claim to fame (with Stanley Cohen of Stanford) was the development of the basic science technique of recombinant DNA. This is a great story in itself, and both of them have told it in interviews that I’ve done. Boyer recognized the commercial potential of this new technology, and with a venture capitalist named Bob Swanson formed Genentech in 1976.

The social and ethical issues around these developments are enormously interesting. There were questions about how substantially university professors and university administrators should be involved in the commercialization of the basic science that was going on in their institutions, basic science that in most cases is funded by the public purse. So, Boyer was kind of the lightning rod for some of the tremendous unrest that initially happened in the field when academic scientists began to move into or have direct ties with industry. I should say “biomedical scientists” because scientists in the physical sciences had done this for many, many decades.

Norton

So, here you are documenting a cataclysm very carefully. It all sounds oxymoronic, but go ahead.

Hughes

I ran out of money before I even completed the interviews with Dr. Boyer. Then I got a series of smallish grants, including one from the Genentech Foundation, and I patched together enough funds to complete those two interviews. By then I was totally engaged in this project, but there was no money.

At that point I was splitting my time between UCSF and the Bancroft, and then I came back full time to the Bancroft Library, and Charles Faulhaber came in as the new director. He visited the different library departments to introduce himself, and I remember very clearly going up to him after his meeting with ROHO staff and saying, “You know, I’ve been doing this absolutely fantastic project, and the Bancroft Library sits on the edge of the greatest concentration of biotech industry in the world, and we can’t let this project die for lack of funding.” So out of that conversation grew the Program in the History of the Biological Sciences and Biotechnology, which is a combined oral history and archival program. I work very closely with the curator of the History of Science and Technology Program, who at the moment is David Farrell, to coordinate the archival collecting policies in biotechnology and the oral histories. It works very nicely because the relationships one establishes through the oral histories very often open the door to donations of papers.

That project at the Bancroft was jump-started by Professor Daniel Koshland. He was very enthusiastic about the oral history component of the biotech project. He subsidized four long oral histories, including two with Nobel Prize winners, both of whom happen to be at Stanford. And then, in about 1999, it seemed to me that Genentech was the obvious place to go. It’s in the Bay Area. It’s one of the two most successful biotech companies in the world. And more to the point in regard to my historical mission, it’s the first company and more or less a model for the companies that were to come. So, at one point, Charles Faulhaber and David Farrell and Merrilee Proffitt and I went to Genentech and made a presentation. Tom Woodhouse is a lawyer who had connections with the biotech industry, and he brought Tom Kiley into the project (he is the now-retired general counsel for Genentech; he made his name in biotech intellectual property). Merrilee made a terrific presentation of the oral histories we’d put online, and I think that convinced Genentech of the tremendous merits of a big oral histories series in biotechnology.

Genentech gave what eventually became half a million dollars to a program that initially was going to be focused on Genentech because their twenty-fifth anniversary was coming up. And then we planned to spread out to other biotech companies in the Bay Area, which is what I’m doing now. I’m still interviewing people at Genentech and I’m bringing in people from Cetus, which was the first biotechnology company, now absorbed by Chiron.

Norton

Thank you, Sally. Exciting work. 

STAFF NEWS

Updates about some new and veteran staff members, postdocs, and affiliates at ROHO.

Lea Barker is an editor at ROHO. Prior to moving to the United States in late 1999, she worked as a transcriber and copy editor for *Hansard*, the verbatim record of the debates in New Zealand's House of Representatives; supplied transcripts of interviews that formed the basis for several award-winning short film, television, and theater projects; and was a desktop publishing operator in the Publications Unit of the National Library of New Zealand. Before joining ROHO, Lea was an administrative assistant in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences at UC Berkeley.

Kim Bird is a PhD student in the History of Consciousness Program at UC Santa Cruz. She is a Bancroft Fellow at ROHO and is developing a project in poetry and oral history. Her interview with poet Carl Rakosi will be available soon from ROHO. Her dissertation is on left-wing poets in California in the 1930s and 1940s.

Beth Castle is a President's Postdoctoral Fellow at UC Berkeley. She earned her doctorate in history at King's College, Cambridge, and this year at ROHO she will be finishing a book about women in the Red Power Movement, to be published by Oxford University Press. Dr. Castle will begin her ROHO appointment as an academic specialist in California cultures at the conclusion of her fellowship year.

Judith Dunning is an oral historian with a specialty in community history. Among Dunning's projects are interviews with Italian immigrant women in Boston's North End, shipyard workers in the Charlestown Naval Yard in Boston; textile mill workers in Lowell, Massachusetts; Kaiser shipyard workers in Richmond, California; and cannery workers, fishermen, and whalers in the San Francisco Bay area. Dunning was writer and photographer for the exhibits "Lowell: Community of Workers," and "Fishermen by Trade: Fifty Years on San Francisco Bay." The materials she has collected, including a series of adult literacy books drawn from her oral histories, are available in many public libraries throughout the United States. Currently, Dunning is interviewing in the area of California agriculture.

Victor Geraci is the Food and Wine Historian at ROHO. He completed his doctorate in American history from UC Santa Barbara in 1997 and served as an Associate Professor of History at Central Connecticut State University (1998-2003). Geraci's academic specialty in the California wine industry utilizes oral and public history methodologies honed through projects involving Sicilian immigration, al-

coholic centers, local history, environmental organizations, vintner associations, and over twenty years of secondary teaching and curriculum development in California. His viticulture and viniculture publications include the co-authored *Aged In Oak*, journal articles in the *Southern California Quarterly*, *Journal of Agricultural History*, and *Journal of San Diego History*, and the forthcoming book *Salud! The Rise of Santa Barbara's Wine Industry*, from the University of Nevada Press.

Simon Grivet is a PhD student at the Centre des Etudes Nord-Américaines at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. He is spending the 2003-2004 year at ROHO on a Fulbright Fellowship. His dissertation is on the history of capital punishment in California, and he will be doing extensive interviews as part of his research.

Martin Meeker is in residence for the 2003-2004 year at ROHO on a Sexuality Research Postdoctoral Fellowship from the Social Science Research Council. While at ROHO, Meeker is completing a book manuscript, tentatively titled *Contacts Desired: A History of Connecting to the Gay and Lesbian World, 1940s-1970s*, to be published by the University of Chicago Press. He received a PhD in history from the University of Southern California in 2000.

Linda Norton came to ROHO in 2002 from the University of California Press, where she worked for fifteen years, first as the manager of the press's Manhattan office and then as an acquisitions editor in Berkeley. She serves on the boards of Heyday Institute and the California Studies Association. In 2002 she was a Lannan Foundation writer-in-residence in Marfa, Texas. New work is forthcoming in 26, a literary magazine, and in the *Oral History Review*. Her collages have been exhibited at the Kitchen in New York and her poem, "Landscaping for Privacy," set to music by Eve Beglarian, is available on a CRI recording.

Alexis Peri is ROHO's administrative assistant. She graduated from UC Berkeley last year, where she double-majored in history and psychology. As a student, Alexis worked as a research assistant in the history department and as a production clerk at ROHO. She is interested in Russian intellectual and cultural history and her goal is to study more in this area at UC Berkeley, where she was recently accepted into the graduate program in history.

Jess Rigelhaupt is a Research Associate at ROHO. He is part of the interviewing team for the Rosie the Riveter project and is coordinating the New Directions in Oral History Speaker Series, which is sponsored by the Townsend Center for the Humanities. In addition, he is conducting oral history interviews focused on post-World War II

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social movements in the San Francisco Bay Area for his dissertation, *The California Labor School: Building Communities of Activism and the Making of the People's Front in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1934-1960*. He is a PhD candidate in the Program in American Culture at the University of Michigan.

In 2003, **Richard Cándida Smith**, Director of ROHO and Professor of History at UC Berkeley, published essays in several new books and journals, including *Jay DeFeo and 'The Rose'* (California); *Postborder City: Cultural Spaces of Baja California* (Routledge); *Transit Circle: Revista Brasileira de Estudos Americanos* 2, Nov Srie, *Estudos Historicos* no. 30; and *Historia Oral* 6. He was interviewed for *Historia*, a journal published in Portugal, and his essay "Analytical Strategies for Oral History Interviews" (2001) has been translated into Chinese for publication in *Historical Quarterly*, a publication of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. He is currently working on a critical biography of Jay DeFeo.

Editor **Gerald Stone** came to ROHO from the Partners for Advanced Transit and Highways program at UC Berkeley's Institute of Transportation Studies, where he edited the program's newsletter and annual report. He also wrote copy for PATH and was the institute's still photographer: over the course of ten years he created an image catalog of over ten thousand transportation-related images. Gerald was originally trained as a scholarly editor at Stanford University Press, and has freelanced for many commercial and academic organizations, including the University of California Press.

Eleanor (Lee) Swent has received a grant from the Book Club of California for her work in oral history with Vietnamese refugees in California. She will conduct new interviews to supplement the twenty-three interviews she started in 1997, and her interviews may augment an exhibit that the Oakland Museum is planning for 2004. Lee, an interviewer and researcher at ROHO, is the project manager for the extensive series of Knoxville-McLaughlin oral histories in mining. Please see the ROHO website for completed interviews and other updates about oral histories in mining, or contact eswent@library.berkeley.edu.

Eric Vettel recently completed his PhD in US history at the University of Virginia. He joins ROHO as a postdoctoral fellow working with science historian Dr. Sally Smith Hughes on the development of the ROHO biotechnology series. His dissertation examined public policy and biotechnology. He is also working with Bancroft curator David Farrell to organize the History of Science and Technology Program papers at the Bancroft Library.

Don Warrin is the new Associate Director at ROHO. He is Professor Emeritus of Portuguese and Spanish at Cal State Hayward. For some twenty years he has been researching and publishing on the history of the Portuguese in the western US. His research in this area culminated in *Land, As Far As the Eye Can See: Portuguese in the Old West* (Arthur H. Clark, publisher, 2001). During spring semester, 2003, he was the first occupant of a new endowed chair in Portuguese Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth. His current project is a history of Portuguese and Cape Verdeans in the American whaling industry. He recently returned from Brazil, where he spoke at the Federal University in Rio and gave a paper at the University of Paraná in Curitiba.

Please see other articles in this issue for more biographical information about ROHO staff. 

ORAL HISTORIES OF THE DISABILITY RIGHTS AND INDEPENDENT LIVING MOVEMENT

Stay tuned! ROHO's new website on the Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement (DRILM) project is slated to launch in August 2004. Discover our rich collection of primary sources exploring the social and political history of the disability movement from the 1960s to the present.

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. once wrote, "Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The urge for freedom will eventually come." For people with disabilities, the urge for freedom has arrived. The story of how this happened—a vital part of American history—is preserved in the oral histories, with audio and video clips, and in the archival papers of this collection.

We are very excited about making this significant resource available to the widest audience possible through our soon-to-be website!

For more information, please contact Ann Lage or Esther Ehrlich at (510) 643-4788.

Dorothea Lange, continued from page 5

whom I admired and she was brought into our home as a guest; there had been great preparations for her coming because she was a very superior person, and I was introduced to her and then I left the room—and then I heard her say, “That child has a spiritual face.” I’m now sixty-five years old and I’ve never forgotten that.

Riess

These are the things that enable you to bear childhood.

Lange

They make you able to bear it, but they also give you direction. It comes from the right person at the right time. It’s like putting a seed in the ground, if the soil is just right and it is the right time of the year, and the seed is healthy; I mean, there must have been something else or it wouldn’t have made that impression on me. I must have known that was true. In a way, I must have known that. And her saying that to me led me a little bit I think in my own career to over-encourage people because I want so much to do that for someone else.

I remember also one of the things that meant a very great deal to me was that a man gave to me a bunch of lilacs on my birthday and I sat on the Twenty-third Street crosstown car, with those lilacs in my lap, jammed in with people, on my birthday, sitting there, feeling so wonderful. I can see myself. Do you see yourself plainly at all when you remember your own childhood? I always see. I can remember everything. I can hear the sounds of the horse-drawn crosstown. There were no trolleys and no buses. And it was under the Elevated. I remember the darkness and the light under the Elevated and the crosstown car. I sat there with these lilacs in one of the instants of realization of the moment. And the flowers—all my life I don’t think I did get over it. I don’t think I did. I am a passionate lover of flowers. And that’s the moment that did it. Curious. And I had a straw hat on.

I was driving home with one of my little granddaughters, my Leslie, from San Francisco the other day and she likes, as all children do, to give the man the money at the tollgate. She gave this colored man the money and he said, “Thank you, Princess.” And she said, “Why did he call me Princess?” I said, “I don’t really know. Maybe he thought you were a princess.” She said, “What made him think I was a princess?” I said, “I don’t know.” And she was very quiet. Then all of a sudden she shrieked, “I know what it was. It was this!” And she had a little edge of white lace on the edge of her dress, eyelet, common eyelet, . . .

NEW DIRECTIONS IN ORAL HISTORY



A Series of Lectures and Talks Sponsored by ROHO and the Townsend Center for Humanities. For more information about the spring or fall 2004 schedule, or to be added to the mailing list, contact series coordinator Jess Rigelhaupt, jrigelha@library.berkeley.edu.

TOPICS AND SPEAKERS THIS SPRING INCLUDE:

Ask & Tell: Oral Histories with Gay Veterans from World War II to the Gulf War

Steve Estes, History Department, Sonoma State University

The California Labor School and the Building of Activist Culture in the Post World War II San Francisco Bay Area

Jess Rigelhaupt, ROHO

Impairment? Empowerment? Challenging Societal Definitions of Disability

Esther Ehrlich, ROHO

Cultural Commodities and Narratives of Reciprocity: Ching-yi Dougherty and Cold War Identity Constructions, which is a chapter in progress from the larger dissertation project, “Arrival of the Fittest: Aesthetics of Identity and Narrative Negotiations for Cold War Chinese Immigrants”

Robin Li, Program in American Culture, University of Michigan

Reluctant Witnesses: Oral History and the Protagonists of Capital Punishment in California

Simon Grivet, ROHO

Feelings of Desire: Queer Latina and Latino Memories from the Bay Area

Horacio N. Roque Ramirez, Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies, UC Santa Barbara

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