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University of California
Berkeley, California

Doris Muscatine
FOOD AND WINE WRITER

Interviews conducted by
Victor W. Geraci, Ph.D.,
Food and Wine Historian
in 2004

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Doris Muscatine

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Interview # 01: September 29, 2004

Audio File 1

01-00:00:05

Geraci: I am Vic Geraci, food and wine historian from the University of California, Berkeley, Regional Oral History Office. Today's date is Wednesday, September 29, 2004, and seated with me is food writer, Doris Muscatine. This interview is being conducted in Doris's home in Berkeley, California.

Doris, first of all, thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview with us. I'd like to start off with a little bit more of a general interview, and then we'll work into more depth as we go along.

As a food writer, it's inherent that many of the influences on your narrative are the result of the experiences of your growing up. So let's start with the background of your life growing up, with an eye on the factors that could have influenced or helped you develop as a chronicler of American and Bay Area food ways. There's a lot in that statement, but basically let's start with Doris the young girl, your parents, grandparents, and try and trace your life and your interaction with food and this whole thing, throughout it.

Muscatine: I was born in New York, upper Riverside Drive, in a hospital called the Mount Morris Maternity Hospital, which is no longer there. I think it was about where Harlem is now. [laughs] My parents moved to Trenton, New Jersey, when I was still a baby. At six months old, I was taken to Chicago because of my mother's business, and it was just for a few months.

Geraci: What did your Mom do?

Muscatine: She was in the retail women's clothing business, and at that point she was opening milliners' stores for an owner who was in New York. He, my father, went to college for a year and studied mechanical engineering, but he gave that up and they went into business, retail, women's retail clothing in Trenton. He was the sort of business manager and accountant.

Geraci: So, you're at six months then, you said you'd moved to Chicago.

Muscatine: At six months for a few months, and then we went to Trenton, and they opened this business. I was probably a year old. I don't know. In a carriage, still.

Geraci: So you don't quite remember the foodway at that point!

Muscatine: No. [laughs]

Geraci: What about their heritage, their upbringing?

Muscatine: My mother was born of a peasant family who lived in Russia. They lived in a little village called, I think, Askovitz. Then they moved to Warshilovka, where the boarding house was. People would come to the apple market on weekends--they grew apples--and she provided food for them. They demanded schnapps with their food, so she began supplying that--illegally--and someone snitched on her and she was sentenced to jail. She was pregnant at the time, so my grandfather was allowed to serve her time for her, which is unusual.

Geraci: That's interesting.

Muscatine: Yes. My father was born in Russia, but it was Warsaw, Poland--it became Warsaw, Poland, but it was then part of Russia. I think his family was slightly better off than my mother's family. They came as youngsters to America.

Geraci: Did they come with their parents?

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: Okay. Do you happen to know about when they came over?

Muscatine: No, but they're on the Ellis Island history wall, recorded, because they both came through Ellis Island.

Geraci: What language did they speak at home?

Muscatine: They spoke, as far as I know, English. But when they didn't want me to understand [laughs] they spoke Yiddish. I don't know whether Russian was part of the language in the households or not.

Geraci: Considering that they were in a borderland area, language could have been very different. So by "speaking Yiddish" I take it then that they were Jewish.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: Were they practicing Jews?

Muscatine: No. Not at all. [laughs]

Geraci: That wasn't that uncommon, either.

Muscatine: Yes. My grandfather on my mother's side was somewhat religious and when he came to our house, we had to hide the Christmas decorations and so on.

Geraci: The only reason I'm asking, then obviously there was not a need to have a kosher table or anything along those lines?

Muscatine: No. Nothing like that.

Geraci: They come over. Your parents are obviously with them--how did they meet?

Muscatine: I don't know how they met. I assume they met in New York. They went on a honeymoon--judging from the pictures--at Lake Placid. But I don't really know much about their early lives.

Geraci: Then they obviously move into the women's clothing.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: Let's pick up from there. What was it like for the young Doris, when she got past a year old and you could probably start remembering some of these things--what transpires?

Muscatine: I don't remember much except going to--when I was in school and the maid was off on Thursdays, I went to the store and I sat upstairs in the alteration department, and they gave me scraps and twines and everything so I could construct pictures. I used the twine for braids for hair, and the materials for costumes for the figures that I made, and so on.

Geraci: Do you have any siblings?

Muscatine: No.

Geraci: An only child, then. So on Thursdays you could always plan on being at the store--a kind of store babysitting service, I guess we could say?

Muscatine: Yes. [laughter]

Geraci: As you were growing up--and obviously this is part of your background--what were some of your foodways like at home? Were your parents into food? Your mother into cooking? Your father?

01-00:09:18

Muscatine: My mother didn't cook much, and wasn't much interested in food. She did the same thing over and over. She knew how to make sweet and sour stuffed cabbage. Or sometimes sweet and sour tongue. And she put raisins in it--daringly! She knew how to make roast chicken, and broil a lamb chop, and make baked potatoes. But she wasn't really into cooking. And we always had a housekeeper who was also cook, so my mother outlined what things she should cook. We always had the same thing on every night of the week. Monday it was--I don't know what--salmon croquettes, and I remember that chicken came on Friday and was served with spaghetti, which was cooked--not canned--but cooked. And the sauce was made of canned spaghetti sauce with things added to it. I remember it as very good. [laughs]

Geraci: We always have those memories of home. Those are our warm comfort foods.

Muscatine: Yes. And for breakfast I was allowed to have coffee as long as I can remember. It was half milk and half coffee, and I dunked my kaiser roll in it.

Geraci: So, really as far as cuisine, it really wasn't based on fresh, seasonal, all these types of things.

Muscatine: No, not at all. Although, we got milk delivered fresh, bread delivered fresh--even though it wasn't very good bread--and fish was delivered, but we never ate fish.

Geraci: It was delivered, but you never ate it?

Muscatine: We didn't buy any.

Geraci: Oh, you didn't buy any. That was always delivered to the door, like a fishmonger would come to the door?

Muscatine: Yes. And there were many things like that. When we first came to California in 1948, we had a chicken man who squawked like a chicken, flapped his arms like a chicken, and delivered chickens.

Geraci: Sounds like he'd been around the chickens too long.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: As far as then, did you have any exposure to ethnic foods? On the East Coast. There's a myriad of ethnic foods.

Muscatine: Pizza, which were called “tomato pies,” and there was one restaurant which was Italian, called Lorenzo’s. We went there and got steaks--none of the Italian foods. But it was known for that.

Geraci: An Italian chop-house.

Muscatine: Yes. There was a Chinese restaurant in town, and my father and I used to go there. We would also go to the Italian restaurant and have Italian food when my mother wasn’t with us.

Geraci: So your father was a little bit more experimental.

Muscatine: Oh, yes. He was very much interested in food. For instance, when we went to the Shore, which we often did on Sundays--it wasn’t a very far drive. Often we spent a couple of weeks there. My father and I used to eat steamed clams, and my mother would turn green, absolutely. She didn’t understand why we liked this or lobster or prawns or anything.

Geraci: One of the things I do need to put in a context for the time period which we’re talking about is, what years are we talking about? In essence, I’m asking when were you born and what years pertain to this?

Muscatine: I was born in 1926, in January, early 1926. This would be when I was—in the thirties, all through the thirties. I went to school in, I think--I graduated from college in 1946.

Geraci: I take it this time period that we’re talking about, when you’re visiting restaurants with your father and all this, and when you say “the city,” you’re talking New York?

Muscatine: Trenton.

Geraci: Trenton. Okay. We’re talking Trenton. The Depression is going on. How did that--did it have an effect on your family or foodways?

Muscatine: I only remembered--it didn’t have an effect on us as far as the food. But I remember my cousin, who was fired from his job, coming around. At first he wore an overcoat and hat and tie and was very proper. He would come around to our house and chat with my parents. But as years went by--and it was two or three years before he lucked out and found a job--he got more and more disheveled and unshaven.

Geraci: A little ragged around the edges.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: Did your family do much entertaining?

Muscatine: No. They played cards and occasionally they had card games in their house. But they very seldom had guests for dinner.

Geraci: How about holidays? Did you have a larger family within the area?

Muscatine: We didn't pay any special attention to holidays. I don't have any vivid memories of holidays.

Geraci: A lot of times that has a lot to do with any particular foodways that you may have picked up along the lines of holiday celebrations. Did your family travel much? Did you have any great experiences travelling?

Muscatine: No. I went with my father to Florida when I was in high school. They took cruises--he did, and my mother tended to go to the Catskill Mountains, but there was little influence on my food.

Geraci: You weren't travelling outside the United States or any other regions or anything like that?

Muscatine: No. No. Not until after I was married.

Geraci: Did you do any cooking as a child?

Muscatine: I cooked one dish on the maid's day off, which was whatever was left-over, particularly lamb chops and baked potatoes and vegetables such as peas and spinach. Whatever I found in the fridge. I would sauté all this in chunks in butter, and then douse it with ketchup, mix the ketchup in, and I called it mushkaboola. If there wasn't meat, I broke two eggs and scrambled them into the whatever.

Geraci: That's quite a concoction! [laughter] I'm afraid to ask how it tasted.

Muscatine: And I was very proud. Oh, my memory is that it was delicious.

Geraci: Do you still cook that? No? [laughter] Just maybe as a remembrance.

Muscatine: I haven't for years. Not since I was seven.

Geraci: So this is around when you were seven? That's okay. For a seven-year-old that would be a good food experiment then. Did your family, or did you have friends, family, anybody who was involved in the food industry--

Muscatine: No.

Geraci: --or foodways at all?

Muscatine: I remember that we used to go, often, to restaurants because we were--business people did. The two major restaurants were owned by Greek people, and they were very ordinary, as far as I remember. The mayor would come by, and he was a very portly man, and he knew my parents, so he would always come by if we were in a restaurant and pick up a spoon and sample all of our food. [laughter]

Geraci: So he was eating off everybody's plates.

Muscatine: Yes. Yes. After he had his own dinner.

Geraci: That accounts for the portliness, then. Did you have anyone in your youth that really played an important part in--

Muscatine: No. I had no experience at all with food as a child.

Geraci: That's amazing.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: That's important to know for what we're really {taking a look at?}.

Muscatine: When we came to California, it broke on me as a revelation that there were ethnic foods, and well-cooked foods, and fresh foods. In Trenton, we used to go out along the river road--the Delaware River Road. There were, in the summer, fresh food stands, which had produce--melons and corn on the cob and fresh vegetables. Tomatoes and so on. And we always bought stuff there. But most of the time, we had canned goods.

Geraci: Which was very typical of the time.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: How about school? When I'm talking "school," I mean elementary through high school.

Muscatine: I often took my lunch. I remember that the first time I bought lunch in the cafeteria--and I must have been six or seven years old--I bought all candies. The woman said to me, who took the money, "Are you sure you shouldn't have something healthier than candy?" And I said, "Oh, no." When I got home, my parents asked me what I had had for lunch, and I told them. So they said, "Tomorrow, it changes. You must buy such-and-such." So I had soup and milk and a banana for my second day.

Geraci: For your second day. That was much better than just all candy!

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: Did you take any courses, like in high school? Home economics?

Muscatine: There was an obligatory course that we had to take in cooking. We made--the high point was creamed, chipped beef on toast. We made--I don't know what they were called, but some kind of nest, and it was toast and egg whites, beaten--which formed the nest--and the egg yolk was dropped in the middle and then it was baked until it was inedible.

Geraci: Boy, that was an experience!

Muscatine: "Birds' nests on toast."

Geraci: Bird's nest on toast. I take it then that school didn't give you a--

Muscatine: No! [laughter]

Geraci: So how about college, then? Where did you go to college?

Muscatine: Bennington. I was there for three years, and they decided that was enough—I could graduate. I always felt cheated.

Geraci: That last year.

Muscatine: Yes. But there were a couple of places around. The food in the dining room wasn't anything special, but there were a couple of restaurants around, where we would go to eat, and they weren't exceptional.

Geraci: So college didn't provide any better experience?

Muscatine: No.

Geraci: Where is Bennington, exactly?

Muscatine: In Vermont. Southern Vermont.

Geraci: So there was nothing around there that was exceptional?

Muscatine: No.

Geraci: Any of your friends in college involved in food?

Muscatine: My closest friend, Hudas Liff, invited me and Charles to Thanksgiving dinner. We went, and her father—thinking he had these guests—called up his liquor store and said, "Send me the best case of wine you have." So we had an entire Thanksgiving dinner with Chateau Yquem.
[laughter]

Geraci: Not a bad choice!

Muscatine: It was good. I only remember the wine.

Geraci: Did you have any experiences in growing up, then, with wine? Was that really a major experience for you, for wine?

Muscatine: Yes. Yes. We had no wine at home except occasionally Manischewitz, which was sweet. We drank cocktails and highballs with such things as Cokes. Very sweet. To disguise the taste.

Geraci: There again everything is leading you to a food habit that's very nondescript in growing up. One of the things you just mentioned, when you had gone to this friend's house for Thanksgiving, you'd already met Charles then, I take it, at that point.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: Let's talk a little bit about that. When did you meet Charles?

Muscatine: His sister, Alice, was one of my best friends even back in high school. So I knew him, but he's five years older than I am. I knew him but he was always, you know, elite [laughs] in my eyes. When he went to war, he was in the European theater and his mother suggested that I write to him, so I started writing to him. He answered and we became closer and closer friends. By the time he came back after two-and-a-half years, we were close friends. He took me out and finally we decided to get married. We were married in July of 1945, and he had applied for a language program to get back from overseas. He applied for Russian, which he thought would be the nearest thing to literature that he could obtain in the navy. He was told to take the first available air transportation home, take a thirty-day furlough, and report for Japanese school.

Geraci: It was little different from Russian!

Muscatine: So he waited until the twenty-ninth day and we all went to Washington—Washington, D.C.—and he said, “You’ve made a horrible mistake. I applied for Russian.” And they said, “That’s closed. Back to the fleet or Japanese.” So he chose Japanese.

Geraci: How life moves us in different directions at different times. That’s very interesting that you literally, then, through these letters—

Muscatine: Part of the program in which he was involved, involved going overseas at the completion of the language course. So I took a leave of absence from the college. I was going to go back and finish when he was

serving his time overseas, but I was worth ten points—you earned a quarter of a point each month for serving in the navy—and I, as a wife, was worth ten points. So he got out.

Geraci: So you were a premium prize.

Muscatine: Suddenly he was out, and I had college left, so we arranged our classes. He was mostly doing his dissertation, so we arranged our classes and got an apartment in New Haven, and I went back to school and he commuted.

Geraci: So I take it he went to Yale, then.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: How about in New Haven? Did you have any exposure to different foods, at least. There is Worcester Square, for Italian food.

Muscatine: We didn't have much experience because we didn't have any money. I had two experiences there. One was when my husband invited his dissertation advisor for dinner. I went to the co-op, which was nearby, and asked for a chicken. I picked out a very grand chicken and it was a boiling chicken, which I didn't know. I got it home and tried to broil it. When Helga Kökeritz cut into it, it went flying off his plate, and he said, "Not to worry. My mother often made this mistake, also." He was very, very nice. But I blew out the fuses, because our broiler was an electric thing and so the dessert, which was a banana cream pie and the refrigerator started defrosting on it. It was a disaster.

Geraci: So that would be an example of a true disaster.

Muscatine: Yes! Absolutely. From beginning to end.

Geraci: What did you get your degree in?

Muscatine: Psychology.

Geraci: Did you go back to doing further work? While your husband was at Yale, what were you doing?

Muscatine: I was for a year at Bennington, and we commuted. I was studying and in the winter work period, I did research for my thesis in hospitals in New Haven.

Geraci: Anything else about New Haven you remember?

Muscatine: One other thing. One time, after Chuck was hired at Berkeley—he was still finishing up his thesis at Yale, and he had been hired by a man who wasn't the chair of the department. The chairman was coming East, so he wrote to us or called us and said he would be there and could he take us to dinner. At one time he had been married to Judith Anderson, so he had just gone to see her in Medea. When we went to his hotel in New Haven, he came down in the elevator and the graduate students were circling him like moths to a flame—around a flame—and he said, "Okay, let's go to the very best restaurant in town." We didn't have any idea what that would be, so we said, "Well, we know of an Italian place that is pretty good." We had been there once. He said, "Fine." So we went. There was a blind piano player playing cocktail music or such, and he said to the maitre d'hotel, "As far away from the music as possible." And then, he started regaling us about Judith Anderson's play. He used his hands to describe her denunciation of her body. He had every lump and bump—obviously familiar with her body—[laughter] and people were fascinated. They all turned and looked at us. I don't remember what we ate; I only remember that we caused a scene.

Geraci: Well, that's good. Do you remember the name of the restaurant?

Muscatine: No. You would think I would, but maybe I've blocked it. [laughs]

Geraci: It was his physical description of her that just kind of blocked it all out after that? Okay. I guess what we're looking at then is your husband is finishing up at Yale, you've finished up at Bennington. He's hired at Berkeley, so obviously you make the journey across the country to California. Let's start there.

Muscatine: The minute we hit California, I was impressed. With the place, the beauty, the weather, everything. It was January, and it was sunny and beautiful. We had had a blizzard across the country, and it followed us. It took us fourteen days to get here.

Geraci: I take it you drove.

Muscatine: Yes, we drove. And kept heading south.

Geraci: So, you make the journey across. I know that in an article you had written for the Journal of Gastronomy, you made the statement, when we moved to California, when your husband had finished his degree, that was what opened you up to the world of food. You discovered restaurants, fresh ingredients, ethnic foods, and all those things all of a sudden became—so obvious then that this really was an eye-opening experience, coming to California.

Muscatine: Absolutely.

Geraci: What made it different? Let's be a little more specific. How was California so different than that which you left.

Muscatine: We went into any given restaurant—we didn't know of anything in particular—it was wonderful. Fresh and good cooking and ethnic differences, which we hadn't experienced before. If we had gone to New York, which was only an hour away, we would have, but when we went to New York, when I was taken by my mother, we ate in Schraft's, which was a kind of glorified soda bar, and we ate in vegetarian restaurants, which imitated the shape of meat with vegetables. It was horrible.

Geraci: The whole idea of this fresh fruits, vegetables, climate, just from the look on your face—

Muscatine: It was absolutely overwhelming. Yes.

Geraci: Obviously, you picked up something from your father, and that's the ability to really be experimental with food.

Muscatine: Yes. Yes. I think if it hadn't been for my father, I wouldn't have been as interested.

Geraci: Or as impressed. How about your husband? Is he the same as you, this natural curiosity at that time? Was he as impressed as you were?

Muscatine: Yes. Yes. He was, and he had had more or less the same background. His mother was a good baker but a horrible cook. That's what he grew up with. He used to make designs out of his food on his plate. The peas over here, the mashed potatoes in a square. You know, he used to play with his food.

Geraci: Same as you—a lot of canned goods.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: Nothing extraordinary.

Muscatine: Yup.

Geraci: So, on getting here, I noticed that you had to go back East at one point to take care of your mom, and you made a really interesting comment about viewing your relatives—I guess you'd become tainted by California—and watching them eat, and sitting at their table. Can you describe that a little bit? You've come out here, you've left one food

cuisine, you've now experienced what you almost considered to be your Grand Awakening, and then you had to go back to Trenton for a while to take care of your mom.

Muscatine: I went back when we were spending a year in Italy.

Geraci: Your husband was doing research.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: In Rome. Right.

Muscatine: I had to leave and come back because my mom was seriously ill. The first thing I did, I stayed in her apartment in New Jersey, and she was in the hospital in Philadelphia, so I took this little train from Yardley. It was like a Toonerville trolley. It didn't have air-conditioning. You opened the windows, and so on. I would drive her car—or a rental car; I don't remember—every day and take the train. The first thing I did was order a case of wine, Louis Martini, which the liquor store happened to have, delivered to the apartment house. My mother's friends used to come every night and ring the doorbell when I got home. I would go through Reading terminal, where they have a large market, and I would buy all sorts of fresh things for my dinner—sausages or lamb chops. They had butchers and everything there. I would buy this on the way home and then cook it and pour myself a glass of wine, and have flowers on the table and so on. My mother's friends used to come and enquire after her, but really to see what I was eating! [laughter] They determined that I was obviously an alcoholic because I had wine with my dinner. They couldn't understand why I had flowers and fussed with my meal. It was amazing.

Geraci: This segues very obviously: there is a food revolution going on in America, and things were changing. Would that be a fair statement? You'd been out to California. Californians like to feel that in the late fifties, early sixties, we start a food revolution, along with all the other movements—especially in this Berkeley area—that are coming out. Is there a California cuisine that's starting to make its way across the nation now?

Muscatine: I think that the Reading Market has been there forever, so I don't think that was particularly new or influenced by California, but certainly restaurants were changing and influenced by California. More markets and such were opening up. But I think actually it took a long time. Now, of course, it's universal—as in Europe and everything.

Geraci: Well, let's talk a little bit about that. When you say it's universal, why do you think it became universal? You did get to spend some time in Rome, so you've seen a European foodway. Have you been to France?

Muscatine: Yes. We lived two years in Paris.

Geraci: So you had seen then, this whole idea of fresh fruits, seasonal, different meats, different foods, many, many restaurants. And California just really I guess would be more—how would you explain that? Is that part of your awakening too? Was it just California, or was it the fact that at the same time, you're getting to travel to Europe?

Muscatine: We didn't go to Europe until the fifties, at the end of the fifties, and by that time things were changing in the United States. I think Alice Waters was influenced by the time she spent in France, and saw marketing done fresh, and everybody bought things for the next meal.

Geraci: I guess what I'm getting to, is for you then, this California experience—you're right: Alice Waters, influenced by what she encountered in France. You really were influenced by what you encountered in California.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: Yours is a California story.

Muscatine: An awakening. Yes. And when we went to Europe, we found more similarities between Europe—or Italy and France, at least—and California. The San Francisco Italian food has never been as good as the Italian food, but I think there are differences in products and raw materials. Butchering is done differently in each case.

Geraci: Let's talk about the Bay Area a little bit, at that time. What were some of these products, as you said, that were really starting to impress you and change you?

Muscatine: The variety of salad greens, for instance. In Trenton, we only had iceberg lettuce with Russian dressing—which is coming back now! But that's all we had. And both in Europe, where they have mesclun and arugula, all these good things, we were amazed. And in San Francisco where they had a variety of salad greens and, more recently, mesclun.

Geraci: The idea of baby greens. What about some of the other vegetables that you had encountered?

Muscatine: We had never eaten anything but canned peas. I think we got fresh spinach in New Jersey, but I can't remember that we had—we had succotash, which was canned. Canned corn and canned lima beans. But I don't think we had much of a variety, and here there was a plentitude of all sorts of things: artichokes and cardoons, and asparagus of different types—white, green. We had canned asparagus at home, I remember.

Geraci: What about the fruits?

Muscatine: Fruits—all kinds of fruits—available here. In my market now, I can get all kinds of exotic things that I usually try to see what they're like. Buddha's hands, and dragon fruit, and I don't know—black, orange-shaped fruits. Lychee nuts, fresh lychees. All sorts of things.

Geraci: Did you have much fresh fruit when you were at home?

Muscatine: We had apples, pears, and bananas and peaches in the summertime. And plums, and presumably grapes, although I don't remember my mother buying those.

Geraci: How about butchering? You said that you noticed the difference in meat cuts alone, the types of meat.

Muscatine: The Europeans cut a carcass differently than we do, and often it's tougher but more flavorful in Europe than here. I think a part of it is that we have such marbling and so much fat on everything, that it tenderizes it, but it's not good for you. [laughs]

Geraci: It's not good for you. You mentioned a moment ago, the market you go to now. Where does Doris shop?

Muscatine: Berkeley Bowl and Andronico's from time to time, but it doesn't have nearly the variety of Berkeley Bowl, but it's very convenient. Just a few blocks away.

Geraci: Can you find that elsewhere? The thing is, I mean, you're living in Berkeley and this is a community of numerous—everything from Berkeley Bowl to Monterey Market—and then there's smaller shops. You have the Andronico's. You have a large distribution of these foods. When you go back East now, do you find those types of things?

Muscatine: Somewhat. More limited, but there's a very, very good selection in Washington and Maryland, where my daughter lives, which is run by Whole Foods or Fresh Fields, as they call it there. They have exceptional produce, but not the exotics.

Geraci: Let's shift gears a little bit, so we can finish up at least this portion of the interview. Let's talk a little bit more about your family. You mentioned your daughter at this point. Let's talk about your kids. We've got you out here, finally in California.

Muscatine: My son, who was the first-born, is—

Geraci: His name is?

Muscatine: Jeff. Jeffrey. We were accused of naming them—our kids—after Chaucerian characters, because he's Jeff, or Jeffrey, and she's Alison. She's legally changed her name to Lissa, which is what we always called her. But not the case: we just liked those names. He lives in Palo Alto. He was always interested in food and cooking. His wife is a wonderful cook, but he always cooked and all the time he was growing up. He liked it. And has a great interest in food, which his wife has also. But their kids are fussy.

Geraci: Interesting. Were your kids fussy when they were at home?

Muscatine: No.

Geraci: Because you're experimenting with all these different foods while your kids are growing up.

Muscatine: But I was very careful not to ever impose my cooking techniques or food preferences on them. They do have healthy appetites and healthy curiosities, and like wine and like food.

Geraci: What does your son do?

Muscatine: He worked for Hitachi for a long time, and he was discharged about three years ago this coming December. He has set up his own consulting business, and that's increasing as time goes.

Geraci: That's good. Grandkids?

Muscatine: He has an oldest daughter who's studying in Paris—her junior year abroad at Stanford. Then she's going to go on to Italy for two terms. One term in Paris. And his younger daughter is a freshman at Bennington.

Geraci: Following grandma!

Muscatine: Yes. His youngest child is a son, and he is fifteen and in high school.

Geraci: How about your daughter?

Muscatine: Our daughter is living in Bethesda, and she's a good cook and likes wine. She has twins who are eleven and a younger son, who's seven.

Geraci: You've got a lot of grandkids. That keeps grandma busy, then.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: Anything else? I mean, what was it like to grow up in the Muscatine home? What was it like for your kids to grow up here as far as food—?

Muscatine: Well, we always had a variety of everything. Much fresh food and fruit and vegetables and salads and various meats and fishes. You name it, we had it.

Geraci: Very experimental though.

Muscatine: We used to cook much more elaborately with butter and cream and sauces and all that sort of thing. Our diet is much simpler now, but equally good, I think.

Geraci: As we started to move more towards olive oil as opposed to—more the Italian and Spanish way of adding fat, to cook with olive oil, as opposed to the French way of butter.

Muscatine: Right. They always enjoyed cooking. My daughter, made cookies from time to time, but she wasn't in the kitchen as much as my son. He was the cook for his Boy Scout troop when they went camping. His piece de resistance was a ham with pineapple spelling out "Troop 22" or whatever. [laughter]

Geraci: That's great! Did they ever call Momma for a recipe that they can remember from—?

Muscatine: No. [laughs]

Geraci: That's interesting, because we'd talked about that earlier in the interview. We have these things that we remember from home. That warm, psychological comfort food.

Muscatine: Yes. I think they're more experimental and they have my cookbooks to fall back on.

Geraci: At least in your case they have those to fall back on.

Muscatine: But I don't remember—I remember my daughter occasionally calling asking something about how long should you cook this or that. But not really. Very little, not very often.

Geraci: You haven't always been in the Berkeley area.

Muscatine: No.

Geraci: I'll just add it to the tape right now—your husband, Charles Muscatine, there is an interview within the Regional Oral History Office dealing with his career and his life, and in particular his involvement in much that went on in Berkeley in the sixties. So I know for a while you had to move away from Berkeley. How was that?

Muscatine: In 1950, a week after our son was born, Charles was fired for not signing the Loyalty Oath. So, when Jeff was about two, we went to Middletown, Connecticut, to Wesleyan, where he was offered a job for the interim. Many schools offered positions, either temporary or if you wanted to stay. There was very wide academic—at least—support.

Geraci: Oh, absolutely.

Muscatine: And we stayed in Wesleyan for two years.

Geraci: How was the food in Connecticut?

Muscatine: Not especially interesting.

Geraci: It seems to me it wouldn't have been that much different than possibly what you'd experienced in Vermont or New Jersey. It's within that same, at least, regional area.

Muscatine: There was a Sicilian background. They paraded the saint—whoever she was—

Geraci: Saint Sebastian.

Muscatine: —Saint Sebastian—through the streets and tucked money on the float and in the statue. But not the food. The food didn't seem to carry over.

Geraci: So you had truly been tainted by California. [laughs]

Muscatine: Yes. Yes.

Geraci: I think that's just about enough for today. We've got a good background for you, for who you are, and then we'll pick up in our next interview—we'll begin looking at Doris and her writing in both food and wine.

[End of session]

Interview # 02: November 03, 2004
Audio File 2

Geraci: I am Vic Geraci, food and wine historian from the University of California, Berkeley's Regional Oral History Office. Today's date is Wednesday, November 3, 2004, and seated with me is Doris Muscatine, food writer. This interview is being conducted in Doris's home in Berkeley, California. [pause]

In our last interview we discussed your personal background and the things that brought you to interpreting, evaluating, and describing Bay Area foodways. Today, I would like to discuss the changes that you have seen in San Francisco restaurants since the release of your book *A Cook's Tour of San Francisco*. When did the book come out?

Muscatine: Nineteen sixty-four.

Geraci: So this is right at the beginning, then, of all this change that's really starting to happen.

Muscatine: Maybe even in '63.

Geraci: Okay. So it is early.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: I think one of the things that fascinated me was your ability--you had written about the history of San Francisco. You understand this history. So you're just coming to this as "I need to put together a history of foodways." Let's talk about it. How did you get started on this?

Muscatine: Actually, I started a book on Rome, restaurants representing the different regions of the country, because they described differences in cooking and attitudes and history. Because they were each separate countries before the unification, but all of the provinces--now provinces--are represented by Roman cooking. We lived there for a while, and people asked me, "Well, you've lived there, what to eat besides spaghetti and scallopini?" So I began making lists and xeroxing them. It was purple ink. Mimeographing.

Geraci: Oh, the old mimeograph!

Muscatine: My husband said, wisely, "You're devoting so much time to making these lists, why don't you make one copy and hand it out?" So I began doing that. A person used it and liked it so much that she told the children's book editor of the [*San Francisco*] *Chronicle* about it, and said, "This should be a book." So Charlotte Jackson, which was what

her name was--and she was the wife of the book editor of the *Chronicle*, she said, "I'm going to New York tomorrow and I'm going to see Blanche Knopf. If you consider making this into a book, why don't you write me a letter outlining how you would go about this, and I'll take it and show it to her." So I did. And she did. And the next thing I knew was, Judith Jones, who was later Julia Childs' editor, wrote back and said, "This is fabulous. Why don't you write it?" I didn't know that you needed an agent or contract or an advance or anything, so I set about writing it. I was about 90 percent done, when I had a letter from Judith, who said, "Somehow Doubleday is putting out a book which is so similar, and the same price range as your book, so we won't publish it, but why don't you do San Francisco? No one has done San Francisco. So I started in on that.

Meanwhile, Charles met a person who was a former student of his at an MLA conference. This former student was now a book editor, and his firm didn't publish cookbooks. So Charles asked Bob, "What do you do if you have 90 percent of this finished book, and they won't publish it?" Bob said, "I'll have some of the people in the firm read it, and let you know. Maybe it's no good." The next thing I heard was from a top agent in New York, to whom Bob had shown this, and he liked it and said, "I would like to be your agent."

Geraci: And who was this person?

Muscatine: Carl Brandt. The next thing I knew was when I finished the San Francisco book, Judith Jones didn't like it. And I had a letter--those days, you wrote letters--and it was from Carl Brandt, and it said, "I have bad news and good news. Judith Jones didn't like the San Francisco book, but Elinor Parker at Scribner's liked them both, and is buying them both, and here's your advance."

Geraci: That was a pleasant surprise at that point!

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: Were there similarities between the way you approached these two books? You had talked about with the Italian, the regional. So you were approaching--

Muscatine: The San Francisco book represented all of the ethnic differences in the population. There were--from the very, very beginning--people came from all around the world to San Francisco during the gold rush. So from 1848, there was always an ethnic mix. So I approached this as though they were provinces in Italy, in Rome, and there were differences-ethnic differences-in San Francisco cooking.

Geraci: So it's taking that regional approach.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: Let's start with the book then. It seemed to me the book was broken into-at least, periodized into two specific eras. Basically from the gold rush to about the earthquake, would be the first era. Is that correct?

Muscatine: Yes, but this book was up until the earthquake, *Old San Francisco*.

Geraci: Right. *Old San Francisco, the Biography of a City, From Early Days to the Earthquake*.

Muscatine: But *A Cook's Tour of San Francisco* was contemporary restaurants with some history behind them.

Geraci: Okay. Well, let's talk about the book, and what you have in a-I love the idea of how you got to the book. Writing sometimes-people just think that you write the book and it just appears. I would like the story of how it comes about.

Muscatine: I must say that there weren't millions of cookbooks and regional guidebooks and all of that sort of thing. It was a fairly new form.

Geraci: What originally gave you the idea to do this?

Muscatine: The lists had I made for people going abroad.

Geraci: So it was just from your own travels. Just something out of your own personal interest.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: Interesting. What else about the book? Let's start talking about the old San Francisco and its ways.

Muscatine: By 1852, there were 160 hotels and restaurants, 43 markets, and 63 bakeries, which is quite remarkable. There is a person who wrote in 1852 and said, there is almost everything here-game, eggs, which came from the Farallon Islands and were from wild birds. They sometimes sold thousands of these eggs in a day or two. And they were expensive. In the original days, at first, there were few women who came, and most people who came really thought of making money in the gold fields and returning home. So they came without families. There were boarding houses and hotels, but dining halls were fairly empty. They ate quickly and hurriedly, and were turned out. So

there were no such things as living rooms and social places to gather. But that quickly changed.

Geraci: So at first, what you're saying, is that this was just a place where I go-I mean, food is just fuel. I'm just going to eat in a quick, fast-and then there's a change. About when does this change occur?

Muscatine: Early. Within a year.

Geraci: Interesting. Why? What seemed to be the impetus?

Muscatine: Some people brought women, early on, families which came overland, primarily, in wagon trains and caravans. The people who went around, through the isthmus, were usually single men. The age was pretty young. Many people discovered that they were unlucky at the mines, so made the transition to businessman and sold Levis, which originally the Levi canvas was for tents, but they made it into blue jeans.

Geraci: Miners were looking for a tough piece of clothing.

Muscatine: Yes. Very, very soon, there was interest in food because all of the restaurants represented different home cooking, including the United States, but there were revolutions in Europe in 1848, so many people came from Germany and France and Italians came. The practice was, in the early days, to desert the ships that came into the harbor. I think there were something like 600 ships abandoned in the harbor of San Francisco, and crews and people went straight to the gold mines. One of these ships was a jail, and one was a hotel. One was an Italian restaurant. It was run by Giuseppe Bazzuro, and he introduced, for instance, cioppino, which is a very San Francisco type dish. A fish stew. In Genoa, where he came from, the word for fish stew is something like cioppino-I have it written down some place-and the word for fish market is something like Ciappa, so that was apparently the origin of the word.

Geraci: So what we're looking at is, from the onset, San Francisco has this regional flavor, like you had talked with your book, but it really is based on San Francisco being a cosmopolitan city that was drawing all these ethnicities together.

Muscatine: Yes. And at the mines, people were tolerant-particularly if they were successful at mining—tolerant of their differences, but in The City, people first of all were reduced to levels of—a doctor, for instance, might be a carpenter here. And a lawyer might be a plumber. Roles reversed. Millionaires were instantly made or instantly stripped of their money. But there was a certain tolerance of all these ethnic differences.

Signs were often in many languages. There was a general tolerance because of the change of circumstances and having to live next door.

- Geraci: Would it be fair to say, then, that these ethnics foods in some way became a means for them to assimilate and become part of a community?
- Muscatine: No. People tended to stick to their own, except the Chinese restaurants were known to be very good. They had yellow triangular flags that identified them on the outside. People raved about the food in there.
- Geraci: Why the yellow triangular flags?
- Muscatine: I don't know.
- Geraci: I thought maybe it had some significance.
- Muscatine: No.
- Geraci: It was just a way to identify.
- Muscatine: It may have done.
- Geraci: Was there something in particular about their cuisine that you were able to find?
- Muscatine: I guess it was different. Unusual. The Chinese have a way of making much of little ingredients, and tasting good.
- Geraci: I think in all times humans, we're always looking for foods that are different, that are unusual.
- Muscatine: As well as old reliables.
- Geraci: Yes, the old reliables. So it's that spirit that really takes hold quickly.
- Muscatine: The various ethnic groups had games and celebrations and marches. Various representations of their old habits. Contests and singing groups and that sort of thing.
- Geraci: Let's go into a little bit more detail then. What type of restaurants and things are developing within The City within this time frame? California's just become a state. Let's move on with that a little bit here.
- Muscatine: There were various restaurants that were early on. The Tadich Grill was formed in 1849.

Geraci: I think what's important to remember as we talk about some of these restaurants, I should be asking you: Are any of them still in existence today?

Muscatine: Yes. Tadich is.

Geraci: That shows a continuity over time that's amazing.

Muscatine: It wasn't called Tadich's in those days, or Tadich. It was called a coffee house or cafe. It was in a market, and it moved to another market when the first was destroyed by either earthquake or fire early on. It then took on the name of the market where it was. So it was Central World Coffee House, or something like that. Then it moved to- it was called the New World Coffee Saloon.

Geraci: Coffee Saloon-that's interesting.

Muscatine: Then, in 1882, there was a Republican contingent and one of the members was a nephew of Samuel Brannan, who was instrumental in the early immigrants. He was a politician and had won an election, and he once said, "It will be a cold day when I am left out," or something like that. But he used the term "cold day" and so the Republican headquarters, which was called The Wigwam, which was on the corner of Stockton and Geary, sort of where Nieman Marcus is. I don't know which corner it was on. When Alexander Badlam ran for office, he lost, and they remembered his remark about the cold day, so they delivered huge blocks of ice at his home. He was so upset that he repaired to Tadich Grill, which wasn't yet called Tadich, with his Republican cronies, for resuscitation, and in the end the restaurant was called the Cold Day Restaurant because of that. When it was bought by John Tadich, he called it Tadich Grill, the Cold Day Restaurant.

Geraci: What kind of foods were they serving?

Muscatine: I think the terrapin and turtle soup. Mainly fish. I don't know whether they were serving rice pudding then, but they still do.

Geraci: Today, what does their menu somewhat consist of? Has there been a continuity over the long period? Are they still mainly specializing in fish?

Muscatine: Yes, fish. Different dishes and different emphases, but still pretty old-fashioned in terms of cooking.

Geraci: And fish being one of the things that San Francisco has as a natural resource. The ability to have fresh fish.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: It's interesting how a restaurant gets its name sometimes. How about some others that might be-?

Muscatine: Jack's was the first French restaurant. It was originally owned by a man who was Jacques, a Frenchman. They think that the name actually came from a frieze of jackrabbits that ran around the place, not from Jacques. Then it was sold to Edward Blanquie, another Frenchman, and he didn't change the name. Kept it the same. It was finally bought by people named Redinger. The father Michael and his brother bought it, and still kept the name. Then their son, one of the sons, took it over and finally closed it. We went to the closing night.

Geraci: When was that?

Muscatine: About maybe ten years ago.

Geraci: So it lasted for a long time then.

Muscatine: It lasted a long, long time. And then it was bought by a man who owns John's Grill—John Konstin—and he tried to bring back the old recipes, and refurbished it. It was not successful because he didn't quite—his chef had never eaten there, didn't know any of the old recipes. They called on me to advise the chef, but there's only so much you can do.

Geraci: So you actually went in and gave-?

Muscatine: Yes. It closed. Then Phillippe Jeanty took it over, and it's now called Jeanty at Jack's, but it's beautiful, and they have retained some of the old dishes.

Geraci: What are some of the old dishes they've retained? So we're talking a French cuisine.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: A traditional French cuisine over time.

Muscatine: What Jeanty, in his Yountville places has—and he was the chef at Domain Chandon for years and years, and left to open a smaller and simpler bistro. The cooking at Domain was pretty elaborate and expensive. His idea was to leave Domain and open a much simpler place. So he's carried this through to Jack's. He cooks various things, like Steak and Frites, and all sorts of bistro dishes, Coq au Vin, and so on. But he has retained maybe Celery Victor. I think Jack's used to serve celery with anchovies over it, which is basically Celery Victor,

and they used to serve calf's head complete with brains and cheeks and tongue, and all of that. But not any more. I can't remember-we used to eat very well. Roman Punch, they had, which was a rum mixed into ice cream, and they used it as a dessert. But in the old days it was a refreshment, and entremets.

Geraci: Obviously you grew up and ate there in some of the more recent times, how has the restaurant changed? We know that the menus keep some similarity across time, but how does it adapt to its new audiences?

Muscatine: For one thing, it was refurbished in such a way that they opened up the whole restaurant. They used to have a private staircase to rooms upstairs, which when there wasn't any more hanky-panky going on, you could set aside or reserve one of these rooms. And they had small rooms and larger rooms. In the old days, they had a separate entrance to this staircase so people could go up without being seen by the main restaurant eaters. In the old days, they used to have a pull, with which you summoned the waiter if you needed him. There were many places like this in San Francisco.

Geraci: There were places, then, that were designed for private eating, where you would not have to be part of the general hoi-polloi, the crowd that was down there, as opposed to the more modern trend which is more of a communal type movement today, with a larger room where everyone is.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: It's interesting also to see how it changes in a rough-and-tumble San Francisco, having private rooms, or having rooms for different purposes. Less savory purposes, maybe.

Muscatine: Some of them actually had bedrooms, and that sort of thing.

Geraci: So a restaurant-brothel all in one. From the old days. You're looking at an establishment that really did evolve over time. It grew with The City, then.

Muscatine: Yes. And they opened up the second floor to make it a balcony, and the third floor is now a huge private dining room, which you can hire.

Geraci: Like for groups or receptions, things like that.

Muscatine: Yes. They refurbished it without losing the old character, but it's bright and cheerful.

Geraci: Can you describe it a little bit more?

Muscatine: Now they have polished brass and a grand staircase going up to the balcony, although they also have an elevator for people who can't walk the steps. And it's earthquake-proof, of course. At one time, in the 1906 earthquake, it burned to the ground, so they reopened it temporarily until they rebuilt, more or less at Van Ness Avenue.

Geraci: It seems also that their clientele was probably, across time, a little bit higher? If they have private rooms, this is more of an upscale restaurant or establishment across time?

Muscatine: I think it was. I don't know for sure, but I think that it has always been considered one of the top French restaurants.

Geraci: Okay. What about some others?

Muscatine: There was May's Oyster House, which opened in 1867. They had two specialities. One was Hangtown Fry. Placerville was named Hangtown in the old days, and a person was condemned to hang and he opted for his last meal to have a Hangtown Fry, which was oysters and eggs and that sort of mix. Everyone always assumed that the oysters were the thing that was hard to obtain and would delay his execution, but instead it was eggs, which were hideously expensive and came from the Farallones—if you were lucky. And the other thing that they used to make was an oyster loaf, which was a hollowed out loaf of French bread, or cut of French bread, and fried oysters and various things inside, and apparently divine enough to make you swoon. They used to be called Peacemakers, in New Orleans. When a husband erred, he brought an oyster loaf home to his wife as an offering of peace.

Geraci: Instead of flowers, he brought her an oyster loaf. Okay! Is that still around today?

Muscatine: Yes, I think so. When I last heard, it was still there. Owned by Dalmations, Croatians.

Geraci: I wonder, do they still have the oyster loaf?

Muscatine: I don't know, but I bet they do. Sam's was opened in the same year, 1867. It also specialized in fish. The old Clam House began in 1861. Schroeder's Cafe opened early and it was German and didn't allow women in. When we first moved here in 1948, I think women were only allowed at a certain time. They still restricted women.

Geraci: Why? If it's a restaurant?

Muscatine: Well, Lockober's in Boston, of Cambridge, didn't allow women until fairly recently.

Geraci: So, in some ways it was a men's club, then, also.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: What's interesting now is we're starting to break down-you've talked about your regional and your ethnic. We've talked about French, we've talked about the specialty of San Francisco being fish. We've talked Italian, now we're bringing in German, with Schroeders. So we really are getting all these regional foods starting to accumulate.

Muscatine: The Cliff House, which I don't think had any particular ethnicity, was opened in 1858. But it always was on the shore and had a beautiful Bay view and that sort of thing.

Geraci: And you always see the postcards of the old days of the Cliff House. If we're saying they didn't have an ethnic-what type of cuisine did they have?

Muscatine: I don't really know, in the old days, what it had. But I assume more or less American.

Geraci: What would constitute that?

Muscatine: Steaks and chops and soups. I don't know, really.

Geraci: How about today?

Muscatine: Today, I think it has just reopened. Fior d'Italia, which opened in 1886, was one of the oldest Italian restaurants in the United States, and it is sort of an Italian neighborhood place, where they have many celebrations of anniversaries and of wedding parties and that sort of thing.

Geraci: Where is it located?

Muscatine: I think in North Beach, on Union Street.

Geraci: It's in North Beach. I see. So it is within the Italian community, then.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: Was it a particular regional Italian, or was it just generally labeled an Italian restaurant?

Muscatine: I don't think it was particularly regional. I think they had the basic Italian dishes. Pastas.

Geraci: The American expectation of an Italian dish.

Muscatine: Yes. We haven't eaten there for years, but we used to go when we first came.

Geraci: What's amazing to me, as we're going through these restaurants-I'll say it again-they're still around. In an industry today where restaurants seem to open and close with large frequency, we have these that stay. They have this continuity.

Muscatine: Trader Vic's, which didn't open until the thirties, in Oakland, is still around and in Oakland. And the old Trader Vic's in San Francisco is now a Vietnamese restaurant, and very high class. I hear that Trader Vic's is going to reopen in San Francisco in a different location. The Palace Hotel Garden Court, which originally when the Palace Hotel was built, the Garden Court was where you entered with horse and carriage, and the registration desk was through the Garden Court. But people whose rooms abutted the court complained about the noise, and eventually it became a restaurant. An enclosed space and a restaurant. It was always a pretty elegant restaurant, although the food was not all that great or special.

Geraci: Sometimes you pay for ambience.

Muscatine: Yes. It was absolutely beautiful.

Geraci: What kind of food did they specialize in? Or did they have a specialty?

Muscatine: Just miscellaneous food. Again, they might have an ethnic dish or two, but mainly it was salads and soups and very elaborate steaks and that sort of thing.

Geraci: One thing that we haven't mentioned in going through these, thus far, is these are restaurants that are lasting for a long period of time-what about chefs? If you're keeping a continuity in cuisine and in your representation, were there chefs that were making their names? Or is this pre- our fascination with chefs today?

Muscatine: Our fascination with chefs-celebrity chefs-is a fairly new thing. There were a few chefs who stood out, like Escoffier and Victor Hirtzler in the St. Francis Hotel. I'm trying to think of who else. But normally, in a normal restaurant, there wasn't a celebrated chef.

Geraci: The restaurant is the focus of the cuisine, whereas today it's the chef who is almost, in some cases, the focus.

Muscatine: And they have cooking shows on television and all sorts of appearances and books, and book signings. They're real celebrities, whereas it used to be that you wouldn't necessarily know who was cooking in the kitchen.

Geraci: We'll get back to these restaurants again, but these couple of questions just came to my mind. What about service? Is this a male occupation at this point, as far as who my waiters are? Is service of any issue in these restaurants?

Muscatine: I think that in places like Jack's, there were notoriously old, crabby waiters who served you extremely well but didn't have personalities and would never say, "I'm Ted. I'm your waitperson tonight."
[laughter]

Geraci: Point well taken! Do we have any other restaurants that you would like to mention at this point? I just happened to think about the chefs.

Muscatine: I think that's about it. There were many, many old restaurants which were famous. Delmonico's, The Pup-

Geraci: The Pup?

Muscatine: P-u-p.

Geraci: What kind of cuisine was that?

Muscatine: It was started by a man who was chef at the old Poodle Dog.

Geraci: The Poodle Dog being one of the original of the higher French restaurants.

Muscatine: Yes. And it was called Poulet D'Or originally, and miners mispronounced it so eventually it became known as The Poodle Dog. And The Fly Trap, which has been there for a long time, has a new place on, I believe, Second Street. I've never been. Which is called also The Fly Trap, but I don't think there's any connection except the name.

Geraci: What type of restaurant was The Fly Trap?

Muscatine: Miscellaneous. Continental, I think. In the old days, everything was current, or the provisions were current and the state-Los Angeles didn't develop, so there were vast rancheros where cattle were raised so there was always meat and large amounts of wild game. The missionaries from Mexico and Spain planted grapes when they developed the chain of missions, so there were vineyards. In 1839,

Jean-Louis Vignes had vineyards in Los Angeles and imported many of the European grapes. The missionaries had mission grapes, which apparently they got from South America, but they were cruder and not European-style.

Geraci: So the Bay Area-this is a natural place for fresh fish. There's plenty of ample meat. We have dairy products. We have fresh fruits and vegetables readily available, and then we have people from all over the world wanting to cook their ethnic dishes. Does this seem to be what's really developing in this old San Francisco?

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: I guess another way to say that is that this is a city that in the 1800s until 1906, built a great food tradition.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: There was some good eating going on.

Muscatine: Oh, absolutely! And originally there were a huge number of courses. Dinner parties went on for hours. They thought if you ended before midnight, it wasn't a success.

Geraci: It was a form of entertainment.

Muscatine: Yes. Yes! And the saloons, of which there were ample numbers, served a free lunch early on. It went from four o'clock in the afternoon, and they would have calves' heads and tongues and hams and chickens and all sorts of roast beefs and oysters, and numerous courses that you could partake of. People would go from one saloon to the other and have a few snacks with their drink, and it has always been a drinking town.

Geraci: But it's a drinking town that's mixed with food. I mean, food is always part of the whole mix. There's a spirit of eating.

Muscatine: Yes. The wine trade was always successful here. People always drank wine with their food. Early menus list clarets and champagnes and hocks and sherries and madeiras, which aren't in favor so much nowadays. But all these sorts of things in abundance. There's a description of a meal, for instance, in which first they drank champagne and there was a bottle of claret at each place. But I guess, if you went on for hours, you could consume that much.

Geraci: It seems, with that kind of spirit, we have people of all social classes, then, in San Francisco. There's a nightlife. The sense of community,

from the very beginning, seems to establish that food is part of our sense of who we are. For San Francisco. Would that be a fair statement, that that was developing? That this city was partially food?

Muscatine: I think so, Yes. Everyone always paid attention to food. Even in the old days, the miners used to construct-bake their own bread, and carried starters with them. Sourdough starters, and took it to bed at night to keep it warm.

Geraci: That's interesting. Let's take just a little bit of a break here for a second.

[Audio File 3]

Geraci: Today is November 3, 2004. This is disk number 2 of interview number 2. Doris, when we left off, we were talking about the development of San Francisco and its foodway, right about up to 1906, when we were looking at the Great Earthquake. That seems to be a dividing point. What's the next era?

Muscatine: The era until World War II.

Geraci: About 1906, then, to the end of World War II. What seemed to be the energy in food in The City at that point?

Muscatine: I think for a while the earthquake damaged so much, but after the earthquake, people ate very, very well. Fed in Union Square at open picnic tables.

Geraci: Interesting. Were there restaurateurs who were doing this?

Muscatine: I think probably they got various volunteers from restaurants and service people, but they fed everybody. There's a famous description of a gentlemen's group eating right after the earthquake, but they moved things to the sidewalk, and they had an elaborate meal.

Geraci: [laughs] The world may be falling down, but I'm still eating!

Muscatine: But for many people it was a disaster. Things were wiped out, mainly by the fire that followed, but also buildings and things were quite ruined.

Geraci: In rebuilding a city that's been burnt-you know, how many times has London burned to the ground through its history-did it change the way people perceived food? Did it open an opportunity for new types of restaurants, or did it slow things down, or did it just continue?

Muscatine: I think many places rebuilt if they were destroyed.

Geraci: Many of the places that we had just talked about obviously had rebuilt after the initial quake itself. During this period, does food maintain its importance in San Francisco?

Muscatine: I think it has always been important in San Francisco because of the way it began, and the mixture of ethnic foods, and the emphasis on foods and drinks, all through its history from the very beginning.

Geraci: So there didn't seem to be much-I mean, we're talking about the Depression and World War II occurred during this era, that didn't seem to really slow The City down?

Muscatine: I don't think so. I wasn't here. [laughs]

Geraci: You got here in '48, so actually you're one of the ones who comes in with that third wave, then, of World War II to the present. You're one of the ones-a good example of coming in during that time.

Muscatine: Right.

Geraci: Let's talk about The City when you came here in '48. We've talked a little bit about your background, what about the restaurant scene, as you remember, arriving here in the late forties?

Muscatine: My husband and I went to The City very early on and we didn't know where to eat, so we picked out a little place and were amazed at the quality of the food. We had never experienced anything like this, and we ate around. This was a no-famous-name or anything place, and it was wonderful. Later, we found out that Ernie's and The Blue Fox were places to eat-the best places-and there were all sorts of other places to try. So we went to Ernie's, for instance, and we had-the usual meal there was cracked crab when it was in season, garbanzo beans spiced and cooked, and a salad. Then a soup. Then a pasta. Then a main course, like, I think, tenderloin brochet with wild rice, flaming. And then fried cream or banana fritters, with wine throughout. That was a typical meal that you had. All these things came with the main course.

Geraci: Amazing. What you're saying is The City was still holding up with its-

Muscatine: Yes. And The Blue Fox had the same sort of thing. We also ate at places like Alfred's, which was notable for its steaks. The Poodle Dog was still here.

Geraci: So there were a lot of restaurants.

Muscatine: Yes. And in North Beach, there were places like Ray's Bar, which was a little bar on the corner with three or four tables, and you got the most wonderful pastas and steaks, or chickens. We learned a lot about various cooking.

Geraci: I guess, then, through all three of these eras, would it be fair to say San Francisco is a city that eats out?

Muscatine: Yes. I think so. Nowadays, many new restaurants are opening, but in the old days there weren't so many. You went back and back to old favorites.

Geraci: I would take it then, the restaurant would recognize you; they have a return clientele. So it was more of a community-type returning to them.

Muscatine: Yes.

Geraci: But still, even in that era when you're first there, this is not the era of chefs yet. This is the era of restaurants.

Muscatine: I think that's true. There were a couple of well-known chefs who wrote cookbooks, but these were in the early days, like Victor Hirtzler.

Geraci: During this period when you first got here, then, into the late 1940s, early 1950s, America is going through its consensus era of the Cold War, and all that's happening. We're turning to more scientific foodways. We're looking at, in some ways-many people have written about we're in the beginnings of-I mean, 1954 [Raymond Albert] Kroc starts with McDonald's. We're beginning the fast food era, and America is looking for the shortcuts. Canned foods. Processed foods. Pre-cooked foods. All the new-the processed cheeses, all these things. I guess "better food through science"-however we want to look at it. America is changing. Did you see a lot of change going on in San Francisco during this time?

Muscatine: San Francisco has always depended on fresh vegetables, fresh fish. Cracked crab, for instance, has always been a favorite here. There was a huge oyster market during the days of the gold rush on up. When the trans-continental railroad was completed in 1869, they could even ship fresh oysters from the East Coast. Before that, they had bought fresh oysters from Washington state. And before that, they were probably canned because they couldn't survive the long sea voyage or in a caravan across the plains. The hydraulic leavings in the mine, hydraulic mining leavings, had silted the bay. It came down in the rivers and eventually polluted the bay so badly that the oyster industry was gone. Now, there is Hog Island Oyster up in Point Reyes, raising fresh oysters.

Geraci: Wonderful oysters.

Muscatine: Yes. There has always been an interest in fresh things and choice meats. This is where the emphasis started on organic foods and farmers markets and edible schoolyards.

Geraci: Before we get to that point though, somewhere along the line, there has to have been a tension where even San Francisco feared that they were losing that. I can go into The City today and I find my fair share of McDonald's, Burger King, Taco Bell. All the chains, all the fast-food trimmings are there. All the chain grocery stores with all their little canned goods just lined up like soldiers waiting to go. There was a tension that seemed to be building up. Even San Francisco was beginning to fall prey to that fast food—

Muscatine: Somewhat.

Geraci: But then there is a change.

Muscatine: But there has always been good bread available. Sourdough and bakeries. Wonderful bakeries, all through the period of change, when there were frozen foods and canned goods, packaged bread.

Geraci: Could part of this be a function of that the Bay Area has a lot more wealthy people, or at least people with more income and availability of income? Disposable income, in other words.

Muscatine: Yes, I think partly that. But a lot of poor people still are interested in maintaining their cultural traditions and cooking the way they're used to. Part of it explains the packaged food and the fast food restaurants, because those are convenient, and we didn't use to know that we were going to get obese. I have never eaten in a McDonald's, for instance, but I'm probably an exception. But I think people like that sort of fast food.

Geraci: Even within the Slow Food Movement, you go to a Trader Joe's, you go to an Andronico's in the Bay Area. I can still buy a cooked meal or already processed meal—for speed. It's fast, but it's using fresh ingredients. It's using a better grade or a better quality of food.

Muscatine: But that's expensive. But convenient, so maybe you're right.

Geraci: I guess what I'm looking at is—and I don't know the answer, but it seems that there was a struggle going on, and part of that struggle is based on money. The Bay Area, people did want good, fresh, seasonal foods. They had a tradition. They were used to it. And as this fast food thing comes in, it does offer cheaper—a less expensive way for people

to eat. But still, people here hung on to some of that older: “No. I want some of the better food.”

Muscatine: Right.

Geraci: Would it be a fair statement to say that maybe by the fifties and sixties the rest of the nation had given in more to the fast food?

Muscatine: I think, judging by the obesity nowadays, probably they were getting into the habit of eating less nutritious food.

Geraci: Totally unscientific, but I’ve heard numerous people make the comments—who have travelled all over the United States—that people in California tend to be, you know, besides the comments about our suntans and all the other types of things, that Californians—and it also would go for many people towards the other coast too, towards the New England coast—are slender compared to people in the midsection of the nation.

Muscatine: I don’t know.

03-00:17:42

Geraci: No, but I’m just saying, you hear people who make this type of comment all the time, but it seems that San Francisco then did keep all this. Now, during the sixties, obviously, you were very much involved in the movements—between what your husband was doing, the two of you were involved in that. Did food become political at that point as part of all this movement?

03-00:18:08

Muscatine: Um.

03-00:18:10

Geraci: I mean, you had a tradition here of fresh fruits, vegetables that are not big corporate America.

03-00:18:20

Muscatine: Yes. Maybe that was the beginning. I don’t know.

03-00:18:29

Geraci: We have people that will eventually—Alice Waters will become, make her way. The Cheese Board were looking—

03-00:18:38

Muscatine: Collective.

03-00:18:38

Geraci:

The Collective. These are very sixties, seventies, Bay Area things, but using food to make a statement. Alice Waters today—you already mentioned an edible schoolyard. That's a political statement.

03-00:18:57

Muscatine:

Yes. Farmers markets and organic food are in many ways political statements because organic food, which isn't defined exactly, but there are pressures to make the government more aware of defining what sells as organic.

03-00:19:41

Geraci:

Much of it does start here. The call for quality food. Whether it be organic or not, but the idea of quality food was something that San Franciscans—from the story you've just told me—are very used to. A hundred-and-fifty or more year tradition of quality food. So it would make sense then that as the quality of our food lessens nationally, this would be the one area that would call for—does that make sense?

03-00:20:13

Muscatine:

Yes, it does, but I don't know really much about this, except personal observations.

03-00:20:26

Geraci:

That's great. [laughter] That's all I'm asking for. I don't know much about it either, but it's that personal observation on your part. What we're looking at is something happened here in the sixties and seventies. You're a great example of coming here in the late forties and fifties from the East Coast, and you were surrounded by restaurants. Those were available to you, yet when you got out here, it was very different than anything you had ever had.

03-00:21:06

Muscatine:

Yes. There was much more emphasis on good food. Nowadays, when we go to New York, but we know many people involved with food so we always go to very good restaurants, not necessarily fancy ones, but excellent ones, and we eat extremely well there. But I think when we grew up in Trenton, there were not very good restaurants. New Jersey. So big cities tend to have more of an emphasis on food.

03-00:22:12

Geraci:

Okay, but I guess again I'll return to your—even within your book, *The Biography of a City*, and in your book about San Francisco restaurants—what year did that come out? The first edition?

03-00:22:29

Muscatine:

I think, '63.

03-00:22:30

Geraci:

Yes, '63, which is still very early. This is a city that has a food culture, a food tradition, and therefore it shouldn't be surprising that maybe a new revolutionary change—considering the energy of the sixties and seventies in the Bay Area—that food would also be used as part of the arsenal to try and change the nation.

03-00:22:59

Muscatine:

And we have. Partly.

03-00:23:04

Geraci:

Partly. [laughs] I like that. What kind of changes do you think it has instituted?

03-00:23:10

Muscatine:

More emphasis on a variety of vegetables and fruits and baking. Good breads. Certainly, prepared foods—convenience foods—which I don't think necessarily started here, but we certainly have our share.

03-00:23:51

Geraci:

Where do you think they started?

03-00:23:52

Muscatine:

I don't know. Whether they started in the East in large cities like New York, or whether it grew spontaneously in both places. I don't know.

03-00:24:13

Geraci:

Okay. It could be a spontaneous—I mean, a lot of times as new ideas are reaching fruition, they occurred in different places simultaneously. That's the reason in some fields we give numerous Nobel Prizes in the same year for the same field, because there are different ideas coming up within that. But there is a change.

03-00:24:42

Muscatine:

I think there is.

03-00:24:49

Geraci:

What about food quality?

03-00:24:51

Muscatine:

I think, if anything, food quality has gotten increasingly better because we have certain meats which we know the origin of, and certain ranchers perform in different ways. Grass-fed versus grain-fed cattle, for instance. They had a tasting at Chez Panisse of these various meats. I won't tell you which way it came out.

03-00:25:42

Geraci:

[laughs] Oh, that's not fair! Was there a noticeable difference?

03-00:25:48

Muscatine:

People preferred the grain-fed flavor over the grass-fed.

03-00:25:58

Geraci:

It would seem to make sense, because an animal tastes much like that which it eats, and grains provide more of a taste than, I would think, grass would. Because grasses can be very—it's like when we talk about venison. Deer that eat on an open range have eaten some things that aren't exactly—

03-00:26:19

Muscatine:

Palatable.

03-00:26:20

Geraci:

Palatable! Thank you. That was a good word. Palatable. Whereas if you have deer that are eating fresh fruits off a local orchard—which they will—the meats become sweeter. So I could see—

03-00:26:36

Muscatine:

At any rate, poultry is raised in certain ways. Fish—fish are a real problem because I don't think that industry has—industry has prevented the government from issuing warnings about mercury levels and contaminants with farm-raised fish.

03-00:27:19

Geraci:

Couldn't that even be carried to wild fish? The environmental—

03-00:27:23

Muscatine:

Oh, sure!

03-00:27:23

Geraci:

Just within the environment itself, even wild fish now have become tainted with mercury and other—.

03-00:27:31

Muscatine:

Yes, and they say that if you eat smaller fish, they have less long life and they won't have as much mercury as shark, tilefish, and tuna—some kinds of tuna—larger fish.

03-00:28:05

Geraci:

They're eating it for a longer period of time, thus have accumulated more.

03-00:28:11

Muscatine:

Yes, and all the waters are apparently polluted. But my fish market, for instance, labels the place of origin and whether it's farmed or wild or caught by trawling or with nets. So you have some input into what you buy.

03-00:28:42

Geraci:

Have you seen a big change in that over the last few years within—I can't imagine being back East or in some Midwestern grocery store, and seeing that type of labelling.

03-00:28:57

Muscatine: No. I think it's even unique around here.

03-00:29:04

Geraci: But do you think that could be a trend?

03-00:29:06

Muscatine: Yes. I think the pressure on government to identify the pollutants, whether mercury or PCBs or whatever, will increase, and people will label fish more. Certainly, poultry is labeled and meat is labeled in some places whether it's free-range or kept in a coop in its own defecations.

03-00:29:53

Geraci: Even milks and cheeses now are starting to be labeled whether the animal's been given growth hormones or not.

03-00:30:03

Muscatine: So I think it more and more will spread across the country.

03-00:30:08

Geraci: Okay. So that could be then another movement that started to generate out of this area. Not so much that we're making new discoveries but we are a place of cutting edge.

03-00:30:21

Muscatine: Yes. Agreed.

03-00:30:22

Geraci: Maybe in the sixties and the seventies we offered the idea of returning to fresh fruits, vegetables, the Mediterranean concept of a diet—seasonal. And maybe in the nineties and into the new millennium, it's more food quality. The big issue out here, that you will not find in many places in the United States, on our local ballot, just yesterday, GMOs [genetically modified organisms]. Can we have genetically modified products? Many counties in this area have said no to genetically modified. There again, it's down to food quality. So maybe this is another cutting edge that's heading out.

03-00:31:08

Muscatine: Probably. Because many things that we encompass here go on and spread. But I don't know whether New York stores do this, because I don't shop.

03-00:31:32

Geraci: Right. You don't shop in New York. Are there any other like little maybe areas where during the sixties and seventies—anything else that we gave to foodways for the rest of the nation? We'll talk more in another interview about people like Alice Waters, and I think education has really been at the key of that, but we'll talk about her

and that in a separate interview. We've looked at fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, we've talked about that. Food quality, much of the concern starting here. Is there anything else that would be—?

03-00:32:17

Muscatine: I can't think of anything.

03-00:32:18

Geraci: Okay. So, why don't we call it quits for today, and then we can come back?

03-00:32:28

Muscatine: Right.

[End of Session]

Interview # 03: November 10, 2004

Audio File 4

04-00:00:08

Geraci: I am Vic Geraci, the food and wine historian from the University of California, Berkeley, Regional Oral History Office. Today's date is Wednesday, 10 November, 2004, and seated with me is Doris Muscatine, food and wine writer. This interview is being conducted in Doris's home in Berkeley, California.

Doris, the theme for today's interview is to take a look at your illustrious career as a food and wine writer and some of the major topics you wrote about. So I'd like to begin with talking about food. You've written some wonderful articles through the years, and for today's interview I'd like to concentrate on four areas dealing with the food writing, that I think are very representative of foodways, at least in the Bay Area, and have become national, and almost international representations what the food feel is, or the passion within this area.

Let's start with, first of all, you wrote a great article about coffee. It was called "In Our Cups" and it was March 23, 1986. In that article you make, I think, a wonderful statement. You said: "San Franciscans are the most educated coffee drinkers anywhere." Let's start there. Let's talk a little bit about coffee.

04-00:01:37

Muscatine: Coffee has always been a major thing in San Francisco. People liked their coffee from the days of the gold rush, but it was hard to get coffee then. If it was roasted, it tended to get stale by the time people got here, and if it wasn't roasted, it tended to ferment or react to the weather.

04-00:02:20

Geraci: Coffee ferments?

04-00:02:23

Muscatine:

Well, it spoiled, let's say. At any rate, in 1850, there was a first roasting plant in San Francisco, so they could ship the beans and roast them on the spot. It was called the Pioneer Steam Coffee and Spice Mills, and it was on Powell Street. It was owned by a man named William Bovee. Folger, who came when he was fourteen years old, by ship to join the gold rush, was hired by Bovee to help build the milling plant or roasting plant. He stayed on and he went into the business, but by the end of the year he decided to go try his fortunes in the goldfields, and he took samples of coffee with him. He sold them, and took orders for them among the miners. Finally, he opened his own grocery store. He must just have been fifteen or sixteen years old.

04-00:04:16

Geraci:

This was James Folger? Fifteen or sixteen years old?

04-00:04:20

Muscatine:

Yes. And then he later bought into the Pioneer Spice Mills when he returned to San Francisco. Then he bought out the owner in 1865, so he was the sole owner, and he changed the name to his name, which was J.A. Folger and Company. That lasted until 1963, when it was sold to Proctor and Gamble.

04-00:05:03

Geraci:

So it lasted, then, for a long time.

04-00:05:08

Muscatine:

Three major coffee firms started in San Francisco. One of them was Folger. Another was Hills Bros. The brothers came in 1873 by the newly established transcontinental railroad. Their father was already in San Francisco and within five years they had a shop on Market Street that sold, among other things, coffee and also tea and spices and that sort of thing. They moved several times, but by the 1880s, they practiced "cupping" as it was called. Which had to do with actually tasting the coffee instead of depending on the appearance.

04-00:06:33

Geraci:

So this is becoming a connoisseur-type—?

04-00:06:34

Muscatine:

Yes. In 1900, they introduced coffee in vacuum cans, which was an innovative thing.

04-00:06:53

Geraci:

When you said "they," was this coming from all three of the companies?

04-00:06:56

Muscatine:

No. Just Hills Bros. Hills Bros. lasted as a family-owned firm until 1984 when it sold to Nestlé. The other originator was MJB, which

were the initials of Max Joseph Brandenstein. During World War One, when there was much anti-German feeling, some of the family changed their name to Bransten so it wouldn't sound so German. In 1881, they had a store which sold imported goods such as green coffee and tea and rice and so on, and then they began to roast coffee. In 1987, they also sold to Nestlé, but the Branstens stayed on to supervise, and they assured everyone that Nestlé had all the latest up-to-date equipment and there would be no changes in MJB coffee.

04-00:08:48

Geraci:

So we have a city, then, that coffee is at its heart. Where's that gone since that time? Has there been any—obviously there's a major change in this coffee industry as they're selling to large international or corporate structure. It becomes corporate. What about more at the local level? How do people perceive their coffee here?

04-00:09:13

Muscatine:

This is the home of espresso in this country. There was a coffee roasting house where we have bought all of our coffee ever since we moved here in 1948, and it was opened in 1935 by—it was called Graffeo. Gianbatista Giovanni Repetto bought it, and when you came in to get your coffee beans, he had an old-fashioned roaster. He had it in the window, and he was roasting away, and every now and then he'd sample the beans to see if they were dark enough. While you were waiting for your order, if you were a steady customer and friend, he would offer you an espresso. He would pull out from under the counter a bottle of brandy and ask if you wanted a caffè corretto. He would slosh the coffee with spirits, and it was a very happy occasion. Except one of his customers apparently told on him, so he had to cut it out. That's too bad, I think.

04-00:11:30

Geraci:

Now we're talking about, even in the midst of these large corporate coffeehouses, there's always been this spirit for the "local" here. That's a great example. Were there any other local places where coffee was really an experience for people?

04-00:11:49

Muscatine:

Yes, there were a couple of them. Peet's in Berkeley was one of those coffee places. They always had featured coffees which changed week by week. Not only espresso and French roast, dark roast, but also the better kinds of other lighter coffees. They also sold coffee equipment. Alfred Peet—who began it—once told me that he began as a tea taster, but he ended up selling it to other people and importing green coffee. So he stayed with coffee for the rest of his life.

04-00:13:07

Geraci:

So that would be the time, I would take it, when Peet's extended beyond just more the local. Peet's today does have a national presence. You can buy Peet's coffee—

04-00:13:18

Muscatine:

Yes. And the people who started Starbucks originally used to work in Peet's, I think. There was also another place—Freed, Teller, and Freed—which in 1899 started out. They developed sniffing for the aroma and bouquet. They would pour a little amount—maybe two inches—into a cup and they taught their employees to slurp it from a spoon and circulate air—sucking air over it. You could taste it better. Then they would spit it out into a spittoon.

04-00:14:27

Geraci:

That sounds like a wine tasting.

04-00:14:31

Muscatine:

That was also called “cupping.”

04-00:14:36

Geraci:

We're getting into rituals here that are very much, that we always think about with wine tasting. Where you would take the wine in your mouth and you trill it to oxygenate it. This is the same type of—

04-00:14:51

Muscatine:

Yes. There were also places that sold equipment and repaired equipment. One of those places was Thomas Cara, who started in 1946. It's now owned by his son, Christopher, as Graffeo is owned by the son Luciano, who used to be a banker and came into the business when his father retired. Thomas Cara, who died several years ago, but it continues under his son. He was famous for bringing in the first espresso machine into the United States. Also, he discovered, during his military service during World War Two, the Neapolitan pot, where you put the coffee in the middle and bring the water to a boil in the bottom and then turn it over, so the water drips through the coffee. He says that in the original days, in Naples, where he saw these, they were made out of tin drums, storage drums. They used that material because I guess there was a shortage.

04-00:17:01

Geraci:

That's all they had. Right.

04-00:17:04

Muscatine:

But it's a wonderful, wonderful establishment, still on Pacific, where it has been for a number of years.

04-00:17:22

Geraci:

I guess the question I would have for you at this point is, Why? It's obvious that coffee is one of the food items that's at the heart and soul

of this region. Why is coffee so big? Everything from the MJB, the Folger's, which is really going out to just everyday coffee consumption, to the small establishments that are more for the connoisseurs, or for people that are very much—

04-00:17:53

Muscatine:

Nowadays, people drink coffee all the time. Americans tend to drink six to eight cups of highly acid coffee—weak in appearance, but more acid and more caffeinated than a shot of espresso, which Europeans might drink once or twice a day. But now, people are tending more to drink darker roasts and appreciate other things than the simple acidic coffee of the past. I think that also there are caffè macchiato and caffè espresso and cappuccino and all of those things—caffè latte—are all more familiar now than in a special little group, than they are to a special little group.

04-00:19:33

Geraci:

I guess one of the reasons I chose coffee as an item to talk about is that it seems to be, like many things in this area, that has immigrants bringing it in. It's a culinary thing that can appeal to both connoisseurs and everyday people, but this area's turned it into almost a ritualistic, or a very large commercial success. I mean, coffee houses in the Bay Area are everywhere.

04-00:20:05

Muscatine:

Yes. And you can—

04-00:20:07

Geraci:

So does this show a change in Americans?

04-00:20:09

Muscatine:

—go there and sit there and read or do your work. No one hurries you out after you buy a cup of coffee.

04-00:20:21

Geraci:

Unlike many restaurants.

04-00:20:22

Muscatine:

Yes.

04-00:20:25

Geraci:

I know in the article you make a statement about an East Bay Peet's Coffee, Francis Ford Coppola wrote *The Godfather*.

04-00:20:35

Muscatine:

I think that was in the Caffè Trieste in San Francisco, but that is an old coffeehouse and it's had many famous people among its clients. They hang out there. Francis Ford Coppola did indeed write the screenplay *The Godfather* there.

04-00:21:10
Geraci: The coffee house, then, is a place where people can get together?

04-00:21:15
Muscatine: Yes.

04-00:21:16
Geraci: Can talk. They don't feel pressured to leave.

04-00:21:19
Muscatine: Right.

04-00:21:20
Geraci: It's a sense of community, then.

04-00:21:22
Muscatine: It's like a living room, for social reasons. [coughs]

04-00:21:35
Geraci: Would you like to take a break?

04-00:21:34
Muscatine: Yes. Sorry.

04-00:21:44
Geraci: That's okay. I guess another place I was somewhat interested in is the home of Irish coffee, the Buena Vista Café.

04-00:21:49
Muscatine: Oh, Yes! Stanton Delaplane discovered that years ago. I think he was the one who introduced it to Buena Vista. I forget now whether he had it in Ireland or concocted it from Irish whisky and whipped cream and coffee. I don't remember exactly what his connection was to the origins, but he certainly is the one who introduced it to the Buena Vista Café and it has been a stand-by ever since.

04-00:22:55
Geraci: To this day. In fact, it's in all the tour guide books. For the home of Irish Coffee.

04-00:23:03
Muscatine: And Enrico Banducci, who was once called the Squire of North Beach, or something of the sort, had the first outdoor seating for a coffee house. But he also combined it with a restaurant. He loved to cook, but he always thought that coffee was highly important. He was working on an invention of a spray which would provide coffee aroma for the household, so it would smell inviting. He often ground his coffee and had the waiters parade through the restaurant so that the odors would permeate. He was one of the first coffee houses to introduce the espresso and cappuccino and caffè latte and macchiato. He had outdoor tables in the fifties. Years ago. He said that coffee cans should

be square because they would fit in a refrigerator better. He had all sorts of interesting notions.

04-00:25:10

Geraci:

Would it be fair—I'll let you respond to this—if I made the comment that the present-day coffee phenomenon, nationwide, for Americans, is really in many ways a Bay Area gift that we've given. Much of that energy from what you've described here started here and then was spread outward.

04-00:25:34

Muscatine:

I don't know anything about the history of coffee drinking in the East, so whether we influenced New York City or not, I don't know. But certainly it was a big thing here and is still a big thing. People love to congregate in coffee houses, and I think that there aren't so many coffee houses in the East as there are here, or depending on the population.

04-00:26:28

Geraci:

It seems in the East now you have two major chains—Dunkin' Donuts and Starbucks would be the two places people go. But not the amount of independent coffee houses like I've experienced here.

04-00:26:40

Muscatine:

I don't really know if they're tucked into neighborhoods and that sort of thing.

04-00:26:52

Geraci:

Okay. Anything else you'd like to say about coffee?

04-00:26:51

Muscatine:

I think not. [laughter]

04-00:27:03

Geraci:

That's a closed subject! Well, then let's move to the next part, which would be talking about bread. You've written quite a few articles there again dealing with bread. One of them in particular is very important in that when we think of bread, we think of sourdough. No matter where I've been in the United States—airports, wherever it may be—it's always an important thing. Stores will have a little sign: San Francisco Sourdough. That is obviously something that has generated out of here, as a regional thing. You wrote a great article called "On a Roll: the Sweet Success of San Francisco's Sourdough." Let's talk about sourdough bread.

04-00:27:51

Muscatine:

Sourdough is made by a starter, or sponge, which is a bacterium and yeast that affect the bread. But it changes from place to place. Also water and flour and salt, which go into the basic bread, influence it depending on where you buy them, or what mixture you use.

04-00:28:46

Geraci:

I would take it from what you just said, climate plays a role in it also.

04-00:28:51

Muscatine:

Yes. And it changes completely. Even the same starter, if sent to another place, will change and take on some of the local characteristics. Or the bacteria will change. So sourdough bread in San Francisco is quite different than if you ship the dough elsewhere. Some of this is solved by partially baking and finishing it in a local place. And some of it is solved by guarding completely and almost freezing—but not quite—and sending by air to other cities like Chicago and then trying to bake the product as unchanged as possible.

Originally, sourdough came here—possibly it was brought by French settlers leaving Mexico after the 1838 Mexican Pastry War, in which there was some dispute over a French baker who claimed that he was underpaid or something and sued the Mexican government for some vast amount of money, and there was finally an insurrection. So French settlers fled Mexico and they brought with them the sponge or starter for French bread. They think. And wagon trains from the East often carried starters with them so they could bake bread en route. Basque shepherds were another source. They went up into the mountains to fill their functions as shepherds and were often gone for months at a time, and had to bake their bread. So they're considered to have maybe have brought the bread. People on the way to the gold rush, the Forty-niners, their trail often took them through Mexico, where they bought various equipment for the mines, but also possibly starter. They all are possible sources of the original sourdough. The Forty-niners were called "sourdoughs." They all baked their bread, and they concocted ovens—Dutch ovens—with coals underneath and on top. They often took the starter to bed with them if it were cold and they thought it would be damaged. So, they all baked.

04-00:33:27

Geraci:

Interesting. I guess, then, from what you've just laid out for me is a story—again, we're looking at this immigrant influence on cuisine that's taking place in this city. It's because the city is cosmopolitan and does have this vast influence of French, Italian, German, Mexican—all these people are coming in, bringing their foodways and this is a great mixing ground, I guess, in some ways.

04-00:33:59

Muscatine:

But nowadays San Francisco is known as the sourdough bread capital. Yet it derived from other cultures.

04-00:34:15

Geraci:

But as you said, at least the sourdough bread here is different than it would be in other areas. So it is a distinctive bread.

04-00:34:27

Muscatine:

In more recent times, Leo Klein, who was a scientist working for the government and he lived in Albany, and he wanted to discover what made San Francisco sourdough bread different than elsewhere. He discovered a unique bacteria, which he named—you get to name it if you discover something in science—*Lactobacillus San Francisco*. That, in combination or in symbiotic relation with a yeast which was named *Saccharomyces exigens*, made the unique situation for San Francisco sourdough. When it's shipped, the microflora in other places change and the relationship is different. But he discovered that the yeasts elsewhere feed on the sugar in the dough, and are killed by a certain amount of acetic acid, which is by-product of the bacteria. But the San Francisco *Lactobacillus*, conversely, eats the sugar and the yeast won't touch it. This particular yeast. The bacteria creates high levels of acetic acid and the yeast is particularly tolerant of high levels, which therefore makes the sour taste and the longer time of rising, and a drier surface because of the longer rising time. Which results in a thicker crust and a chewier bread.

04-00:37:56

Geraci:

That almost takes the wonder out of it! Now, I guess one part that goes along with this, after we've just finished talking about coffee, what about bakeries then, within this region? It seems we've just laid the story down of a wonderful independent coffee shop system at the local level here, that somewhat—I think—has been exported. What about bakeries in San Francisco?

04-00:38:26

Muscatine:

The first bakery was called Boudin, and it was opened by a Frenchman in 1849. It was then called the French Bread Baking Company. The Frenchman who started it, Isadore Boudin, had fled from the Mexican Pastry Wars, and he opened it in 1849. The subsequent employees in 1945 bought it and they were named Steve Geraldo and Hyman Singer. By 1972, Geraldo became the sole owner. The Parisien Bakery started in 1856, and in the late 1800s Toscana and Colombo started in Oakland. In 1898, Larabarue brothers—who were Basque brothers—started the famous Larabarue Bakery which lasted until 1976. They were famous because they sent breads to New York, Paris, London, Guam, Hawaii, Tokyo, Frankfurt. Geraldos, in 1983, they formed the French Bread Company and they bought Parisien, Colombo, Boudin, Toscana. And they bought the label of Larabarue, so you would often see bread from Larraburu and it was baked in one of the other bakeries. The Parisien usually.

Also, Ernie's Restaurant served the first baguettes, which Venetian Bakery made for them. They cut them up and served them, and they were absolutely wonderful. When Venetian Bakery went out of business, they gave me some of their starter. For years we had

wonderful baguettes, without the current variety, which you can now get wonderful baguettes all over the area. I think that's more or less the history of the baking companies. More recently there have been places like Tassajara, which makes bread in its bakery in San Francisco. It's a zen buddhist monastery in Big Sur and it's extremely very difficult to get there, but they're noted for their vegetarian food and breads and that sort of thing. So it's worth a pilgrimage one time. They also have a connection to Green Gulch Farm in Marin and Greens Restaurant—a vegetarian restaurant in San Francisco.

The Cheese Board Collective in Berkeley started out selling cheeses and eventually began baking bread, and now is well-known for its breads. They have over, I think it's 400 cheeses, but it's equally known for its breads. Acme, in Berkeley, has a sourdough called pain au levain, and it's wonderful bread. They bake for Chez Panisse and various restaurants. It's sold throughout the Bay Area now. Their starter, or sponge, is made from grape yeasts. I think that Charles Sullivan, who is the father of the baker, Steve Sullivan, is a historian but also has or had a vineyard and the grapes came from him at some point. I think they have more than one starter. And Semifreddi, who was started by bakers, I think, and it's an equally famous bread, but the person who started it went on to open Phoenix, which is a bread-baking and pasta-making place, and now serves food.

04-00:45:55

Geraci:

I believe that's Eric Sartenaer, isn't it?

04-00:45:58

Muscatine:

Yes.

04-00:46:01

Geraci:

In just kind of reflecting on what we've just talked about, I guess one thing for the Bay Area that we have to be thankful for is the Mexican Pastry Wars. [laughter] It seems to have brought, at least for bread in this region and what has become a bread specialty, a very French tradition, although there is some of the Basque. But there is a very large French tradition here. At one time you had written a great article—it was called "If you've starved for real old-fashioned bread, there's a little man in Paris." I'll let you talk about him—Lionel Poilâne?

04-00:46:48

Muscatine:

Poilâne.

04-00:46:50

Geraci:

Poilâne, pardon me. He had a great quote: "Bread deals with living things, with giving life, with growth, with the seed, the grain that nurtures. Breadmaking is basically sexual from farming to baking." I

love that. I mean bread becomes—it is the staff of life, almost in a biblical sense then. I would like to talk about him a little bit.

04-00:47:17

Muscatine:

That occurred at a lunch at which I was present, and there was a butcher who looked more like a banker—dark suit, rosette, tie, white shirt—and the father of Lionel, who is since dead, as is Lionel, and they were discussing the difference between butchering or slaughtering and death, and bread baking, and that's the quote that Lionel made.

04-00:48:32

Geraci:

So what were the quotes about butchering then?

04-00:48:40

Muscatine:

That it had to do with slaughter and blood and power over the creature whose life you ended. Exactly the opposite of seeds and sprouting and rising and affirmative things.

04-00:49:08

Geraci:

So this becomes really a fascinating story of light and dark—slaughtering being the dark, the butchering of the animal, the killing, the taking of life, and bread, being that which gives us almost a Christian resurrection-type ideology: from the seed will spring the plant, the bread, and all this life. That's interesting. I would have loved to have seen the conversation between these two men. It must have been heated.

04-00:49:36

Muscatine:

It was wonderful.

04-00:49:40

Geraci:

The dynamics of talking about something like that. I know that you had actually taken a trip to Paris to see the bakeries there and that you had written about it one time. Well, that was the “If you're starved for real old-fashioned bread...” where you talk about selling to famous people like Salvador Dali, Pierre Cardin, Brigitte Bardot, President Georges Pompidou. Bread is just this wonderful symbol, this staff of life.

04-00:50:20

Muscatine:

The father of Poilâne, who started out—when we met Lionel, he was simply working in the bakery. When you went into the bakery, it is a very small shop on the Rue du Cherche Midi. You went beyond the front room, in which the wares were displayed and you stood in line to buy things, and there were various women clerks attending to selling. You went beyond that into what was then the senior Poilâne's office. It had among other things a chandelier that was wired and actually lit, but it was made entirely of bread dough. He often showed—he took delight in showing you his collection of envelopes, which were highly

illustrative, and had been made by artists all around the world who were addressing him. Some of them were very bawdy because the baguettes and miche, which are the round large loaves, are very suggestive of anatomy. And the word Poilâne—"poile" is hair and "âne" is ass, so it's the hair of the ass. All of these things were very subjective, and I one time asked him, "How do they get through the Post Office?" And the father said, "Oh, it amuses the postmen." [laughter]

04-00:53:07

Geraci: That's a great story.

04-00:53:09

Muscatine: The father used to sit on a chair, the seat of which was in shreds. It was a cane seat and it hung down in shreds and there was a cushion over it on which he sat. And there was a cat which had a bowl of flour in which he dipped his paw occasionally and licked it off when he felt hungry. But now they have a huge building and new offices and all sorts of things, because they've expanded from the bakery to the supplying various restaurants. They even import the bread in the United States, but it's expensive. It doesn't spoil before ten days or so although it has no preservatives. It's very longlasting. So you can ship it and it's okay.

04-00:54:49

Geraci: And still have a decent loaf of bread. That's great. Now, as we shift here a little bit, it seems then that to summarize momentarily: coffee seems to have been an Italian import, somewhat, to the Bay Area; bread is very much a French import to the Bay Area; and I know we're going to do maybe a little bit out of the sequence I told you before, but let's talk about another foreign food. That's vinegar.

04-00:55:28

Muscatine: Yes.

04-00:55:32

Geraci: There again, another thing given to us by an ethnic group.

04-00:55:37

Muscatine: Well, balsamic vinegar surely is. It comes from Italy. True balsamic vinegar is defined by law and has to come from a very small area around Modena. There are towns in which everybody makes their own balsamic vinegar, such as Spilamberto, which I wrote about.

04-00:56:34

Geraci: That was your *Gastronomica* article.

04-00:56:36

Muscatine: Yes. Chefs and cooks didn't identify balsamic vinegar. I don't think it was much used before the 1850s. When we were in Italy, we once in

Rome had strawberries—wild strawberries—which were dressed with a balsamic vinegar and sugar. They were so unusual that I asked the proprietor for the recipe, and he said, “You put vinegar and sugar,” but he didn’t say “balsamic vinegar.” Balsamic is made like the solera process in sherry, by aging and fermenting and so on in a succession of casks, each of a different wood. Drawing some off once a year, for the family use in the case of Spilamberto, and filling the empty space from the barrel next in size, and so on. There are in the battery of barrels maybe seven or so—sometimes ten—and they’re all of different woods. English oak, acacia, locust, chestnut. Each lends its flavor to the finished product.

First off, you have to take white wine, crushed grapes and skins, and outdoors boil them for maybe two days, until they reduce in size to half and are syrupy. That’s called saba, and it’s used in cooking and has been for some time. You put that to ferment in the largest barrel and that’s the start, and you inoculate it with a little vinegar from regular vinegar, and that starts the fermentation, and you go on from there.

04-01:00:22

Geraci:

So this is quite an involved process.

04-01:00:23

Muscatine:

Oh, yes.

04-01:00:24

Geraci:

But a distinctive flavor. Something very different.

04-01:00:30

Muscatine:

Quite different than regular vinegar, and nowadays you see on every supermarket shelf you see balsamic vinegars, but there’s a distinction. A true, traditional balsamic vinegar—which is labeled as such—has to be at least ten years’ old. The barrels have to have been—the result has to have been in barrels for at least ten years. If it’s extra vecchio—extra old—it has to be at least twenty-five years in the process. And there are some that are older than that. You pay accordingly. But it has to be of certain grapes. The white grape, trebbiano, is the principal one but anything that’s grown in the same defined locality can be used. Government, many years ago, made an edict that you could call balsamic vinegar of Modena was okay to use, but you see that on the store shelves. And it sometimes says six or eight or ten years old. That’s a very little portion of six- or eight- or ten-years-old vinegar, which is incorporated or added to the usual regular balsamic that’s—it’s made in the same way but not so lengthy a process.

04-01:03:11

Geraci:

Could I compare this to these small premium wineries that hand-craft a wine as opposed to trying to mass-produce a particular wine? It seems that—you're right; I can find balsamic vinegar in any grocery store at this point. But there's that difference between the ultra-premium and just the commercial grade.

04-01:03:40

Muscatine:

Besides which, "balsamic vinegar" can be from any place, have anything—sugar added, whatever. So it doesn't mean anything. So if you see a bargain, it's probably not balsamic vinegar. The traditional is the hand-crafted, original, expensive stuff, and the balsamic vinegar of Modena can add caramel and add little bits of older wine, and advertise that it's eight-years-old vinegar. But not! Some of those are fairly expensive.

04-01:04:51

Geraci:

Yes. Good balsamic vinegars are not a cheap item.

04-01:04:57

Muscatine:

No.

04-01:05:00

Geraci:

They're very expensive. Interesting. Well, in the last of the food items that I'd like to talk about on just the last few minutes of this disk. Kind of shift directions now. Another thing that seems to be something that we talk about in the Bay Area—the rest of the United States, probably; maybe even the world looks at it and sees—is the idea of our dedication, in many ways, to pure foods or organic foods. I know one of the things that you've written about and that is very big in this area now is the whole idea of the free-range chicken. I know you've written about that, so let's talk about that for a second.

04-01:05:40

Muscatine:

First of all, chickens are lazy, not very bright, and easily stressed out, respond to variations in temperature, not favorably. So if you make a range-capable chicken, you open the outdoors so they can go out at will. You find that the laziness and the—if it's warm outside, they would just as soon stay in. But there are certainly advantages in free-range chickens in that they can eat. They roam more freely. Most of them have a real chicken yard to roam about in, but because they're subject to predators, they have to be brought in at night. However, their diet consists of vegetarian things like grasses and scratching for grubs and worms and beetles and such. But also includes pebbles and stones, which are acting in the chicken like fiber does in a human. So it makes them go more freely—defecate, and so on. Often the beetles and grubs and so on that they pick up have parasites in them. Also bird droppings have sometimes parasites, and chickens are particularly subject to parasites, so it's a mixed blessing as to whether they go out

or are fed indoors by-products of poultry or animals, which often have a high fat content and make them grow much more readily. Also, indoors, many people—farmers—put the lights on all the time to fool the chickens into thinking that it's daytime and they should eat. So they grow and mature and are slaughtered much quicker than chickens that go on the range.

04-01:09:42

Geraci:

I guess there are two questions that are just coming to my mind right now. First off, from what you've just explained, is it really worth all the effort for free-range? And the second part to that being, it seems to me that it's more an issue of diet, i.e., mad cow disease. We're feeding beef by-products that may give the disease to cows, so therefore it perpetuates it. I guess it's more of a humane issue than a food quality issue. Would that be fair to say? Just the idea of free-range.

04-01:10:24

Muscatine:

Free-range chickens, according to a tasting—several, many tastings, but one which I attended was at the Cakebread Winery, and they had many wine and food writers and judges and teachers and various people who were in business to sell these chickens—both sides; free-range and not free-range. And they almost unanimously—I think there was just one person who voted against the free-range. Everybody found that free-range had more flavor, less fat.

04-01:11:33

Geraci:

So there is a difference?

04-01:11:34

Muscatine:

Yes. So there is a difference.

04-01:11:38

Geraci:

And then coupled with diet, that can make for a very—

04-01:11:42

Muscatine:

All chickens are given antibiotics because they're particularly subject to infections—viral infections and, I guess, bacterial infections, if they're given antibiotics. If they are given antibiotics, responsible people just give them for a couple of weeks, whereas other people—mass-producers—give them for months at a time, and add them to the feed. So it's a question of—

04-01:12:49

Geraci:

Balance, almost.

04-01:12:50

Muscatine:

Balance, Yes. And about 70 percent of the crop could be wiped out by an infection.

04-01:13:03

Geraci: So this could be catastrophic for the rancher themselves.

04-01:13:07

Muscatine: So it's no wonder that they start them off resistant.

04-01:13:13

Geraci: Well, we're just about at the end of this disk, so I think this is a perfect place for us to just stop for a moment.

[End session]

Interview # 04: December 8, 2004

Audio File 5

05-00:00:06

Geraci: I am Vic Geraci, Food and Wine historian from the University of California, Berkeley, Regional Oral History Office. Today's date is Wednesday, December 8, 2004, and seated with me is Doris Muscatine, food writer. This interview is being conducted in Doris's home in Berkeley, California.

Well, Doris, good morning, and thank you again. This is our next interview in our series. There were some corrections that you wanted to make as you thought back.

05-00:00:40

Muscatine: And amplifications about Jack's Restaurant.

05-00:00:46

Geraci: Okay, so why don't we start there, and we'll just move from this point.

05-00:00:48

Muscatine: I don't remember whether we said that Jack's began in 1864. It was the oldest French restaurant in the City, and in 1884, Jacques Monique was the owner. At the end of the century, he sold it to Edward Blanquie, who didn't change the name to reflect the new ownership, so it remained Jack's Rotisserie, which it was called. Later, they did alterations to the place, and they simplified the name to Jack's at that time. Michel Redinger worked at Jack's from 1889 to 1906, and he bought an interest in the place after the earthquake and fire.

05-00:02:06

Geraci: What was his job? Was he the chef?

05-00:02:07

Muscatine: No. He was—

05-00:02:09

Geraci: He just bought an interest in it.

05-00:02:11

Muscatine:

Yes. He was a waiter, I think, at Jacks, originally, and then bought an interest. After the fire and earthquake, it operated on Golden Gate Avenue until 1907, when they reopened on Sacramento Street, where it had been. Paul Redinger—Michael's brother—worked there since 1903, and he took over after Michael retired. Then Paul's son, Jack, took over after that. So he was the last owner and it was a coincidence that his name was Jack. And I must mention Dominique, who was our waiter forever, and he was absolutely wonderful. When Jeanty bought the place, he was there to greet the guests on the re-opening.

05-00:03:55

Geraci:

But you always had him as a regular waiter there?

05-00:03:57

Muscatine:

Yes. Always. He was absolutely wonderful. On the closing night, he brought us the most wonderful wine from the cellar. It was on New Year's Eve when it finally closed.

05-00:04:17

Geraci:

What year was this?

05-00:04:20

Muscatine:

I don't remember, but it was about eight or ten years ago. Louis Lurie, who was a financier and man-about-town, ate lunch at the same table for fifty-two or more years. It was always the same round table, and he had about seven or eight guests with him, every day. He was famous for eating there. You saw hatted and gloved older ladies at lunch, with their martinis and their sole Marguery. And the men, who were older men, came every day and had mutton chops with the kidneys attached, and mock turtle soup to begin with. They were famous for frogs' legs, and crêpes, and sorrel soup.

05-00:05:55

Geraci:

So they really stuck to this French cuisine?

05-00:05:55

Muscatine:

Yes. It was really a rotisserie-brasserie-bistro type of cooking. Nothing fancy, but excellent. They had wonderful cracked Dungeness crab. They cracked it absolutely perfectly, on the edge, and I one time asked Dominique, how did they manage to crack it so well. He said, "Come with me into the kitchen." They used an old sawed-off chair leg, wooden chair leg, which was just the right weight to crack the crab without mashing it or splintering it. Absolutely perfect. And it was all in the wrist. If you used your forearm, it was too strong. They showed me how they cracked the crab, and then they said, "Take the crab hammer—the old chair leg—we'll get another."

05-00:07:30

Geraci:

Do you still have it?

05-00:07:32
Muscatine: Yes. I've had it ever since.

05-00:07:38
Geraci: A new use for a chair leg. I like that.

05-00:07:42
Muscatine: Yes. But it was really an interesting place.

05-00:07:49
Geraci: Is that something we're missing from restaurants today? That sort of, almost family feel when you walk into—

05-00:07:58
Muscatine: I think if you make an acquaintance and go back often enough, maybe some restaurants recognize you as one of the family.

05-00:08:15
Geraci: A regular. Because that seems like a very intimate type of eatery at that point.

05-00:08:21
Muscatine: One time when I was writing the first book, *Cook's Tour*, and that was in the sixties, early sixties, I went there with the intention of interviewing Jack and collecting some recipes and so on. I sat there and had lunch, and the table next to me was a bunch of regulars. We began to chat and we became immediate friends, and joined forces, and suddenly one of us said, "It's time for dinner!" So we had dinner.

05-00:09:19
Geraci: That is a long conversation. [laughter] That is amazing. Any other restaurant-type—?

05-00:09:34
Muscatine: No, but I did want to say that we inherited from the Spanish and Mexicans, which is quite a different topic, but I don't think I said before that when the Mexicans and Spanish came up the coast and established the missions, and so on, that we learned from them hospitality. They always planted wine grapes, wherever they went. They introduced barbecuing, or cooking over an open fire. And they even left money for travelers in their rooms, so that they would be okay on their travels.

05-00:10:36
Geraci: A real sense of a guest being taken care of, then.

05-00:10:41
Muscatine: Yes. Hospitality.

05-00:10:46

Geraci:

That's the reason we even call it the "hospitality trade" today. One of the things then, I guess, to segue to is that there have been—I think most people would agree there has been—a lot of changes in restaurants and restaurateuring and hospitality, and these types of service. What types of things stick out in your mind as major shifts?

05-00:11:07

Muscatine:

For one thing, the fancy restaurants, many of them, have closed—that we grew up with and got used to—such as Ernie's and Alexis and the Blue Fox, and El Prado, and the Redwood Room, and Trader Vic's, which has opened again but it has been only for a couple of weeks. The Garden Court is still there, however. But now we have Masa's and Fifth Floor and the Ritz and Michael Minna in the St. Francis, Barry Danko, Fleur de Lys, Campton Place, and downstairs at Chez Panisse. These are all more recent fancy places.

05-00:12:28

Geraci:

Why do you think we had a shift and we kind of lost them for a while?

05-00:12:31

Muscatine:

I don't know. I think maybe they served heavier foods and larger portions. Certainly the meals that we ate at Ernie's were entirely different than what you would get now at a fancy restaurant. Also, the proprietors aged and wanted to retire, so it was—

05-00:13:11

Geraci:

It was almost like a generation shift that needed to take place.

05-00:13:15

Muscatine:

Yes.

05-00:13:17

Geraci:

Now, you mentioned the size of meals, the cuisine itself. Did they get larger? Did they get smaller?

05-00:13:25

Muscatine:

When we used to go to Ernie's, for instance, which was an elegant establishment, it didn't start out that way. But the sons who inherited it from the father changed the red checkered tablecloths and plonk and that sort of thing, to fancier and fancier meals. We used to get cracked crab and garbanzo bean salad and tortellini and soup. A platter of antipasto. All of that came with your meal. Then we would have for the main course, usually steak on skewers and flamed maybe over wild rice or some sort of rice concoction. Then, in the end, we would have banana fritters—

05-00:15:01

Geraci:

This is the proverbial feast.

05-00:15:03
Muscatine:

That was usual. It's much changed.

05-00:15:14
Geraci:

Could we account some of that change maybe a shift towards more the Mediterranean restaurant style of courses and stages with smaller amounts, but more different courses?

05-00:15:26
Muscatine:

I don't know why that happened and why the shift was certainly worldwide. In France, they created nouvelle cuisine, and it was odd combinations. It seemed as if invention was the name of the game for many places. Not even tasty.

05-00:16:03
Geraci:

Could it have been that a change in the way that we even cooked at home. It seems, from what you've just described, these older up-scale restaurants were an extension of home cuisine. In some ways. Am I correct in saying that?

05-00:16:22
Muscatine:

I don't know, because home cooking and restaurant cooking of that complication are entirely different. Cuts of meat are different. Sauces and stocks are different. But there was an emphasis on lighter foods, so cream and butter and flour sauces, thickened sauces, were replaced by natural vegetable juices.

05-00:17:07
Geraci:

And that would explain more of a Mediterranean approach as opposed to the traditional French approach using much more, as you said, the creams, eggs. A lot of the sauces were very heavy in fat.

05-00:17:20
Muscatine:

Yes. And so the emphasis was on healthier food and lighter food, and much more fish than we used to have. But even the French places that were more bistro-like, though they had not fancy food, but moderate food, they all closed. Like Charles, and Chez Marguerite, and Chez Léon, and L'Étoile, La Petite Auberge, the Poodle Dog—all closed. And I don't know whether they were influenced by the style of food, or whether the people got old and retired.

05-00:18:53
Geraci:

I notice overwhelmingly those seem to be French restaurants.

05-00:18:56
Muscatine:

Yes. They were French, but other things changed. For instance, there used to be a lot of family-style restaurants like Hotel du Midi, Basque. Hotel d'Espagne was Basque. La Pantera was Italian. Restaurant de France, and Des Alpes. Only one or two of those remain. They used to be places where you would go and pay a sum of money and sit at a

communal table, perhaps. It was very cheap and the dinner included your wine. They would bring a huge bowl of soup, and you could have as much as you wanted. Then they would bring a salad and a main course, and vegetables, and usually fruit for dessert. It was very, very inexpensive. Those places are gone now. Some of them were a little fancier, but they were all quite wonderful.

05-00:20:52

Geraci:

Do you think those have been maybe somewhat replaced with the larger commercial or corporate-type eateries—TGI Friday—that really are serving, you know, big cuisines. I'm not saying that the food would be equivalent, but maybe that's been part of it.

05-00:21:17

Muscatine:

Maybe. But also there was a spirit to those places. For instance, Ray's was a bar on Columbus Avenue. They had two or three tables or like booths. And they had the most wonderful pasta and steak and only two or three people could eat, or two or three tables' worth of people could eat at any given time. It was different than the corporate places today. There was a spirit and familiarity.

05-00:22:33

Geraci:

Also, I mean, it would seem to me that they weren't chasing you out of the table when your check arrives and you're not even through with your main course.

05-00:22:39

Muscatine:

No. No. Not at all. It was leisurely and wonderful, and there are places like that today. The old-style places like Tadich Grill are still here, and Sam's, and Swan's Oyster House, where you sit at a counter, but those are sort of old-fashioned still. Although they don't any longer have terrapin or green turtle or that sort of thing. But Bocce Ball and The Old Spaghetti Factory and Mike's Pool Hall and Veneto, which had a gondola actually in the water—[laughs] Those places are all gone. They were sort of off-beat.

05-00:23:52

Geraci:

So it seems to me that what you're drawing here is that we've lost the individuality of the little restaurants, and they're being replaced with these larger chain or corporate-type—every time I go to a certain type of corporate restaurant, I know that each one's going to be familiar. The menu will be familiar. The design will be familiar.

05-00:24:30

Muscatine:

Well, in Lupo's, which is now called Tomaso's because the Italian chef bought it—or the Chinese chef bought it from the Italian Cantalupo family—he was the chef all along. Frank Cantalupo used to come and get down on his knees and beseech you to have certain things, like the oysters. Lupo's oysters are quite famous. They had

lemon juice and a lot of garlic, and breadcrumbs, and were put under the broiler. Absolutely delicious.

05-00:25:29

Geraci:

I take it we're talking—this is all regional and seasonal foods. They're very local-type foods.

05-00:25:35

Muscatine:

Yes. Frank used to beseech you to have certain things. That's no longer the case. Frank Cantalupo is dead long since, and it's Tomaso's now, and it has much the same food, but no beseeching person.

05-00:26:11

Geraci:

I think that's what I had asked you a little bit earlier. It seems that we're losing the intimacy of the restaurant.

05-00:26:17

Muscatine:

Yes. And Sam Wo's in Chinatown's Edsel Ford Fong, who used to wait on you, also would beseech you to have certain dishes, and that's no longer possible, I don't think. Edsel Ford Fong died long ago, also.

05-00:26:58

Geraci:

Could it be that more people are eating out and there's just so much more demand?

05-00:27:05

Muscatine:

Chinatown has entirely changed. It used to be all Cantonese. When Cecilia Chiang came, I think in 1960s, early sixties or maybe even late fifties—I don't know—she opened a place on Polk Street, outside of Chinatown and served Mandarin cuisine, which is sort of Pekinese imperial—the palace and their imperial family and Shanghai mix. But always for the upper class or elite.

05-00:28:14

Geraci:

A haute cuisine.

05-00:28:15

Muscatine:

Yes. That was different than Cantonese. Now, you have everything. You have Hunan, which uses fagara peppers and crushed red peppers and smoked hams, much smoking. And Szechuan. And Chung King. There are restaurants that serve fiery dishes. Mongolian and Manchurian have either Mongolian firepots or nomadic food like grilled meats. Fukien has seafoods and soups. All of South-east Asia, as well, has been introduced. And there are fusion cuisines, where you combine French and Vietnamese. Or French and Thai. Or some South-east Asian with European touches. It's all quite different.

05-00:30:01

Geraci:

Could part of the explanation for this be the changes in the immigration patterns? We're talking food politics. Are there more different types of Asians, or groups of Asians, coming in?

05-00:30:14

Muscatine:

Yes, because the 20,000 who came during the gold rush were from the Canton area. They came to work on the—even the railroad that they dug. They dug many of the vineyard caves, and dug tunnels and all sorts of things, and had laundries, and restaurants. From the earliest days. Their cooking was sweet and sour, and thickened with cornstarch or some such. Now, there's cooking from all of the other provinces, because people have come from all the other provinces.

05-00:31:34

Geraci:

So it seems then that California had for a long period of time, then, a basic Cantonese cuisine, and that would almost tie to the Chinese Exclusion Act. Because for years, there are no Asians other than the original Cantonese that were here, and it wouldn't be until after World War II with new Asian immigrants that we start bringing in all this different cuisine.

05-00:31:57

Muscatine:

You're right. Absolutely. The Japanese—which is extremely popular now—was very limited in the old days because Japanese didn't come as the Chinese did. Sushi and sashimi and yakatori and all sorts of even kaiseki feasts—high-scale Japanese cooking—as well as the more informal places.

05-00:32:50

Geraci:

Could part of that have been the same explanation, possibly, then for the French restaurants? Originally, during the gold rush, you had mentioned many of these people bringing their personal chefs in, who are French. We have an influx of French cuisine, and then it would be later on, as we start having all these other immigrant groups come in, that we have a shift.

05-00:33:16

Muscatine:

Because we have immigrant groups, for instance, from Brazil and Argentina, and we have influences from South America, which we didn't have originally. Yes, I think.

05-00:33:40

Geraci:

I was fascinated also, you mentioned a lot of Basque food, and the Basque restaurants.

05-00:33:47

Muscatine:

That's not prevalent so much any more, but Basques came to this country to be shepherds. Mainly men. They stayed in hotels in North

Beach on their way to the shepherding, and that's how the family-style Basque places began.

05-00:34:26

Geraci:

People are bringing their foods with them, and that's the beauty of this American or this regional cuisine, is that it's a combination of so many different foods.

05-00:34:41

Muscatine:

Yes. And we also have a new Spanish influence with many tapas restaurants. The other day we ate in a tapas restaurant which is actually Basque. It's called Bocadillos. There are little sandwiches of sausage, and absolutely delicious. This is a chef named Hirigoyen, who originally had Fringale. He's sold it. And then opened a Basque place called Piperade. This Bocadillos is a Basque place, only recently opened, that has tapas.

05-00:35:49

Geraci:

The small-plate movement right now is very, very big. But I think that's also tied to some of the health issues of overeating. People looking for smaller portions than maybe they had in the past.

05-00:36:02

Muscatine:

Instead of a smorgasbord.

05-00:36:04

Geraci:

Instead of smorgasbord, we're supersizing in a McDonald's-type world now. They're looking for the small plate. Still wanting to taste some really nice foods, well prepared.

05-00:36:13

Muscatine:

But little bits.

05-00:36:14

Geraci:

In smaller amounts, right. I find that very interesting that these chefs of certain ethnicities become experts in other ethnic cultural cuisines.

05-00:36:30

Muscatine:

Yes, they do.

05-00:36:32

Geraci:

So, any other major changes, you think, that you've seen in the restaurant scene?

05-00:36:41

Muscatine:

Just an emphasis on health. For instance, there are vegetarian restaurants now because people are alarmed. There are many more fish restaurants. I think fish was always included as a course in the old days. Now, you have restaurants like Farallone and Aqua, that specialize in rather elaborate preparations of fish. You still have old-fashioned

Tadich's and Sam's and Swans, where it's simple, but I don't know that they've even lightened things that much.

05-00:37:48

Geraci:

[laughs] That's good! As we're looking at it now, if you go into downtown San Francisco, Morton's of Chicago—there are national chains. Has that helped or hindered?

05-00:38:07

Muscatine:

San Francisco doesn't usually go for change. Morton's is okay. It's doing well, I think. But it's right off Union Square, so it gets tourists and such. San Franciscans tend to go to Harris's, and there is no longer Grison's, which used to be a famous steakhouse. Nowadays, you go to places like—well, Harris's is beef. Alfred's is what I was trying to think of. That still exists, apparently.

05-00:39:31

Geraci:

So good old red meat still has its place.

05-00:39:33

Muscatine:

Yes. And George Moroni, who was chef at Fifth Floor and was chef at the Bel Air Hotel when he was twenty-two, then moved up here and opened a number of wonderful high-end restaurants, and has recently opened Tartare in which he creates many tartares of various things. Like ceviches. But they're called tartare. They're all raw, with seasoning. He is going to open a steakhouse alongside of Tartare. Not physically.

05-00:40:50

Geraci:

Right now, for you and your husband, what are your favorite places to go to?

05-00:40:56

Muscatine:

Chez Panisse is one of our very favorites. There, the emphasis is on regional, local ingredients, special lettuces and fresh things. They don't put anything on the menu that isn't absolutely fresh. For instance, when the man who raises geese for them, when he has enough to supply the restaurant, he will call. I don't know that it's geese, but I'm using that as an example. He will call and say, "I have enough geese so that you can have a supply for the restaurant." And they buy them that week and you get your goose on the menu.

05-00:42:13

Geraci:

Obviously in a case like with Chez Panisse, also the fact that they have foragers. People that literally go out and look for—

05-00:42:24

Muscatine:

They do. And not many restaurants do that.

05-00:42:27

Geraci:

They may have a buyer that orders what they need, but the literal idea of having a forager who's always seeking out these new and different local, fresh—

05-00:42:39

Muscatine:

And we like many restaurants in the City. It depends on whether we're celebrating something. In which case we might choose a fancier place. We love all of the South-east Asia cuisine and the Chinese cuisine. Our one disappointment is that Italian restaurants seem to over-sauce the pasta. It's not like Italy.

05-00:43:31

Geraci:

I almost put it in the category of they're moving more towards southern Italian cuisines, which tend to do that more. You're right. Northern Italian pastas do not have a lot of sauce. The sauce, basically, very lightly touches the pasta.

05-00:43:49

Muscatine:

In Rome, for instance, they cook the pastas al dente, but it's really chewy and bitey. Over here, it's always overcooked. To our taste. We love French food. We've even, surprisingly, liked vegetarian food—not just vegetarian but not cooked above 118 degrees at Roxanne's, which no longer—

05-00:44:43

Geraci:

That's the "raw food"-type movement, wasn't it?

05-00:44:44

Muscatine:

It wasn't raw food. They substituted things for the regular ingredients. They made ice cream out of not milk—I forget what they made ice cream out of—

05-00:45:08

Geraci:

Soy? Or tofu?

05-00:45:11

Muscatine:

Something. It was absolutely wonderful. They baked crackers, for instance, slowly, not over 118 degrees, so it took all day, but you got a real cracker. Finally.

05-00:45:34

Geraci:

Interesting.

05-00:45:35

Muscatine:

Yes. It was quite wonderful.

05-00:45:43

Geraci:

Is there anything else you'd like to—before we shift gears to another topic?

05-00:45:45

Muscatine: I think we've covered it.

05-00:45:49

Geraci: We'll stop here for this disc.

Audio File 6

06-00:00:04

Geraci: I am Vic Geraci, Food and Wine Historian from the University of California, Berkeley, Regional Oral History Office. Today's date is Wednesday, December 8, 2004. This is disk number two in our interview of December 8, 2004.

Doris, in our discussion now, let's take a little shift in categories or areas that we're looking at. We've been talking about a lot of your food writing and the things that you've done, and one of the people that you have written about, more than once, has been M.F.K. Fisher, and I know it's someone you've met. Quite a food celebrity in and of herself. So let's just start talking about M.F.K. Fisher. How you got to know her, and—.

06-00:00:52

Muscatine: Well, we got to know her because my husband forgot to send back a Book of the Month Club offering, and it was M.F.K. Fisher. So since it was there, I read it, and it absolutely changed my life. It was so wonderfully well written. A wonderful, original writer. I just loved the fact that it was different and in control, but smooth and the tales she told were absolutely fascinating. She soon gave a class on the history of food and cooking at the university extension, so I took it. We became friends. She said to me once, "Those wonderful brown eyes that have looked at me so intensely that I wanted to meet you." So we met and eventually we had her to dinner after one of the classes, and I had a large French copper fish poacher which fit over three burners on my stove, and I decided to make a salmon. Poach a salmon for dinner. So we got here and the salmon didn't seem to cook. Little beknown to me, one of the burners was out, not working. I don't know how late it was before we finally coaxed this fish to cook, but she was absolutely wonderful about it. We had drunk a lot by then, of wine, and by the time we got to eat we were so hungry that it was absolutely wonderful! I could have done no wrong.

06-00:04:15

Geraci: A little pressure. This woman is almost like a food hero to you, and you're out to impress, and it sure didn't work. [laughs]

06-00:04:24
Muscatine:

Right. But she was so gracious. For instance, when she contributed the foreword, the introduction to the wine book, she submitted a piece and nobody liked it. I, who was editor, had to tell her that nobody liked it.

06-00:05:03
Geraci:

You're talking about *The Book of California Wines*.

06-00:05:04
Muscatine:

Yes. So she rewrote it from a different perspective entirely, and was absolutely gracious about it. Anyone else with that amount of celebrity might have been huffy, at least.

06-00:05:38
Geraci:

Or at least put back a little bit.

06-00:05:39
Muscatine:

Yes. And when we gave the papers to the Bancroft Library that were the rudimentary wine book papers, I asked her, I said, "Do you want this first introduction back?" And she said, "No! Just give it with the other papers to Bancroft." So she had not an ounce of snobbism or elitist views or anything like that. She was always so gracious and hospitable. If you visited her in her home, you always came away with some treasure or other. Food made by her, or wine glasses. She gave some of my friends, whom I took up there because they wanted to meet her, so we had lunch. She invited us all for lunch, and in the end she gave them two crystal—old-fashioned cut crystal glasses. Just like that.

06-00:07:22
Geraci:

As a gift.

06-00:07:22
Muscatine:

Yes. So she was enormously kind, and just wonderfully attentive. She also had a steady stream of visitors. She would—even when she was ill, she would always invite people for meals with her.

06-00:08:00
Geraci:

This is when she was in Glen Ellen?

06-00:08:01
Muscatine:

Yes. But even before that, when she was in St. Helena, she had a huge Victorian house, and she would invite you there as well. When it had its hundredth birthday, she gave a grand party, birthday party for it. I remember Jack Shelton—who has long since been dead but who was a prominent reviewer of restaurants and such; he had a newsletter, I think—he arrived with a boxful of Maine lobsters. We gave her a photograph of her house that my son and I went up and my son, who was a good photographer, took it and we had it framed. She hung it in her bathroom alongside I think it was a Matisse.

06-00:09:32

Geraci:

I hear stories that her bathroom was a treat in and of itself.

06-00:09:35

Muscatine:

Oh Yes. It was a huge room, and it had a separate tub and a separate shower and a large counter, which had the sink and jewelry and all sorts of things that a woman needs. Then it had a rocking chair, because she believed that a bathroom was a room that you spent a lot of time in and it should be commodius and comfortable, and she had good art to look at.

06-00:10:39

Geraci:

In all the books that she had written and articles and things that she had done, she's one of those few and rare people that made food definitely an allegory for life.

06-00:10:53

Muscatine:

Oh, Yes. She believed that you couldn't separate parts of your life, like love, and intimacy, and that sort of thing from food.

06-00:11:18

Geraci:

Did you ever have any discussions? Did she speak in—her writing is so poetic to me. It just flows. It captures you, the spirit of it. Did she speak this way also? Or did she have a different persona in writing than she did in—?

06-00:11:40

Muscatine:

No, she often spoke as she writes, but not quite so extreme. It was conversational. But she was quick to say when she didn't agree with you, and have valid reasons for her stance. She was quite remarkable, I think.

06-00:12:18

Geraci:

Did she use the allegories of food in her everyday conversations? I'm just fascinated. In getting to know her, to have conversations and see her socially, was food really the center of M.F.K. Fisher?

06-00:12:37

Muscatine:

She didn't necessarily say food was important, but it was how she prepared things and how she offered things, and the way she spoke that made it clear that food was really life.

06-00:13:10

Geraci:

I know in our conversations you've also mentioned that she's a very independent person, yet people are extremely important to her.

06-00:13:22

Muscatine:

Oh, Yes.

06-00:13:23
Geraci: So was food a way that she showed this love and this bonding with other people?

06-00:13:31
Muscatine: I think partly, because she believed that eating together—breaking bread, for instance—was a function of intimacy and friendship.

06-00:13:54
Geraci: In some ways, she was also, I think, a great travel writer.

06-00:14:04
Muscatine: Oh, Yes. She lived in many places. Provence, and she went to Japan to study with the famous Japanese chef, Shizuo Tsuji. And she wrote an introduction to his book. She lived in Southern California, always in small places because she liked the lack of confusion and the anonymity that big places—

06-00:15:06
Geraci: She lived in Whittier as a small child. That’s the Orange County area. At that time, it was very small.

06-00:15:12
Muscatine: But she says that she never was inside a Whittier person’s house, because it was a Quaker community and her father and her family were Episcopalians. So she was never invited in.

06-00:15:41
Geraci: In some of the things that have been said about her in her life, I love—Clifton Fadiman had the great quote as saying, “As others do about love, but rather better.” He’s talking about her writing. That’s the reason I was very curious. Was her conversation and her demeanor outside of her writing very sensual? Alice Waters called her a sensualist.

06-00:16:08
Muscatine: Yes. Yes.

06-00:16:09
Geraci: This is a woman who just—she made love to her reader with food and her words.

06-00:16:21
Muscatine: Yes. She did. But if you talked to her, it was the same approach, but not so fancy as her writing.

06-00:16:36
Geraci: That’s what I think has been fascinating in the little discussion we’re having right now, is that you separate her person from her authorship. I think many people see her as this great author, and she did go through a period in her life where she was writing in Hollywood. Much more

formal. The fast lane. But in essence she was very private, slow. She liked the small places, the intimate dinner, the small group of people.

06-00:17:07

Muscatine:

Yes, she liked closeness and was so hospitable that many people became her friends. Some of them used her, in a way, but that was okay with her. Talking about an author for whom she wrote a preface, she said, “We have never seen each other— after I wrote the preface for this book, for his book.” She said, “Although he sent me roses and was most attentive at first, but once it was written we have never seen each other again. And that’s fine with each of us.” So she had a little quality of mischief and contrariness, but all incorporated in a generosity.

06-00:18:38

Geraci:

It seems that you keep coming back to that: this is a giving person.

06-00:18:40

Muscatine:

Yes, absolutely.

06-00:18:43

Geraci:

The world is something to give to. A couple of things. Number one, in her book, I found really fascinating: *How to Cook a Wolf*. This is World War II, and this is a woman who feels—that’s tied to—I think, wrongly so—but she’s tied to higher cuisine and to good foods, but she’s also just an everyday—food is, food is not the end product. It’s part of this whole package. What about it? World War II. This is a tremendous era in American history, and we’re not known for our great food during wartime. *How to Cook a Wolf*.

06-00:19:36

Muscatine:

[chuckles]

06-00:19:39

Geraci:

Also—well, anything else, when you think about M.F.K. Fisher?

06-00:19:48

Muscatine:

Her daughter, Kennedy, once said—I think it was on the occasion of her eightieth birthday, when they showed a documentary which had her daughters, or at least, Kennedy and other people interviewed, and her daughter was asked, “Was your mom’s cooking great?” And she said, “Oh, it was okay. We never even noticed it.” So it was really a part of something. Mary Frances often said that she was brought up on pure things and farm things and wonderful butter without salt, all kinds of things which the younger generation, when she moved to Glen Ellen and went shopping, they resented her, because they thought they had invented all those things. She was used to it.

06-00:21:24

Geraci:

We've talked about this before in your interview, that maybe in some ways we lost the old simple, good, fresh foodways, and are now rediscovering much of what we had in the past. I know along that same line, she had made a comment about the book *Cooking Great Meals Every Day*, and this comes from your *San Francisco Chronicle* 1988 article in a tribute to her for her eightieth birthday. I love this quote: "I do not believe a normal human being can eat a great meal every day."

06-00:21:58

Muscatine:

Yes, that was a review of *Dubious Honors*, in which she described the prefaces that she had written for various books. In *Dubious Honors*, she described that scene.

06-00:22:26

Geraci:

This is an amazing woman, who—you and I have talked about this—in the midst of being, on many of the social changes going on in America, was independent, was her own woman, her own self, on her own terms. Yet she wasn't a feminist; she was just a strong person.

06-00:22:51

Muscatine:

Yes.

06-00:22:51

Geraci:

Would that be a fair statement?

06-00:22:53

Muscatine:

I think, absolutely. She had no particular—she wouldn't exclude, the way feminists, many feminists, do. She wouldn't be so extreme. But she believed in an individual realizing her—or himself, and following that to a conclusion.

06-00:23:33

Geraci:

And even sometimes that conclusion may be very painful. In many of the decisions. And she made those choices, but even in her own life much of the time, they were painful. With her one husband who was, really, in her own writings, her true love. And the painful end that he had come through—

06-00:23:54

Muscatine:

Dillwyn Parrish was really her one love. I think she was fond of her other husbands, and always had reasonable rapport with them after they had broken up, but nothing was like Dillwyn Parrish.

06-00:24:20

Geraci:

Did she talk much about him, later on?

06-00:24:29

Muscatine:

No. Not at all.

06-00:24:33
Geraci: Because from her writings, it is very apparent that he is the love of her life.

06-00:24:38
Muscatine: Yes. And he died painfully. Excruciatingly.

06-00:24:46
Geraci: They had been doing amputations, so it was a long—

06-00:24:50
Muscatine: It was horrible.

06-00:24:52
Geraci: But she didn't talk about him.

06-00:24:54
Muscatine: No.

06-00:24:56
Geraci: Interesting. Well, speaking of strong women, let's kind of segue into another woman I'd like you to comment about, and that's Alice Waters. Very much still, a very active part of foodways in the Bay Area, and nationally and internationally now. The woman has left a mark on food, that is just phenomenal. You've had a relationship with her over the years, also, so let's talk about Alice.

06-00:25:26
Muscatine: Yes. Alice has recently gotten the Berkeley Unified School District to introduce food as a part of the curriculum. So if you're talking about thermal energy, for instance, steaming vegetables is a very good example of same. Economics—you can get the places that farm sustainable agriculture and study them and see how they fit in the economic scheme of things, and so on. Alice has always said that “if you give me a kid for twelve days, I'll get them to eat broccoli.” [laughter] She thinks that if you grow something and cook it, that then makes your interest in it different, and you'll want to taste it instead of all this junk food.

06-00:26:58
Geraci: With M.F.K. Fisher we're talking about a woman who used food as the allegory for life, and really awakened the interest of a lot of Americans in their food. Alice Waters seems to do it through education. She was an old Montessori teacher to begin with in her life.

06-00:27:17
Muscatine: Yes.

06-00:27:17
Geraci: But she sees—this is her quest, this is her bandwagon. Education has always been, I think—look at the amount of chefs that have gone

through Chez Panisse that are now out on their own. Her mentorship of people in food. Would it be fair to say that, for her, her specialty could be education? Whether it be chefs. Now, obviously, with kids. As you said, in the Berkeley school district, which—by the way, that program is drawing national acclaim because it is so different.

06-00:27:55

Muscatine:

And she's also told us that her daughter is at Yale, and when she first went with her daughter, she met the president. Her daughter was, I don't think, even embarrassed, because she knew it was coming, and Alice said, to the president, "There's terrible food in the dining room," or something like that, "and you should have better food, and grow stuff," and whatever. So they did. In one house, at least, they started out a pilot program for improving the food and growing their own things, and so on. So, it's amazing that she's very persuasive. I don't know if education is her thing, as much as a means to convey to people that everything should be local and fresh and instant and not to use things out of season.

06-00:29:41

Geraci:

Okay. It's the vehicle to achieve that. How did she get—I mean, it's obvious, this is a woman on a mission.

06-00:29:49

Muscatine:

Yes.

06-00:29:49

Geraci:

How did she get that?

06-00:29:50

Muscatine:

Well, she believes so strongly in good food.

06-00:29:57

Geraci:

Is this still tied back to her 1960s, Berkeleysque—

06-00:30:01

Muscatine:

I think it's tied to her experience abroad when she saw that markets had fresh things and people bought things every day, not for the week. She sought that out when she returned. I think.

06-00:30:33

Geraci:

But there again, much like M.F.K. Fisher, this is very much an individual. A strong person.

06-00:30:40

Muscatine:

Absolutely.

06-00:30:43

Geraci:

Does Alice see herself as a feminist, or is she just, there again, that strong person?

06-00:30:51
Muscatine: She's never mentioned feminism to me.

06-00:30:55
Geraci: That's interesting in itself that she had never mentioned it, especially to another woman.

06-00:31:02
Muscatine: I think she's more involved with food and promoting people who believe in the outlook that she has, and I think feminism as such is not as important as an individual realizing themselves.

06-00:31:36
Geraci: Being who they need to be. Many people, when they're on a quest like this, tend to sometimes make a few enemies. I'm actually quoting from a *House and Garden* article you wrote in 1982, called "Alice's Restaurant" in which you say, "Alice has a quality of bringing out the good and the bad in people." Would you like to comment on that? [laughs] I found that to be—and that's not saying anything bad. Some people—she's so focused.

06-00:32:18
Muscatine: Yes, I think that Jeremiah Tower, who ended up being an adversary, was someone who had such a strong ego that he couldn't take someone like Alice, who had an equally strong ego. Eventually, he took credit for California cuisine, and she gives him credit for having turned the kitchens around at Chez Panisse, but I think he overdid it.

06-00:33:18
Geraci: I think many people feel he overdid it.

06-00:33:20
Muscatine: Yes.

06-00:33:27
Geraci: With a woman that's this strong, this focused, she has definitely left her impact. What can we say about Alice Waters? She is so famous now, she is so popular. Her name is international. What is Alice Waters like, I guess, in person to talk to, one-on-one?

06-00:33:56
Muscatine: Charming.

06-00:33:58
Geraci: Well, she'd have to be, obviously.

06-00:34:01
Muscatine: But down-to-earth, with a focus on her cause. That doesn't necessarily come up in conversation.

06-00:34:16

Geraci: In everyday life? That's more of a public persona then that she's putting out.

06-00:34:22

Muscatine: Yes.

06-00:34:28

Geraci: Anything else? Are there any other women—I'm fascinated with this role of women who have really left a mark. Traditionally, cooking—that's a domestic skill. And that's something that has always been more-or-less ascribed to women as part of their role. But there are some women that seem to have risen to the top and taken that role to another level. We've just talked about two.

06-00:34:57

Muscatine: Yes. Joyce Goldstein, who was in the Chez Panisse kitchens for a couple of years before she went on to open her own restaurant. Yes. And Judy Rogers has written a really highly thought-out, unusual cookbook.

06-00:35:45

Geraci: How is it unusual?

06-00:35:46

Muscatine: It's much more than just how to cook recipes.

06-00:35:52

Geraci: There's a narrative too?

06-00:35:53

Muscatine: Yes. And a point of view, which is—[cat miaows]

06-00:36:06

Geraci: I wonder what kitty has there.

06-00:36:09

Muscatine: A screw.

06-00:36:14

Geraci: Oh. [laughs] Taking a little break for kitty.

06-00:36:26

Muscatine: I thought—before she swallowed it.

06-00:36:32

Geraci: There have been some—and there again, you've just given me two examples of women that have in some ways mentored under Alice.

06-00:36:41

Muscatine: Yes, absolutely.

06-00:36:47

Geraci: Yet Alice has also mentored some very good men that have gone into the field.

06-00:36:53

Muscatine: Yes. Victoria Wise is another woman, who was the first chef at Chez Panisse, and she has written several books, and went on to run the café in the art college in Oakland, and had the Pig by the Tail charcuterie across from Chez Panisse. Christopher Lee was chef for a long time—ten or twelve years—at Chez Panisse, and he has gone on and opened his own restaurant in Fourth Street. It's called Eccolo.

06-00:38:04

Geraci: We're actually interviewing Christopher. He's part of our series ensemble.

06-00:38:11

Muscatine: So he was certainly—

06-00:38:11

Geraci: Paul Bertolli.

06-00:38:14

Muscatine: Yes, and Paul Bertolli was chef for many years at Chez Panisse.

06-00:38:22

Geraci: I think that's what I'm somewhat drawn to with Alice Waters, is that not only is she a woman with a mission, she's trying to bring a foodway, bring it to people. Or maybe bring it back to people. But she's also providing a platform to educated, providing the platform to mentor others to help them push this message out also. Both men and women.

06-00:38:49

Muscatine: I don't know whether these people left because they felt it was time to move on, or whether Alice provided a training and platform in that sense.

06-00:39:10

Geraci: Maybe segue, then, at this point into, you had at one point for the *Examiner* in 1989, written about cooking at the Ritz. Your own cooking school experiences, and talking about cooking schools. You actually attended.

06-00:39:29

Muscatine: No.

06-00:39:30

Geraci: You didn't?

06-00:39:32

Muscatine:

I went to the Cordon Bleu on and off for two years, but the Ritz, I knew the man who was the opening director. He died, unfortunately, but he invited me to come in and take courses if I wanted, and review the whole school. So I went, and wrote it up for the *Examiner*, but I never took him up on his offer.

06-00:40:32

Geraci:

Would you have wanted to do it? Or you just didn't get the opportunity?

06-00:40:37

Muscatine:

I really didn't want to spend that amount of time, then, because I had gone back especially to do this article.

06-00:40:55

Geraci:

I guess the question I would have is, for those of us who just cook for our own selves or for family on an everyday basis, is it that valuable?

06-00:41:08

Muscatine:

Oh, sure, because there are various length of courses and you can do professional training as well as shorter courses for the home cook. I know that when we were at the Cordon Bleu, one woman invited me to lunch at her house, and it was very fancy and elegant in the 16th Arrondissement, and, you know, pretty swanky. We had lunch, and it turned out that she was interested in attending Cordon Bleu because she was looking for a chef. That was her only reason.

06-00:42:19

Geraci:

She could watch them all in their training, and select the one that she wanted. [laughter] That's a different reason—I have to admit, that's a new reason to go to cooking school. I'd never heard of that. I think we've kind of exhausted for where we are today. I think we've made some very good progress today. Thank you very much!

06-00:42:38

Muscatine:

You're welcome.

[End of Session]

VITA

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BACKGROUND:

B.A., Bennington College, 1947; studied at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris (demonstration classes and private lessons with Chef Charles Narsès), 1962-3, 1968-9; completed two courses with Jaques Pépin, 1976, 1977; completed 3-term pastry course with Jack Lirio, 1976.

Resident, Rome, 1959-60; Paris, 1962-3, 1968-9.
Owner of vineyard in Napa Valley, California for 17 years.

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Books:

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OLD SAN FRANCISCO, THE BIOGRAPHY OF A CITY, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975, 480 pp. (Author recipient of Award of Merit, City and County of San Francisco, 1976.)

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA/SOTHEBY BOOK OF CALIFORNIA WINE, Berkeley: The University of California Press; London: Philip Wilson, Publishers of Sotheby, 1984, 615 pp. Veuve-Clicquot Award for Best Wine Book of the Year, 1984 (awarded in 1985). Commonwealth Club Silver Medal for first place, Best Book of Californiana, 1984 (awarded in June, 1985).

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EDITORIAL:

Consultant to University of California Press on wine books, from September, 1981.
Senior Editor, *University of California/Sotheby Book of California Wine*.

MEDIA EXPERIENCE:

Host, author, producer of ten-part radio interview series, *Cook's Tour: With Doris Muscatine and Her Guests*, KPFA, 1964

Consultant to and participant in *San Francisco*, one of a five-part television series, *California Dream*, a documentary on the state's history, released nationally in the fall of 1981, repeated in the spring of 1982, for PBS (KOCE-TV, producer).

Bay Area 2000, San Francisco, Birth of a City, interview on San Francisco history by Ken Swartz, Channel 4, KRON-TV, a year-long series on the history of San Francisco.

Twentieth Century Project, interview by Mike Plante on loyalty oath and WWII, for ABC, 1995.

San Francisco culinary history, particularly 1850's (Tadich Grill) up to Mark Hopkins, WW II, by Ed Forgotson, CBS News Productions, 1999-2000.

AWARDS:

WAFIE: recipient of the Wine and Food Achievement Award for Literature-Journalism from the Northern California chapter of the American Institute for Wine and Food, 1991.

Award of Merit, City and County of San Francisco.

MEMBERSHIP:

Friends of Bancroft Library; Authors' Guild; San Francisco Opera Guild; San Francisco Professional Food Society; Italian Historical Society (member Advisory Board) 1974-84; Chair, Bennington College Alumni Association, 1981-83; University of California Museum (Council Board Member, 1982-91); member Democratic State Central Committee, 1948-49; member American Institute of Wine and Food since 1982; Copia; Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Museum of Modern Art, New York; De Young Museum; Palace of the Legion of Honor Museum; Advisor on Grape-Growing and Marketing to Coleville Indian Tribe, Washington, 1982. Formerly member of Mechanics Institute, California Historical Society, Berkeley Wine and Food Society.

WORKS IN PROGRESS:

THE VINEGAR OF SPILAMBERTO and Other Italian Adventures with Food, Places and People; Emeryville: to be published by Shoemaker & Hoard, October, 2005.

4 or 5-part Oral History (~~the last segment filmed~~), for Bancroft Library Oral History Department, Univ. of California, Berkeley, sometime in 2005.

Written addendum for the fifth oral history interview (June 14, 2005); or (preferably) to be included as part of the fifth oral history interview.

Wine books:

In 1948, Robert Balzer wrote "California's Best Wines," which pointed out the thirteen, out of some 400, best wineries in the state. It became our bible and we studiously went to Wente, Beaulieu, Martini, Inglenook, Krug, Freemark Abbey, and Korbel. (We once tried to go to Martin Ray, but his wife, who answered the phone, said emphatically, "The wine maker is in the cellar," implying that he was not to be disturbed.) The book started our whole interest in fine wineries that followed the European tradition of choosing the best stock and soil and location, and that made their wines with the care, attention and aging for which their European counterparts were famous.

We bought the red wine that Wente made specifically for its employees and that you could only get at the winery. We thought the Korbel sparkling wine was not as good as the European champagnes (but with new wineries opening and old ones improving, that has changed over the years). We became good friends with the people at BV and especially with Louis Martini. Both places allowed us to throw parties in their vineyards (several times at Martini's Monte Rosso, for as many as hundreds of people, providing that we used Oreste Orsi to cater: we always had prosciutto and melon, broiled half chickens on spits of rosemary, and old-fashioned lasagne. The wine was always provided by Louis Martini, who also came to each event. Once, when it was unseasonably cold, Louis broke up some of the wooden chairs and started a huge bonfire.) When Mario Soldati visited, Louis Martini and I prepared a joint meal at his house in order to entertain the writer. (On that occasion, I recall, Louis and Soldati got into a fierce argument over cooling or not cooling the tanks in which white wine was made.)

When I finished the UC/Sotheby wine book, as part of the promotional tour, I had to appear on a radio talk show with Robert Balzer -- it was on KABC, I think in Los Angeles. I took along the old 1948 book, which had been so instrumental in our love affair with wine, for an autograph. Balzer drew a grape cluster with two leaves and two tendrils, and wrote: "Tendrils of the expanding California vine, for Doris Muscatine from Robert Lawrence Balzer, KABC, December 1984."

Over the years I have admired and learned a lot from all of the many books that Maynard Amerine wrote. Early on, Charles and I took a UC extension course from him in tasting wine. (You brought the glasses, they supplied the wine.) We became very good friends and he had us often to meals, particularly when he entertained such friends as the Gallos or Alfred Knopf. It was through him, in fact, that we first met the Gallos, and once when we were invited to dinner at Ernest's house, Charles asked him, "Have you ever thought of setting up a small winery and making the best wine in the world?" to which Ernest replied, "Why would I want to do that?" (The menu, written out, a copy for each guest,

had all these fancy courses, accompanied by, and also written out, “Gallo Hearty Burgundy,” and so on – all humble Gallo wines, and even including the Gallo brandy.)

Other books that I have used and learned from over the years are Saintsbury’s “Notes on a Cellar-Book” (I have a charming old 1920 copy); Dr. Salvatore Lucia’s “Wine as Food and Medicine”; and Leon Adams’ “The Commonsense Book of Wine,” which came out in 1958, in an attempt to correct the widespread misconceptions that abounded both in the laws and in homes, shops, and restaurants. For Italian wines, I have admired Victor Hazan, and more recently, “Vino Italiano” by Joseph Bastianich and David Lynch. “The Wines of Bordeaux,” by Edmund Penning-Rowsell, which went into a half dozen editions and preceded Robert Parker, is definitive for that region and notes the many changes to that area over the years. Robert Parker, although I realize that many people disagree with his taste and with his power, is a favorite of mine, not only because we share the same agent, but mainly because I admire his incredible wine memory and his fantastic capacity. I have all of his books. I like Richard Olney’s tomes on Yquem and the Romanée-Conti as well as Cyril Ray’s small volume on Lafite.

I have learned much from, and use often, such general encyclopedic works as those of Hugh Johnson, Bob Thompson, Jancis Robinson, (sometimes in collaboration with one another), and most recently, Karen MacNeil. I find the several books written by Alexis Bessaloff, Charles Sullivan and Gerald Asher both lucid and literary. Philip Wagner is most instructive on American wines, and I have enjoyed the books by Frank Prial, Michael Broadbent and Harry Waugh. One of my most precious books, one given to me by my son, Jeff, for my birthday in 1969, is the very handsome “A Directory of California Wine Growers and Wine Makers in 1860.” Illustrated by Henry Evans, and written by Ernest Peninou and Henry Greenleaf, the small volume was put out by Tamalpais Press in 1967.

Vic Geraci is the Food and Wine Historian as well as the associate director of the Regional Oral History Office. Upon completing his doctorate in American history from UC Santa Barbara in 1997 he 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, alcoholic 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 and reviews in *The Southern California Quarterly*, *Journal of Agricultural History*, *The Public Historian*, and *Journal of San Diego History*, and his book *Salud: The Story of the Santa Barbara Wine Industry* from the University of Nevada Press.