AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHLEEN NORRIS
All uses of this manuscript are covered by an agreement between the Regents of the University of California and Kathleen Norris, dated December 10, 1958. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. No part of the manuscript may be quoted for publication without the written permission of the Librarian of the University of California at Berkeley.
INTRODUCTION

As part of the program of collecting literary materials on California authors, following a recommendation of Professor James D. Hart, the Manuscript Division of Bancroft Library, headed by Dr. Robert E. Burke, wrote to Mrs. Kathleen Norris on November 20, 1953, and suggested a series of tape-recorded interviews concerning her life and memoirs. Mrs. Norris indicated approval, but no immediate arrangements were completed. After seeing Mrs. Norris on Ralph Edward's television program, "This is Your Life," Professor Hart wrote to her on October 13, 1955, again suggesting an interview and her answer was cautiously favorable. The interview was placed under the recently organized Regional Cultural History Project of the General Library, directed by Dr. Corinne Gilb. Dr. Hart requested Roland E. Duncan, who had conducted a similar interview in Paris in 1953 with Alice B. Toklas, the companion
of Gertrude Stein, to handle the Norris interview, and introduced them in the spring of 1956 at Mrs. Norris's home, 1650 Waverley Street in Palo Alto.

The first series of three interviews occurred on March 10, 13, and 17, 1956. Two of the meetings were on Saturday mornings, a convenient time for Mrs. Norris's crowded schedule, and one on a Tuesday morning. Her home in Palo Alto was located on a quiet suburban street, set back amongst spreading oaks, and bordered by a neat lawn and attractive flower beds. The large house, with glass doors leading to an inner court, was reminiscent of New England. The living room, where the interviews were held, was spacious and comfortable. To assure spontaneity, the microphone was placed beside a vase and the recording equipment behind a chair. Mrs. Norris was a charming person to interview. Her long experience with expression is verbal as well as literary, and the anecdotes and reminiscences came easily, requiring only occasional stimulation or direction. Her sharpness of recall was amazing for a lady in her active seventies. Above all, her lively humor and warm human understanding were projected and preserved by the
impersonal microphone. Her three pet Pekingese and her Chinese cook made an occasional impression on the sound tape with a bark or a knock, respectively.

The interviews were interrupted during the summer of 1956 while Mrs. Norris made an extended European trip and were not resumed until the fall of 1957. The recording sessions concluded with two Saturday meetings, on September 21 and 28, 1957. Later, Mr. McClelland, Mrs. Norris's secretary, notified the Regional Cultural History Project of contract complications with her publishers concerning the use of the interview information, and legal negotiations delayed completion of the manuscript until the fall of 1959. Urged by her publishers and stimulated by these interviews, Kathleen Norris, the successful novelist, has since prepared her autobiography for publication.

Roland E. Duncan

Regional Cultural History Project
General Library
University of California at Berkeley
September 9, 1959
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KATHLEEN NORRIS

IMPORTANT DATES AND EVENTS

Born: July 16, 1880. San Francisco.
Childhood in San Francisco: 1880-1891.
Youth in Mill Valley: 1891-1900.
Passing of Parents: December, 1899.
Odd Jobs in San Francisco: 1900-1905.
University of California: 1905.
Early literary acquaintances in Bay Area and reading background for literary career.
San Francisco earthquake and fire: April, 1906.
Red Cross work.
Literary World of New York: Pre-World War I.
Publication of "Mother": 1911.
Sister Teresa and Bene' Family Relations.
World War I: 1916-1919.
European Travels and Literary Acquaintances.
The Ranch at Saratoga: 1920-1945.

vii.
Carmel Literary Colony; Hearst and San Simeon
Publication of "Certain People of Importance" (1922) and "Little Ships" (1925);
Autobiographical "Noon" (1925).


Social and Political Activity: 1920s-1930s
   Women's International League for Peace and Freedom,
   Mothers of America,
   America First.

World War II: 1939-1945

Death of husband, C. G. Norris: July 25, 1945,
Palo Alto.

Writing Career: Palo Alto: 1946 to present.
KATHLEEN NORRIS

WORKS

Mother (1911)
The Rich Mrs. Burgoyne (1912)
Poor Dear Margaret Kirby (1912)
Saturday's Child (1914)
The Story of Julia Page (1915)
The Heart of Rachel (1916)
Martie, the Unconquered (1917)
Undertow (1917)
Josslyn's Wife (1918)
Sisters (1919)
Harriet and the Piper (1920)
Beloved Woman (1921)
Certain People of Importance (1922)
Butterfly (1923)
Lucretia Lombard (1922)
Rose of the World (1924)
The Callahans and the Murphys (1924)
Noon (1925)
Little Ships (1925)
The Black Flemings (1926)
Hildegards (1926)
The Sea Gull (1927)
Barberry Bush (1927)
The Fun of Being a Mother (1927)
My Best Girl (1927)
Beauty and the Beast (1928)
What Price Peace (1928)
The Foolish Virgin (1928)
Storm House (1929)
Red Silence (1929)
Home (1929)
Mother and Son (1929)
Passion Flower (1930)
Margaret Yorke (1930)
The Lucky Lawrences (1930)
Beauty in Letters (1930)
The Love of Julie Borel (1931)
Hands Full of Living (1931)
Belle Mere (1931)
Second Hand Wife (1932)
Younger Sister (1932)
My San Francisco (1932)
Tree Haven (1932)
Walls of Gold (1933)
My California (1933)
Wife for Sale (1933)
Angel in the House (1933)
Victoria [Play] (1934)
Manhattan Love Song (1934)
Three Men and Diana (1934)
Maiden Voyage (1934)
Woman in Love (1935)
Beauty's Daughter (1935)
Shining Windows (1935)
Secret Marriage (1936)
The American Flaggs (1936)
Bread into Roses (1937)
You Can't Have Everything (1937)
Heartbroken Melody (1938)
Baker's Dozen (1938)
The Runaway (1939)
Mystery House (1939)
Lost Sunrise (1939)
The World is Made Like That (1940)
The Secret of the Marshbanks (1940)
These I Like Best (1941)
The Venables (1941)
Dina Cashman (1942)
One Nation Indivisible (1942)
An Apple for Eve (1942)
Corner of Heaven (1943)
Love Calls the Tune (1944)
Burned Fingers (1945)
Mink Coat (1946)
Over at the Crowley's (1946)
The Secret of Hillyard House (1947)
High Holliday (1949)
Morning Light (1950)
Shadow Marriage (1952)
Miss Harriet Townsend (1955)
In A Glass Darkly (1957)
CHARLES GILMAN NORRIS (1881-1945)

WORKS

The Amateur (1915)
Salt, or The Education of Griffith Adams (1917)
Brass (1921)
Bread (1923)
Pig Iron (1925)
Zelda Marsh (1927)
Seed (1930)
Zest (1933)
Hands (1935)
Bricks without Straw (1938)
Flint (1944)

Bohemian Club "Grove Plays"
The Rout of the Philistines (1922)
A Gest of Robin Hood (1929)
Ivanhoe (1936)
FRANK NORRIS (1870-1902)

WORKS

Moran of the Lady Letty (1898)
McTeague (1899)
Blix (1899)
A Man's Woman (1900)
The Octopus (1901)
The Pit (1903)
The Responsibilities of the Novelist (1903)
Vandover and the Brute (1914)

Collected Works (1903 and 1928)
Norris: To go really back to the San Francisco of my first memories is to go back to a very fascinating place that was almost colonial in its whole quality. It was a group of people who knew each other and who had all come from backgrounds that were the best of Eastern backgrounds. I'm not speaking of the richest. They weren't Okies either, you know, and they weren't immigrants. They were people who had come on a great adventure, and I think we all felt the spirit of that. At that time, of course, there were sailing vessels coming in the Gate all the time, and the docks were old wooden docks with these vessels tied up at them. The city had wooden sidewalks and dirt streets, many of them, and the whole spirit was of great pride and excitement. We all wanted to know why our people came here, and how they had the courage to come all the way over the mountains down to the coast.

Duncan: It was a very great trek, wasn't it?
Norris: Imagine if they hadn't come to the coast! Some other nation could so easily have preempted that whole strip, like Chile, and then we would have had a crippled nation. We wouldn't have gone from ocean to ocean. Of course that didn't mean much to us. But it was a romantic part of the world, because we had writers even in the beginning. We had Bret Harte, and Mark Twain, and we had a very charming writer of Southern sketches, a man named Charles Warren Stoddard, and very shortly we had Robert Louis Stevenson. Up there in a boarding house, I think he was up on Eddy Street, and my own people were young, very young. My grandfather, my mother's father, was twenty-one.

Duncan: When did your grandfather...

Norris: They got here in '51, early '51. And my grandmother came from Memphis and my grandfather was English-born but with a very Irish name, so there was Ireland right back of him. His name was Moroney. Paul Moroney.

Duncan: Where was he born in England?

Norris: He was born in London. And his father held some sort of position as an instructor in some school in London, but the father had been Irish. The father was born in County Mayo, I think. But in all events, they came, this young grandmother,
Norris: she was eighteen, and my grandfather, who was about two years older. And they brought two covered wagons. And when I said to them, "Why two?" -- it was a family party of about six -- my grandmother reminded me that they had to have the material to start. They had to have nails and hammers and saws and rope and seed and the beginnings of a new life in a new world. A world that they didn't know. And of course they had also a few chairs that her mother gave her and a table and a highboy and all these were to start the new story. And they went to Marysville, and there my grandfather had a farm. Then the silt of the two rivers, the Yuba and the Feather, half covered the farms up there. He came down to San Francisco and wrote an essay to the effect that he thought California soil would bear fruit and vegetables. He was a pioneer. Then they were one of the San Francisco families. My mother was born in '52.

Marysville was named for a Mary Covillaud who was very close to my grandmother. And there was some debate as to whether it would be called Sexton for Grandma or Marysville for Mary Covillaud. And it was the story of that family that they had been left behind in the Donner party, so we
Norris: really were mixed in with the whole business of the early state.

My mother, who was a lovely person, remembered the flood of '62, I think, when she would have been about eight, and also remembered the famous bull that got caught in the quicksands. And the children watched in horror all afternoon while they struggled to save this bull. Of course a lot of stories were those early California stories. The whole point of that story was that the father said to them, "Now you've all got to go into the house." He didn't want them to see the bull submerged while the children were looking on, and I believe there was some talk of shooting the bull. So the children all walked obediently to the house and turned around, and the bull was following them. In fury he had pulled himself out of the creek and was trailing the children.

Mother had a lot of those old stories of floods, and even of Indians. Not anything alarming about Indians, but of course we thought that was very scary. And when the original farmhouse was in the path of the waters, my grandmother more than once moved her children to the roof and just watched the waters swirl away. That was, of course, part of their story. Then they came to San
Norris: Francisco, and...
Duncan: When did they come?
Norris: Let me think. Mother went to that convent in Marysville 'til she was about fifteen, and then she was moved down to San Francisco, and she wept for her beloved nuns. So if she was fifteen, that would be about 1866 or '67.

Then my father had come a long way to get to San Francisco. His mother had married in Ireland, an Irish sailor, captain, and when she followed him with her maid to Honolulu, his ship had not come in. She was going to meet him there. A girl of seventeen, and she had a little Irish maid who afterwards married and did very well in the Islands. And she waited for her husband and he never came. She wrote to the Pope, and the Pope said that under the circumstances, since she was not in fact his wife (although they were married, he had left right after the marriage), she was to wait three and a half years. Not the whole time, not the whole seven years. So she did, and then she married my New England grandfather. And that was where my father was born, a subject of King Kamehameha III. He later had to be nationalized.

Father was born in '45.
Duncan: I was interested in reading a bit about your father, that he had traveled other places as well.

Norris: Oh, yes. You see, as a child, in Honolulu, they started for Europe, and they went to China, and of course they went in sailing vessels. And when they got to China, there was some complication about the seas, and my grandmother, who was widowed then, didn't think it was safe to take her two small children, I think they were seven and five, across to Europe. So she stayed in China for about a year.

Duncan: Where were they living?

Norris: They stayed with a very delightful Scotch family named MacBain. And I was able to thank the MacBains many, many, many years later. The family is still there, in Shanghai. When we went, we also went to Peiping. But this was in Shanghai. And so then she brought the children through Vladivostok, and across Russia. Very primitive times. It took about a month. And they had their food with them, and they got to Ireland, and then she stayed there with her own family, with her children, for about another year. So my father did have that background.

Duncan: How old was he when...
Norris: I think he was about seven when they left Hawaii and perhaps about ten when they got to Ireland. They stayed more than a year with friends in China. Travel in those days, you see, was -- people disappeared. Nobody knew where they were until they turned up. I don't know, I think it might be interesting, to find out how many people never did turn up. Because there were all kinds of risks. And it was sailing vessels.

Duncan: Was it one of the old clipper type?

Norris: I imagine it must have been. But at all events, they did not go through the Canal. Whether there was a Canal passage in the fifties I'm not sure, the Suez, but...

Duncan: No, the Suez was 1871.

Norris: Well, you see, that was years before it. So they crossed Russia and Father could remember very well certain of the aspects of Czarist Russia, and his mother wasn't quite anxious to see the Kremlin because she was, of course, Irish and very Catholic, but she finally decided that the children could see the Kremlin. And so they did.

Duncan: This must have been a very great trek across Russia, because this would be before the railroad.

Norris: (emphatically) Oh, she must have been a woman of absolutely indomitable courage. She seemed to
Norris: think of what she wanted to do and do it. And I suppose she thought, "I want my mother" -- no, her mother was gone, but, "I want my father and brothers to see these children." So she went to Cork, and right outside of Cork is a dairy called Sunrose, and that was the family dairy, the O'Keefes'.

Duncan: Her maiden name was O'Keefe?

Norris: O'Keefe. Marie Teresa O'Keefe. And her mother's name was Kathleen, and her daughter was Kathleen, and that's how I got my name. But my second sister was Maria Teresa, because she had impressed upon the family a tremendous personality. My aunt told me that when she was a little girl, she remembered the old dining table in the old family home, and that there was a rose and a shamrock and a thistle on the big heavy corners, but the rose had been cut away. So there was a blank. This child, Kathleen, remembered that. And I suppose they said to her, "We're going to have nothing to do with the English rose in this house." And she remembered that. So that her background was Hawaiian, Chinese, with a dash of Russian, and of course my father's too, and then of course New England. The strictest type of New England.

And this very lovely Irish grandmother must
Norris: have been an atom bomb in that particular connection. They loved her. They named I don't know how many cousins, cousinettes, Teresa for her. And she must have just brought a breath of something entirely new, because my great-grandfather, Abraham Rand Thompson of Boston, he was a doctor. And he was talking one night about how he hated people who couldn't stand on their own feet and couldn't take care of themselves and had to depend on others, and my grandfather, who was young, of course, said, "Father Thompson, that isn't what you told Mrs. Murphy last week." And he said, "Who told you about that, Teresa?" She said, "I was Mrs. Murphy." She had put a shawl over her head and darkened up her face a little and gone in and gotten twenty dollars from him. And she was just waiting to tell him about it. So that she really was a very wonderful person.

Then she came west, and I wonder how they came, about the year '56 or '57. How would they have come? No railroads.

Duncan: No railroad yet until after the Civil War.

Norris: They came stage coach.

Duncan: Across the Oregon trail?

Norris: Yes, that's what they did. Came across, and all
Norris: the way down to San Francisco. My father was about thirteen or fourteen, and my aunt was three or four years younger. And my father then finished his education here, went into the bank, and my aunt was the belle of the early seventies, I guess. I tried to put her into a book called "Miss Harriet Townsend," -- the flirt, the Victorian girl who is pretty, has a lot of beaux, is engaged to three or four of them at once, and has no more scruple or conscience, just simply giddy. And of course she was pretty well educated. She spoke a couple of languages and was musical and she was quite a little star in San Francisco. And then my grandmother opened a boarding house on Polk, no, on Bush and Stockton, and it was called "The Thompson House." And it was super-respectable. And that was quite a novelty. That would have been -- yes, early sixties.

So with his very romantic background, my father came up to San Francisco and went into a bank. And he was a banker the rest of his life. But he was also an actor and he was also a wonderful person. He was hardly the person you'd think, with six children, to be president of the Bohemian Club, but he was, twice. Because he was so loved. And then he met this mother of mine, of Irish and
Norris: English background, and married, and of course they knew through the club and through the very limited social life of San Francisco, they knew these people who came and went, and writers and actors. Of course San Francisco's theatrical interest is very strong, and they loved, of course, their little Lotta Crabtree who started the business down on Market Street. And then -- when we were all children, they moved us over to Mill Valley, which is, of course, a very beautiful little mountainous ... That was in the nineties. Ninety-one.

Duncan: You mentioned that your father spoke Japanese and so on. Did he always maintain that interest in the Orient? Because this was rather early.

Norris: Well, that was it. You see, he remembered Japan. And in those days, when a vessel came into Japan, with a widow from Honolulu and two small children, it might stay two weeks. It might be selling a cargo or picking up a cargo. A book that gives a very beautiful picture of that type of American development, I think, is Joseph Hergesheimer's *Java Head*. Do you know that book?

Duncan: I'm not familiar...

Norris: If ever you pick up *Java Head*, it's merely the question of a New England family with a lot of sea captains in it. And all through the years they've been bringing in blue jars and little odds and ends
Norris: of Chinese art, and it's such a picture of an old New England house, enriched, you know, by the Orient, and I think father's old home must have been... But at all events, he always was thrilled and interested.

Duncan: His first trip there was really very early, wasn't it, across Siberia -- Japan wasn't opened until 1853 by Matthew Perry.

Norris: No. But their little sailing boat, little ship, put in there, and I suppose the ships stopped there.

Duncan: Perry was in '53.

Norris: Well, it was very close to that, but I think it's more likely four years later.

Duncan: About '56 or '57.

Norris: If only we had him to ask! Think of the chattering Japanese that looked at this thing, you know. Why, they even looked at us later, oh, when we went out there. We were all in white; it seems that that's mourning, and all the family's very tall, you know. And all of us so tall, and in mourning, why, we must have been like supernatural visitants to some of these Japanese villages, you know. Oh, yes, they'd come out and look at us.

Duncan: When did you make a trip?
Norris: Well, I went in -- well, I can date it by one of the children. Hughie is going to be twenty and Hughie's mother was married two years before -- twenty-two years ago, that would have been '34.

Duncan: Thirty-four.

Norris: That's when we went first. And then we went out again.

Duncan: Do you remember where your father went in Japan?

Norris: I don't remember. I knew they docked and I know that there was some kind -- my aunt as a child had the little Japanese wooden shoes. And some little dance that she... So they must have been there a few days. And then to China, and then up, I suppose, unless the boat went up in those early days to Vladivostock. Because... it might have. In all events they came across Russia, which my father always called "Rooshia." I suppose that is what he heard. As a child. And then to Ireland. But, oh, he was so keenly appreciative that even at eleven or twelve he must have taken in everything.

Duncan: He must have been very perceptive at that age.

Norris: He was very remarkable. Now it's nice to talk that way about your father, because I notice so often in the social columns that the girl's name
Norris: is one thing and the mother's name is entirely different and nobody seems to know where the father is. But he was simply a very delightful, well-rounded person. He never pretended to be anything but a very good banker. But he could imitate everything, and he could give us parts of old plays like "Diplomacy," and my father would say, "Well, I'll show you how that old fellow came in on that scene." And he had been -- you know, San Francisco had very good amateur theatricals, as any place is apt to that needs it for amusement.

Duncan: In the seventies and eighties?

Norris: Oh, yes, and Father was in plays, and my aunt was in plays, and it was a great interest to him. Of course there were minstrels, and those minstrels used to come through. That's something that's gone out of American life, I suppose forever. Everybody blacked up, you know, which must have been pretty feeble fun. But it was part of...
CHILDHOOD IN SAN FRANCISCO

Norris: And then later, when we were little children, living in San Francisco, in an old house on Jones Street, Jones and Lombard. And it was brick.

Duncan: Was that your first memory? Of home in San Francisco?

Norris: That's about the first. The back garden is about the first thing I remember. And that the knobs of the doors were china, with little paintings on them. And we used to say they came around the Horn. And we didn't know what that meant, but I'd even heard the little nurse my mother had say, "Those doorknobs came around the Horn."

Now my mother had a nurse, and she paid her twelve dollars a month. And she took care of all of the children. Except the baby; there was always a baby. And she polished our shoes at night. And she helped the cook, who also was paid twelve dollars a month, with a heavy wash on Mondays. And my mother had said to both that she and Mr. Thompson did not like followers. In other words, they didn't want to find young
Norris: men sitting in the kitchen. Now imagine buying a girl's youth for twelve dollars a month! And on Sunday, Lizzie used to take us to the graveyard to see her father's grave. And to bribe us to go to the graveyard, she bought us sugar cane. Now I don't know how many children -- we had no comics, we had no movies, we had no cars, and we went to the graveyard and we had sugar cane. And then the walks along the docks in those days, you know. With the grain coming in, and the ships there.

Duncan: Along the Embarcadero?

Norris: And even one ship with -- of course the Chinese. They didn't have any ships, but they all had to wear pigtails in those days. They couldn't go back downtown without pigtails. So they wore them, and the great thing was to jerk them. I don't think I ever indulged in it, but there were gangs that did. And then some of the ships' sailors wore quite long hair, tied. Fifty, sixty, years ago. The old pigtail fashion.

Duncan: In the late eighties, early nineties?

Norris: It would be, oh, about the middle eighties, toddling around there with a nurse, and then out
Norris: to the sandhills -- just rolling sandhills, and there was a little colony called Tuckertown that thrust itself out there with a few cottages. And they built the children's hospital right out on the sand. And I remember that my mother was very much interested in that. It was beginnings.

And then Father took us one day for a walk and said that he was going to show us a blanket factory. And he took us through the blanket factory where the big hospital is, out on Potrero. And that it was the dismal and terrible thing called an asylum, where poor little girls who got into any kind of trouble were slammed in there like little prisoners. They were prisoners. And wore plain little checked dark dresses, you know. But then it was a blanket factory, and Father was so pleased that our blankets weren't coming over the mountains any more, or around the Horn. We were going to have our own California blankets. And he took us up to Stockton, and up to Napa. I'm trying to think how we got there. Did we go to Vallejo on a boat and take -- I don't know how we got to Napa.
Duncan: There was an old ferry boat going up that way.

Norris: Maybe we took -- yes, that's what we did, and he showed us a glove factory. It's still there. And he was very proud that these things were coming to us, you see, because in the beginning, there were no such things, and when we were in Rio, which is old-fashioned, reactionary, or was, thirty years ago, I was very much struck that a plain little set of china would cost three or four hundred dollars, because they weren't making any. But the American spirit was right here in California, and just as soon as we could get round to it, we started making things.

Duncan: It's really the beginning of our local industrial development.

Norris: Oh, it was, it really was. Because when we, well, not in my memory, but when my grandmother, my aunt, and my father were getting settled in San Francisco, there were warehouses they still called "go-downs," to store things, you see. Came on ships.

Duncan: From the old Cantonese.

Norris: Yes, and they would go down to the wharf with my grandfather in his prime, my Irish, red-headed Moroney grandfather, who lost everything,
Norris: made everything, lost everything, and made every-
thing, and of course lost last... But he used to
go down to the dock with a gold-headed cane,
you see, "Send that bolt of silk up to Mrs.
Moroney. Send me that barrel of sugar. " Rum
and sugar and silks would come around the Horn,
and the papers, if you look at the old papers,
you see, they'd announce what was coming in, and
then everybody would go down and stroll up and
down...

Duncan: Like an auction.

Norris: Just exactly. Little parasols and I suppose
hoops, and pick out, "Do buy me that divine pair
..." and so on. So it's fruitful to think of
the beginnings, and then think -- of course, we
had gone to Mill Valley before the earthquake.
And then think of being smashed flat.

Duncan: It was really a very pleasant, charming life,
all through the eighties and nineties, for you
to remember.

Norris: Oh, it was lovely. It was lovely and open, you
know, and there were gardens all up and down the
streets now. Well, Van Ness was one row of
beautiful homes. And the gardens were all spil-
ling flowers.

Duncan: No automobile roads.
Norris: Oh, not many. Yes, automobile roads. But no automobiles then. See, automobiles came in about the time of the earthquake, just about 1906. I had my first ride in one in 1906. I wonder what we did, the risks we took! The wheels used to come off. I had a hat, and there was a thing called breaking a spring. So it was the beginning, to share the birth of a city. And they loved it so! My father, my aunt, and my mother, San Francisco was just a magic word to them. So we go back to the nineties, I suppose.

Duncan: The former "Gay Nineties," as they used to call them.

Norris: Well, well, I wonder if they were so gay. Of course there grew up in San Francisco an element of very high society. We exchanged marriages with some very prominent New York people. But I'm not sure that I regard any of that as quite as important as the quality that went into the city, the people who were the beginners and the starters of all sorts of things in the city. Now to me it's very lovely that my grandmother, this spirited Irish lady, who went down to old St. Mary's on California Street every
Norris: morning... And then she went across to the markets, which were all coming in in wagons, the way they do in Paris, and she ordered for her big boarding house. And she had a little ring of Irish bog oak, and if the eggs looked small to Mrs. Thompson, she would say, "Try that on the ring." If it went through the ring, it was too small an egg. She had been raised, you see, on a dairy farm, and she knew what she was doing.

Well, her house got a very good reputation for decency. And it was part of our childhood that loads of the middle-aged men we met would say to us "Oh, I stayed at your grandmother's house for six months when I first got here. While I was at your grandmother's house..." We were very proud of it. She was so successful that in '76 she turned it over to an assistant and took her daughter and went abroad to Ireland, England, and to Paris. And in Paris she found that she was doomed. And she died very suddenly in Paris of cancer. And was buried there in the Notre Dame cemetery.

Duncan: In the Ile de la Cité?

Norris: Yes. And my little aunt came back alone. And never quite recovered from the shock of it. But
Norris: she really lived a full and glorious life. And then my aunt and the assistant more or less came to an understanding, and my aunt withdrew from the boardinghouse. And I think she gave music lessons. I know she did. But it was wonderful to hear Mother and Father and my aunt talk of all the old families and some of the stories that were back of them. They began to build these magnificent mansions, you know. Still standing. Some standing. The Pacific Union, of course, is conspicuous. The Flood house. And the Cracker house was torn down for the cathedral.

Duncan: For Grace Cathedral?

Norris: Yes.
MILL VALLEY

Duncan: When did you say you moved over to Mill Valley?
Norris: Well, we went over in '91. Very, very young, the town; it was called the Throckmorton ranch up 'til very close to that time. It belonged to a family called Throckmorton, and that family, one of its most important members probably being the head of it, disappeared, and the thing broke up. But when we went there the cookhouse was there with a couple of cowboys still in it. And they used to make these pies and give them to the children. But Throckmorton disappeared, and they found him some time later buried under the chicken house. Evidently one of the Chinese people on the place had gotten rid of him. And so it was quite a place. And the old mill is there, made of nothing but wooden pegs.

Duncan: That's what Mill Valley was named after, wasn't it?
Norris: Yes, Mill Valley.

It was the house in Mill Valley in which my father really brought us up. It was more or less an adventure to us, across the Bay. We had been living in the city, and we moved across
there. Of course it meant freedom for us and it meant much less responsibility for my mother, and the idea was that we were not to be bothered about schooling. But the school in Mill Valley was so small that they needed the three of us, the top ones, to get the school started. They had to have twelve children and they had, I believe, nine. So we contributed that to education.

We were in what we would now call an integrated school. It had Mexican and colored and one Chinese and several children who didn't speak good English. They were American-born Portuguese, but at home they spoke Portuguese.

But my father's attitude was rather strange about it. He felt that children were altogether too much pushed in schools, and it was very funny to come home, climb the hill up to the house, past the old mill, and have my father perhaps come in and say, "You didn't bring any homework home, did you?" "No, sir." "You haven't any work to do here at all, have you?" "No, sir." "And you can keep up without doing it, can't you?" "Yes, we can." We knew we could, because it was an ungraded school and I would say that our young
intelligences were just about up to the level of some of the other youngsters who were in it. But he did not like us to be in any way troubled about schooling, and so when I was about twelve, which would have been '92 because my years run with the year...

That would be just a year after you moved over to Mill Valley.

Yes. I came home and asked father if he would mind my teaching instead of studying. And I said that there were three or four little children in the school, Polly Schroeder and little Rasette, Emil Rasette, and the teacher would like me to take them. And get them off her hands. So my father said, "By all means," and I then began to teach them and I never was in a class again. I got that at about eleven or twelve, and then what else I got was because I had a very natural hunger for certain lines of work.

What particular lines of work?

Of course languages always fascinated me. And reading, naturally.

You mentioned that your early reading was very voluminous. I imagine that your father did a great deal to stimulate that.
Norris: That was the point. He told me that he would like me to read Macaulay's *England* and it was very slow going. Finally I said to him, "If you'll let me read it aloud to you, I'll read every word of it." I was then about a third of the way through. He said, "Well, go on from where you are." And I'd be in the study reading to him and his interpretation, his enjoyment... you see, that is a little unusual.

And Father had a study off in the sitting-room and he would stop and say, "Listen to this," and he would read us something. I don't think many fathers do. I don't think many people are as fortunate. Father was very, very fond of poetry.

Duncan: Did he write poetry?

Norris: No. He was simply an inspirer.

Oh, yes, was it different!

And then, who was the woman who wrote, I think it was Elizabeth Phelps Ward who wrote the Gypsy books which my sister and I batten on. Then, we did read a tremendous lot of English stuff. Of course, reading, I think it's a great pity for children to ever miss it because they don't read now.
Duncan: I wonder if that's really true, because nowadays so many good books really are coming out in paperback editions.

Norris: Oh, all the good books.

Duncan: And I notice, especially around a campus and so on, people are reading a great deal of this material.

Norris: Is that so. I'm glad to hear that. Of course, I really will say that in our day we wasted a good deal of time, because it was empty time. We read immensely, but there was hardly anything else to distract us. One party a winter would keep my sister and myself agog. We read all the time, but there were many vacant hours, especially in school, where you just sat.

I began reading Dickens when I was nine. I read *Oliver Twist* to the point where somebody took him in and fed him and I stopped and I didn't finish the book for twenty years. I was about ten then. No motor cars, no TV, no radios, no telephones, so we read. Mother would say to us on Saturday, "I wish you'd take the younger children and go up on top of the hill and whatever you do, don't get back until three o'clock and they can take some naps." They were cleaning the house and baking. Teresa and I and Joe would
Norris: each take three books and pack them to the top of the hill with our lunch. We might not read all of them, but we had to have them. Well, of course, it gives you a very rich heritage.

And Father was... my father could have been a writer. He was what we call a "phrase-maker." We say, "That's one of Dad's phrases." But his love of books was so intense and he wanted Joe to read Ivanhoe. Joe will be eighty next year and I don't think he's ever read it. One night Father was in his study, it was just an alcove off the sitting room. Father said, "Joe, how are you getting along in Ivanhoe?" Joe said, "Page 57." My father said, "All right, you can stop. If you aren't going to tell me something about what's going on, if it's just a page, why you don't have to read Ivanhoe."

Father was a great reader, we were all readers. Of course, he used to talk the books over with us. He would say to me, "What would you call the high point of that story, what's the great moment?" That's a great help, you know. It gives you a certain formation.

And Father knew a good many of the writers. There was a writer who wrote of the Sanwich Islands where my father was born. Charles Warren Stoddard
Norris: was a great name in those days.
Duncan: He was in New York also, wasn't he?
Norris: Oh, yes, and he took a position there in one of the Catholic colleges. But this was when he just came up from the islands. He stayed with us for quite awhile.

Then, our old friend Ina D. Coolbrith, regarded my father as a saint.

Duncan: Was this when you were living over in Mill Valley?

Norris: Oh, yes. Then, when it all crashed, of course, we lost that contact with people. But as different people came to the city we'd perhaps have a chance to meet them because Father might say, "If you'd like to come over and spend the weekend with us..." Mother was very hospitable and we were all trained to go and put fresh soap... we had three bathrooms. We were about the only house in the country that had them then. It was one of my father's fanatic ideas. He was brought up in Honolulu and they lived in the water.

So that altogether we did know some of the writers. I'm trying to think who some of the others were. I remember Ella Wheeler Wilcox fluttering over to our house, a little, fluttery lady, famous because of writing, "Laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone."
Norris: But she did something else that was ridiculous. She was a little bit of a lady with fussy hair, lace, a good many pins and what not. She was in England when Queen Victoria reigned. Well, Victoria had her laureate and I guess, no, Tennyson didn't outlive Victoria. Tennyson was not the laureate, but there were also other great poets in England at the time Victoria died. Who wrote "The Highwayman," Alfred Noyes?

Ella Wheeler sat down with her pen and she wrote a line out of the paper a week before the Queen died, "The Queen is taking a ride today." It was the funeral ride, you see, and the guns were going off, booming, and the sorrowful band was playing and the Queen's favorite riding horse was led with his saddle reversed. The Queen, of course, lay on a gun carriage covered with a flag. Do you remember Noel Coward's wonderful line in Cavalcade, they are watching from the windows and they hear the cavalcade passing and the mother turns back into the room and says, "Nine kings rode behind her," and the child pipes up and says, "But wasn't she a little lady, Mother?"

So Ella wrote her poem and do you know with the very solemn obsequies there were for the Queen they read Ella Wheeler's poem. I wouldn't have
Norris: had the gall to write one. With all the world in England writing, but they took that poem of an American woman and read that at the Queen's funeral obsequies. "The Queen is taking a ride today," and then it went on to say that the nation is in black and the drums muffled. It has nothing to it at all. There are a million people who could do better than that. But that was the way it was handled.

Duncan: There are several other people about that same period whom we would be interested in knowing about. You knew Gertrude Atherton, didn't you?

Norris: Yes, in San Francisco. She was the pride and delight of San Francisco. She married, I don't know what her story is personally, but she married into a Spanish-American family here and they were the big people of Atherton. Atherton, of course, is named for that family. Along about the nineties sometime one of her stories burst upon the world and we all talked about the fact that California had another big writer. She was a woman that -- I would say her approach to everything was a little harsh, a little bit challenging. And when you talked to her it was the same way. But toward the end of her life,
Norris: I saw her now and then and I, of course, had to admire her. She, fifty-five years ago, was slim, gifted, recognized as a writer already. She wore her mass of white-gold hair in a great knot on her neck so that you saw her wherever she went and you knew that that was Gertrude Atherton.

Duncan: Very striking.

Norris: But, of course, mine was a distant and very respectful admiration. I went to the Fairmont when she talked and I saw her come out. I think she had on a sort of purple velvet with this crown of gold. But her address was sharp. It was a person who not only was authoritative, but kind of impatient with your own limitations. Sort of, "If you want to write, why don't you write?" That sort of thing, which made us all feel very helpless. At least I did.

But later, as I say, I became very fond of her and used to love to talk to her. She was always admired.

We had a good deal of talk in our family among writers, because San Francisco had more than her share, you see. I believe she had.

Duncan: Oh, I think so.

Norris: We had Gelett Burgess and Frank Norris -- I didn't know him but he was there.
Duncan: Had you read any of his works?

Norris: Oh, yes. He wrote a very clever little study of a newspaper man and his girl called **Elix**, one of the short novels. Then he wrote -- I still think a very charming original story -- **Moran of the Lady Letty**. Those were written in San Francisco and published in San Francisco. I think they were published in New York, but I mean they were finished and ready for publication, and all that crowd of writers -- the Irwins...

Duncan: Will and Wallace?

Norris: Will and Wallace. Of course, Jack London and Bruce Porter, who married Henry James' daughter, and Jimmy -- a little Frenchman and very, very attractive -- Jimmy Hopper. It isn't a French name. Went to live in Carmel years later and my son Frank used to play with his children when Frank was four or five years old.

Even at that time I wanted to write, and I developed the fashion of telling the younger members of the family stories. In that way I kind of gauged what they wanted. The three or four younger members and of course their friends who came in. I could tell by their faces and their comments what they wanted me to repeat or to feature in these serial stories. Little did
Norris: I ever dream that I would be doing it professionallly.

Duncan: This was when you were in your teens?

Norris: Yes. But on one occasion my little brother, who was perhaps seven, asked my mother to ask me to please keep Indians out of the stories because they really frightened him. He was frightened at night when he thought about these Indians. I was having children stolen by Indians and living in Indian camps. Going back into English fiction, they used to have gypsies who supplied that element. You wouldn't, and your mother probably wouldn't, remember that, but there were a great many stories about children stolen in England and carried away by gypsies. That got my brother Jim and he asked my mother to ask me to keep Indians out of the story so I did.

I began to write and wrote a story for the Argonaut, a quite famous little San Francisco paper.

Duncan: Yes, a wonderful paper.

Norris: My father had been a very close friend of Jerome Hart, who started it.

Duncan: When was that? Back in the nineties?

Norris: Oh, yes, it would have been that. I'm pretty sure it was the eighties.
Duncan: The *Argonaut* was late eighties and went all through the nineties.

Norris: Yes, it did. A flimsy sort of a sheet and yet they had a great many subscribers in Europe and in the East. Jerome Hart used to come over to our house in Mill Valley as a club friend of my father and we liked him so much, so it was natural -- he wasn't living then -- to send the story to the *Argonaut* and the *Argonaut* took it. Here was a real beginning.

Duncan: When was your father president of the Bohemian Club?

Norris: He must have been about 1896 or '97.

Duncan: He was president several times, wasn't he?

Norris: I think twice. And he, it was really a strange choice, because there were a good many pretty rich bachelors in the club who could have taken it very much better than Father. He couldn't afford champagne dinners and all sorts of entertainment. Never a cent.

You see, there were about ten of us altogether, for there was a sister and there was an aunt, and I don't know what there wasn't. He used to always say, "When I am an old man, I want to be Ambassador to Japan." And we used to tease him about it, because of course a man who has a family like
Norris: that on a bank manager's salary of course isn't going to talk about Japan. He loved the Islands and he never went back because as he said once to me, "I couldn't go back now without your mother and all six of you and we would never be able to do that." And we never were.

He was a banker, a manager of a small, private bank, and I don't think Father's income ever touched $7000 a year. I think that his salary was $550 a month, but it was a big salary, of course, fifty-seven years ago. We had great comfort. We always had someone in the kitchen and someone else to help with the children, and a couple of horses and a couple of cows, which I learned to milk and my brothers learned to milk. And tremendous leisure.

And Father loved his club, the Bohemian Club. And every summer we would have guests and we would all go into the woods and maybe camp. As I remember, he brought home a visiting Englishman once who was, I think, Irish, Lord Beresford, and he came to the club and my father said, "If you're at loose ends this week-end, come on over to Mill Valley and meet my wife and my children."

I drove Lord Beresford to the train on Monday.
Father had gone very early and I took him down for the ten o'clock train. He said, "I suppose you realize you have a very unusual father." I didn't think there was anything so very unusual about Dad. "Yes," he said, "He's a very extraordinary man. He makes himself instantly known. His humor, his tolerance, his viewpoint." He was exceptional. So I like to feel that fifty-seven years after he died I can pay him a tribute, because we all feel it.

So my father had the five of us over there in Mill Valley, two sons, three daughters, and then my younger brother was added to the family. And that rounded it out again, three girls, three boys. We had lost a little brother.

There were seven children altogether. There were seven. And to my mother, that was -- of course, she belonged to her generation, the Victorian era -- that was heaven to her, to have her three boys and her three girls and the usual visiting aunt and the usual visiting young uncle, and her mother, whom she loved. That mother was a Sexton of Memphis, and her husband was this red-headed Irishman, Paul Moroney, and --

He was red-headed.
Norris: Red-headed and quite violent. And pompous. And at one time quite prominent in the stock market. And a broker. We still can find his records in San Francisco. And Mother's mother was a very gracious, lovely, quiet woman, perhaps too quiet, because she, all she wanted, all Grandma Moroney wanted, was to have people like each other and be peaceful, and be gentle.

My mother was very musical. And there was a musician named Henry Gottschalk, and her piano work was so lovely that when he gave a concert, he wanted my mother to do the intermediate piece between his performances. And she did play beautifully. That made a great element in our life at home -- books and fire and Father and Mother, and the various relatives always coming there. Evenings when Mother played the piano, all the Gilbert and Sullivan operas and all the old fashioned pieces and with real competence, even crossing hands sometimes --

Duncan: This aided in close family living.

Norris: Yes. When I think how simple the elements were, some good old cook in the kitchen and all of us helping to clear the table, and my brother Joe occasionally milking two cows -- for a long time we had two cows --
Duncan: In Marin.

Norris: In Marin. And, oh, it was so safe! It was so different! There wasn't any juvenile problem, because we couldn't get away from home. And I think it is the independence and the motor cars -- but at any rate, it's wonderful to remember. And to remember this lovely, gentle mother and...

I said to my brother once, not long ago, apropos of modern marriage, I said, "Joe, I never can remember between my father and mother anything that wasn't on his part quick concern for her comfort, safety, and what he could do, and on her part simply that Mr. Thompson could never do anything wrong." She had seven children, but she never got quite fresh enough to call him by his name. She was studying French when they were married, and she called him "Monsieur." And he shortened that into "M'sieu." And all his letters to her were signed "M'sieu." She never got quite so familiar. But that was the custom. It was "Mr. Thompson" to everybody else, but to him, she called him "M'sieu."

It's good to remember, because Joe said he never could remember anything that distressed Mother except when we misbehaved. And he said then her very first thought was to put the problem up
Norris: to my father and to abide by that,
But he died young, of course. Father was fifty-three. He died just as the New Year was coming in. Father was buried on Christmas Day, 1899, and the club flag was at half-mast for a week, for him. And we were left with nothing except the memory of a marvelous childhood. Oh, my, such affection, and such imagination, and such ingenuity. We've all tried to pass it along. And my brothers still speak of my father, fifty-six years dead. And Mother had preceded him three weeks.

That close in time. Both in 1899.

And all that gaiety and giddiness of her own childhood, her own youth in San Francisco, and her love of music and contacts that -- all that, it seemed so wiped out. Of course it wasn't. But it's awfully hard when such young parents go. Mother was forty-seven and Father was fifty-three, the eve of his fifty-fourth birthday.

So close together.

Three weeks. It stunned us, of course; it was really like one event. And so my brother, who was twenty, and I was nearly nineteen, we took over. And the
Norris: four younger ones were quite a bit younger. And didn't borrow money; we didn't know what security was. We never thought of it as being very extraordinary. I think it was partly Dickens, and I dedicated my last book to Dickens, because I honestly think that he was the first -- Scott didn't do it and Thackeray didn't do it, and of course Shakespeare couldn't do it -- but he was the first to put a sort of bloom into the humblest kind of living. Somebody said to me in the early years, "What do you think this is, a Dickens novel?" But I'm positive I really feel it, the influence of a person who could make you laugh over people like the Micawbers and like this dreadful family -- oh, who was it? The Kenwicks -- you don't read Dickens, do you?

Duncan: Oh, yes, indeed. In fact, I was very fascinated when in England to walk down around the docks at Deptford and Greenwich.

Norris: Soho?

Duncan: And Soho and -- in fact, one of my favorite pubs in London is the one where the Pickwick Club meets.

Norris: Is it so?

Duncan: It's one called the George and Vulture. And all the eager Dickens people go there.
Norris: I'm going to look it up, because I'm going over in a few weeks. And I'm going to look it up.

Duncan: That one you'd really enjoy. It's got a marvelous grill...

Norris: Well, everything that Dickens said ... there's a little scene in Our Mutual Friend where Bella and John and poor little Rumty, the father, you know, that little browbeaten father, they all had milk and buns sitting on the windowsill in the office, after hours. And that was the kind of thing that nobody ever put into print before Dickens.

Duncan: Very natural.

Norris: Kingsley didn't. They were writers writing, but Dickens was really living it. And I think it helps a lot, because we never got into trouble and we never had any bills and we were solvent right straight through. We were left about $3000. Of course, fifty-five years ago, that was money, some money. But we put a stone up to my father. Joe and I talked it over and we said, "We'll be sorry if we don't." So we did, to Father and Mother. And it cost us $1,100. I suppose that's because we're Irish, part Irish. Well, Joe said if we were all Irish, we'd have put it all in. (laughter). And we'd have borrowed a little money. But I haven't been sorry because there is no way in
Norris: which we can pay a tribute to their memory, that we don't pay it, because whatever is the first fruit of all of us is for them, because they gave us so wisely. And I have tried to pass that on to all the women who read what I write. Give the children love and security, and even if there is panic in the grownups, share it with them. Let them know it. Let them know, this is the crisis we are going to face. I think that the whole problem of delinquency and it's run over a million now, I think there were a million children picked up this year, I suppose many for minor infractions, but there were a million little causes. And the utter wantonness of some of the things they do couldn't happen if a wise man and woman were back of them.

Duncan: Parental direction certainly makes a great deal of difference.

Norris: Now you take the novels of Trollope, since we're back at Dickens. Over and over again it's the son of the family who is wasting the money, getting into trouble, and I think -- isn't it Tolstoi's War and Peace where one of the boys compromised the whole family status with some kind of betting, one night of cards, I think it is. Well, we were spared that, because they were so good. And I, of course, have three brothers left, and a sister.
Duncan: That's quite a sizable family.

Norris: When my parents died, I went first to the White House and got a job selling shirtwaists. And then some members of the family -- well, they will never hear this, and consequently they can't be hurt -- it was my mother's family who felt that the pride of the family was very much lowered by having anyone selling shirtwaists. And I liked it, and I think I would have made a very good saleswoman. But they persuaded me to give it up, and there was an old angel in the White House there, Mr. Rafael Weill. A friend of my father and a friend to us. And I'm always sorry that I went to him and said, "Well, my aunts think that it isn't right for me to be in a shop."

So I went into the office of a big hardware company, Dunham, Carrigan, and Hayden, and had an office job, really, filing and --

Duncan: That would have been about 1900.

Norris: Nineteen-hundred, 1901, 1902. And I was there for over two years. So the new century came in with all of us in a little flat up on Hyde Street, Joe with a job -- with an old electrical engineer, one of the first, Brook Ridley, an Englishman. Myself in a hardware store, and Teresa teaching in the kindergarten in Sausalito for five dollars a month. That was her pay.
Duncan: That was the first break.

Norris: Yes, and we managed and we got along very nicely. I don't remember any apprehension; I just remember feeling that this was what was expected of us. It wasn't happy work for me, though. It wasn't my own right work. And then I went into the Mechanics' Library, which was a fine old library, up on Post Street, as the desk clerk and was there for about three years. And all the time being gnawed at by the feeling "How do you get out of a rut?" you know.

Duncan: You were around books in the Mechanics' Library. A lot of old Californiana.

Norris: Oh, indeed. I used to take them out. Teresa was at Paul Elder, and she brought books home. As long as we didn't take the covers off or get them dirty, I could take books home by the half-dozen and of course we wanted books.
Norris: I'm trying to remember what is the name of the magnificent old professor over there at U.C. who used -- Henry Morse Stephens.

Duncan: Of history.

Norris: You wouldn't know who he was.

Duncan: I know the name.

Norris: He was my father's friend. And he used to come into the library while I was there at the desk. And he was giving what they called "extension courses" in history, and they were fascinating. When he lectured, I would get hold of my sister, or one of my brothers, and we would listen in. I being a clerk in the library, I had rights, and some of the things that he talked about were so fascinating! I was thanking him one day at the desk, and he said why didn't I go over to U.C. and take a course in English letters. And Mr. Chauncey Wetmore Wells was giving a course, daily theme, and it seemed perfectly out of the question, but I had had a good job for awhile. And I could make arrangements at home, and I felt that if I went over there, I could stand on my own feet and
Norris: just take this three-month course and see what it did for me.

Duncan: Which year was that? About 1904 or '05?

Norris: Yes, because it was before the earthquake. Nineteen-hundred and five. And I went over there, and I only hope other girls going to college have that marvelous sense of freedom. This is the atmosphere; this is what I want!

Never saw a high school. My sister went into a high school and rated so high that the board of education went into it a little bit and said they would like to know what this girl's background was, but I never had to bother with such harassing thoughts.

Duncan: How did the University impress you?

Norris: Oh, tremendously. Mrs. Hearst had just given the big Hearst Hall for girls and the big ampitheatre was completed. It was just as marvelous as some of these long, long ago Europeans going on foot to some center of learning.

Duncan: Like Heidelberg.

Norris: I immediately entered Mr. Wells' classes and got a job, what they call student help, household, and I got my meals and my room for about three hours a day, I think it was.

Duncan: Do you remember where you lived?
Norris: I do remember. One was with a professor's family named Torrey. And the other was with a German family, and I cannot remember their names, except they were very, very nice to me. And very appreciative. Of course, I had a good deal to do with the meals. I would go and help the woman of the house getting meals. And it was never anything but a friendly relationship. I was the one that would say, if they were having company, "Please let me take a sandwich and go upstairs, and I'll come down afterwards and help clear up here." But usually, in fact, it was always, "You stay right here where you are." And those were really very happy months.

I worked under a professor named Chauncey Wetmore Wells.

Duncan: His picture is still up in the English department.

Norris: Is it really? It should be. With a beard. He looked like an English professor and he talked like one, but he was American-born. He was the inspiration, he was the unbelievable hand held out to me. To do that I had to go over to Berkeley and get a special student's . . . I couldn't take any tests; I never saw a bluebook in my life, but I said I wanted English and also English history. So I went in his class for a daily fee. We had a
Norris: daily theme, five days a week. I can still see
the little mark he put on the ones he liked,
with a blue pencil. It wasn't more than a week
before he singled out one of my papers. I was
twenty-four, most of the others were about eighteen.
Most of the girls weren't there really with the
idea of being writers. They were just joyous young
things. I had done an immense amount of reading
and some writing, but just the same it was a great
distinction and I've never forgotten it. I went
to tea with him and Mary Wells, who was awfully
sweet to me. He said, "The minute I read that
paper I realized that you had something and the
time is going to come when you will show it."

I then had to go home, a break right into
the term, because my aunt was sick. She had said
she'd live with the children while I was there and
I went home Fridays anyway, but she needed nursing.
So I gave up, but sometime later I dedicated a
book to him as an accessory before the fact because
he gave a hand to a good many writers. Of course,
Frank Norris did some work over there with Morse
Stephens in the nineties.

Duncan: Do you remember what books, perhaps, you read about
that time?

Norris: Well, you see, we were all of us voracious readers.
Norris: And we read everything we could lay our hands on. I remember my sister Teresa, who was afterwards Mrs. William Rose Benét, got hold of a book called *St. Elmo* which is a Civil War story. It didn't make any difference. She read Gayley's *Classic Myths in English Literature* and of course we read all of what we used to call "sets," you know, the... We read Stevenson and Dickens and Thackeray and Scott, all from my father's shelves.

Duncan: How did Dickens impress you about this time?

Norris: Well, Dickens always has been "my boy." I marvel at him still. There are passages of Dickens I can't read now with dry eyes. I simply marvel at him, the power that he has. I put him next to Shakespeare. Milton I only know because I read him. And Dante I read, unfortunately, as an Italian lesson, and that isn't too good, with notes all the way down the page. But I think there are certain scenes in Dickens' books that nobody can -- after all, Thackeray was way above the level of most of us in our lives. He wasn't writing about the people we knew. And Scott. I remember *Old Mortality* and *The Heart of Midlothian*.

During that time, I thought if I could get a librarian's pay, that would be very nice. So I went to the City Hall and took an examination,
Norris: two days. And the first day was about books. And that was just too simple. So I filled it up and wrote script just as I do to this day. And I filled it all up. One of the librarians was boarding with us at the time, and she came home and said, "I have no right to tell you, but they are very much impressed with your paper."

The next day there were questions that were as strange to me as if they had been written in Bengali. It was something unheard of. I don't know just how to classify them. I remember one was what you did to a pipe when you struck it to raise the note of it. Another was -- afterwards Joe told me it wasn't even algebra, it was logarithms.

Duncan: Trigonometry?

Norris: It probably was. And I had never had any of those subjects, and I was completely confused. And of course, I was ruled right out. I still can't see exactly why a librarian has to know those things. But the first paper was marked very high; I think as high, maybe, as ninety-eight. And the next paper didn't get anywhere.

So I lost that chance, but this is what broke my heart, and these are the setbacks that any young person, you know, has to take. But some time later I went with my Aunt Margaret to get her wedding
license at the City Hall, and there was to be some other test, and it said that here was a sample paper. It was my paper! It was spread out there under glass.

And that disturbed me. I don't know, they could have given me a job if they liked it that well.
SAN FRANCISCO FIRE, 1906

Norris: After Father and Mother died, of course, we had to come back to the city for our jobs, and we took a little flat there, but we had gone to Mill Valley in April of 1906 to get it all ready for the tenant; we were going to rent it. We did rent it. In fact, we could have rented ten of them that year. Everybody wanted a house, you know.

And I had my grandmother's egg ring, and I had her little seal for wax before there were waxed envelopes, with the famous shamrock and thistle but no rose. And we had various things that Father had had. Scarves from the Orient, you know, Mother's silk shawl. And we packed those all very carefully and we had stored them just before the earthquake, and they were all burned in the fire.

Duncan: All burned.

Norris: Yes, and a diary from one of my grandmother's cousins in Memphis at the time of the Civil War.

Duncan: Your own home burned, actually, over in Mill Valley?

Norris: No, we had moved from Mill Valley, but we had stored these things in the city when we moved, and I suppose we took everything that we really treasured as so many people do.
Duncan: When the earthquake came, you were watching from Mill Valley?

Norris: Mill Valley, and we climbed the hill and saw this tall smoke. And then my brother and I, who had jobs, decided we'd have to go report, anyway, so we came down to Sausalito and got on a little collier and came over to the city on this collier from the Clyde, and walked up Van Ness. It didn't dare go round to the regular ports. But it stopped at the foot of Meigg's Wharf, I think. And we walked up Van Ness.

Duncan: Was that old Henry Meigg?

Norris: Yes. And then we saw this smoke coming nearer and nearer, and we could hear it. That's the awful part. The sound of the earthquake, too, as if the earth was groaning.

Duncan: Did you feel and hear the rumbling?

Norris: That's the awful part of it. It's as if things way down in there were falling, and it's -- that's one of the frightening elements. The earthquake itself, you know, isn't very violent, doesn't have to be. It's really like a gentle jiggle. There isn't any of this smash and bang. When they did it in the movies, it was really funny, because there wouldn't be any world left if that had happened. But it was very gentle.
Norris: The pictures on the wall clicked. And anything like a lamp clicks, and things in the kitchen rattle. And it's frightfully terrifying, and you can't classify.

Duncan: It was very early in the morning.

Norris: Quarter past five. Beautiful April morning. Lilacs, roses, everything.

Duncan: You were wakened then?

Norris: We were wakened by this. And of course the first thing everyone says is, "What is it? What is it? It's an earthquake!" and we had heard of it. And we rushed out on the porch, and as we rushed through the kitchen, the eggs in the bowl were rattling gently. Everything was rattling.

But this aunt of mine, Miss Kitty Thompson, very quiet and very subdued little person because of various griefs, lived with us, and my father and mother were gone, and she took care of us and we took care of her. But she had prepared. After the earthquake of '68, when she was twelve -- oh, no, she was older, born in '52, she was about sixteen -- she had made herself a wrapper, heavy with pockets. And everything she valued in the world was in that wrapper. Pictures, papers, handkerchiefs, underwear, money, rosary, and anything that she valued, she had in
Norris: that wrapper. Every night since '68. That's thirty-two and six; that's thirty-eight years. And she put that on as soon as she felt that familiar feeling, and she came out of the house decently dressed, which of course, we were not. And she had the feeling -- and she kept it to the end of her life -- and she had it hanging near her, so that the first thing she reached for was her big heavy wrapper and everything in it, and even crackers, and a few light refreshments, I suppose tea, I don't remember. But we always laughed about it because we said she was the only human being we ever knew who was ready.

Duncan: She had a warning long before, hadn't she?

Norris: She had a long wait! Well, you know, we always have had little quivers. Have you felt one?

Duncan: Oh yes, occasionally.

Norris: And I suppose in time we'll have another to date from. But with talk of atom bombs, why, earthquakes seem almost domestic.

Duncan: They do seem rather small!

Norris: Then you know the difference in spirit. A war might have devastated San Francisco, but there would have been frightful suffering, death, and bitterness and resentment. And occupation, maybe. But when it's a great, big, harrowing event like that one, everybody turns out and everybody's
Norris: gay. The people were pouring out of Chinatown when we got to the city, and they were carrying little shaven-headed babies, and they were laughing, chattering, giggling, the way Chinese do, and there was no note in the city, that we saw, except -- there was a man selling souvenirs already, while the fire was burning, and he was selling souvenirs. He had found a Bible, badly scorched, large pages. And the pages were scorched, and he had separated all the pages, and he would sell you a page of the Bible for a souvenir. And of course we bought souvenirs, we bought two pages of the Bible, and we found some kind of prophecy on one of them, and we -- well, people were, I don't know, there was a sort of lack of responsibility about it. Everything was gone. We had no jobs, no future.

Duncan: But everybody was in the same boat.

Norris: Everybody was in an exalted kind of state. What are we going to do? And everybody, well, that was an earthquake.

After the earthquake and the fire, most of the old places were... Of course, the Flood house wasn't touched. That's New York brownstone. It seems that as a little boy he had admired the brownstone houses, and I don't know what it cost
Norris: Mr. Flood, and I don't think he knew, and I don't think he cared. But he brought that brownstone round from New York.

Duncan: It was all imported!

Norris: All imported; there was none here. And he put his brownstone house inside his fence. And the fence, which is rather funny, has magnificent chains on it, solid copper. And I believe they painted them black so people wouldn't steal them. So I don't know quite what they accomplished. But they're copper. And, of course, the other houses burned down. Fairmont was up but not occupied and was gutted completely. But everything else went down. You can't imagine such devastation. Hard to believe it. Forty square blocks of flat ashes.

Duncan: Burned almost as far out as Van Ness, didn't it?

Norris: It did. Reached Van Ness. Some spots. And the front of the Emporium -- that was a venture, the first big department store. And the front of it stood for a long time and wavered in the wind. Just the front. Finally that came down. And of course nobody knows how to handle a calamity.

You know, Larry Harris, who is a very delightful person and a big figure. Well, then in San Francisco's club life and business life. He
Norris: wrote this poem, you know, "The Damnedest, Finest Ruins." (laughter) He was quite well known in club circles. Nobody had ruins like our ruins. And about the end of that week, they brought me a newspaper from Oakland. And I haven't any doubt that that newspaper is in existence; you could find it and look at it. It was published about that time, perhaps the 20th or 21st, and it was full of personals, desperate people trying to get together, you know. And it was extraordinary. "Mama: David and Harry are with us. Have you Caroline?" And then the next one would say, "The Johnson family is living at such-and-such address in Piedmont; Mrs. William Thompson is with them." And those were the personals all through that paper.

Have you ever thought of the treasure which was lost? Well, you were just speaking of it; you were speaking of the documents. Now I have here the *Life of Henry James*. Letters. And Henry James, who had friendships with everybody, this young American writer who went from Boston to England, and eventually became an English citizen, he had letters from all of them. He burned them all. He said that was a conscientious duty, to burn other people's letters.

Duncan: What a loss.
Norris: Oh, when you think of it, you know! And somebody said the other day, "What would we do if we found another Shakespeare?" You know, hidden away somewhere. And I think we'd know it, because I think with all the Shakespeariana we have it would have checked that something's missing here. But it's perfectly frightful to think of what a fire like that in San Francisco destroys. Documents and background. Then, of course, the city was so hot that they didn't dare excavate for a long time. Explosions.

Duncan: In the embers?

Norris: Yes. They had to wait. But then as different people would come upon securities untouched or something that was -- then there would be sort of celebrations. In fact, it was a very happy summer. They called our house "Gretna Green" because there was so much romance going on, all the time. We had had a great deal that was exciting and pleasant at that time; a good many picnics out at Cliff House beach and a good many games at home with pencils and things of that sort. And people who had been almost afraid to get married -- some uncle in Dover, Massachusetts, would say, "Johnny, if you want to come here, I'll give you a job. You won't be able to get
Norris: a job at home for a while." And they were all being married and going off like popcorn, you know.

Duncan: This was right after the fire?

Norris: Right after the fire.

Duncan: I like your simile there, popcorn after the fire.

Norris: I never thought of that! (laughter) They were popping, and they would tell us about it at home. "We're going to be married, take a chance, Bob's uncle is giving us a job," and so on.

And oh, there was really a great deal -- of course, you can't suppress youth. I think there were people, people who paid for that fire. A little more the middle-aged people. Men in the fifties, early sixties, who had jobs and were sure of their jobs but who weren't fit to pick up a job two years later when the company reorganized and straightened itself up. And we knew several, really, who didn't recover from the earthquake. Just went into a sort of premature...

Duncan: Decline.

Norris: Retirement, yes, at the earthquake. But for anybody the right side of thirty it was delirious.
THE LITERARY WORLD

Norris: Some very good writers visited our house in Mill Valley. One was a Miss Julie Heyneman of San Francisco, who later wrote quite a good deal of fiction under the pen name of, I think, Vincent Chard. George Sterling came over to our house. I really think he was a great writer, George Sterling, and a man named Jimmy Hopper, who wrote a great deal, and a very delightful man who wrote a play that was a great success later, The Man Who Came Back -- let me think of what his name was. Yes, that was John Fleming Wilson. And a great many of the people who wanted to write would come over there.

Duncan: You were only an hour away from San Francisco.

Norris: Yes, it was almost less than that, about forty-five minutes.

Duncan: How did you go home?

Norris: We took a boat, a little sidewheeler, called San Rafael, which made the trip back and forth all day. And you said to people, "If you aren't on the 2:15, we'll look for you on the 4:10," and a little shuttle train went up and down from Sausalito. And then another trip went up to San Rafael. And then, that was as far as it went;
Norris: that was its terminal. San Rafael and Mill Valley.

And we all started writing better stories. We'd decided that the East must be yearning for them. And it was. And so all of them, I think every one of the others, was taken, but not mine. And I was very much dashed. While we were waiting to hear from the East, I wrote another story which later, much later, was going to be the "open sesame" to writing stories. But I, of course, didn't know that. Mine came back, and a second story came back. I was really quite hurt. And then I went to my job in San Francisco.

Duncan: What were you working at?

Norris: Well, my sister was in Paul Elder's bookshop, which is a beautifully artistic bookshop. And they opened up on Van Ness, in a house, after the fire. Of course there were no stores. And the Emporium moved into one of the great big mansions and the City of Paris was in another great big mansion, and they all moved out. Bohemian Club moved out too; I think it was a kind of apartment house that they took. But people grabbed what they could get, you know.

So Teresa, my sister, was working at Paul Elder's, and their people were all scattered.
Norris: Some had gone away, and I went in with her for a while, and it's while I was there that I wrote some little sketches. I worked with the Red Cross for about a year after the earthquake, and I got little bits of human history from them.

I wrote an earthquake story, as they all did, and mine was refused, but in the flush of conversation I wrote another story called "What Happened to Alanna." Then I wrote two short stories for the Argonaut. When they were published, I don't know if anything made me feel more successful because the Argonaut was a little weekly and it ran one little story every week and they took two of mine. The check for the first was $12.50. My brother said, "You ought to frame that because you may get some more money for stories." I said (laughing), "I don't frame any check for twelve and a half dollars." That was altogether too valuable. That was in 1907.

Red Cross Stories

Norris: When the earthquake came, and I did this Red Cross work, oh, it was very thrilling. It was up at the girls' high school, and the people came in and you heard their stories. And you said, "What is it that you want, Mrs. Breck?"
(imitates strong Irish accent) "Well, my dear, if I could get hold of a sewing machine, I could get started." And I would write out a card, "Wants sewing machine. Has been a seamstress. Is widow. Has following children:" and those were all filed, you see.

And there was a man named Otto Cushing, and they ought to put up a statue in the city to Otto Cushing, because he was head of the Red Cross and took over, and this very wonderful woman came out from Boston, and we had it all organized, and then he would say to a person, "If you will come in, about four days ahead, come in Saturday, we can tell you." And if we could get hold of a sewing machine, and the East was rushing supplies we would see that this woman had her sewing machine.

Then others would have a chance to go east and not be a burden if they got tickets. And there was a very strange little story of a crippled woman and a blind man and her brother, and they could all be taken care of if they could get east. She was crippled, her husband was blind, but the brother would take care of them if we could get them east. So they all got their tickets finally and they got on the train
Norris: and they got east.

Reporting for the Call

Norris: And I wrote up some of these things, you see, and handed them in to the Call, just for the fun of the thing. And when my aunt said to me one day, "Did you write this?" And I said, "Yes." And she said, "I saw your name on it." And I said, "They used it!" So when I went to the office, they said, "You have a little account here." You know, space and detail. It was about nine dollars and ten cents, I think. But I got something for it. Then they sent for me and asked me if I would take over the social news. And to my ecstasy I was on a newspaper. I knew people and my aunt could tell me anything I didn't know, and I kept that for two years.

Duncan: That was society reporting?

Norris: Society editor and some club. I worked very hard at it because I was getting thirty dollars a week and that was big money. It was good money in those days. It came in the shape of three ten dollar pieces. Did you ever see one?

Duncan: Yes, I have, but a long time ago.

Norris: Of course, all our money was gold and silver. We had no paper money.
Duncan: Before we leave the Call, do you remember Mr. Fremont Older?


Duncan: He was on the Bulletin.

Norris: He was the owner -- and editor. A magnificent man. His wife is still living and a very charming woman, but he was quite a power in newspaper circles.

Duncan: What can you tell us about him?

Norris: Well, except that he was a person immensely respected and that for a few weeks, before I went on the Call, I did work for the Bulletin, taking the place of one of their women writers who was in Europe. I enjoyed it immensely and would have been so glad to go on, but she came back. Very lovely, Miss Frances Joliffe, a woman of very high social connections so she knew what she was writing about, which, of course, I didn't.

On that paper they had a man named Henry Raleigh who afterwards made a great name for himself in New York illustrations, and a very loved friend of mine and my husband's, Herb Roth, who did a daily comic sketch in one of the New York papers. Of course, those names are pretty well forgotten, but it was very exciting.
Mr. Older really was a great influence in letters, there was no question. He was a fine editor.

I belong to a little organization in San Francisco called the "Late Watch." The "Late Watch" is getting to be a very sketchy and scanty little group. I think there are only eleven of us who were in the newspaper business in 1906, in the earthquake year.

Do you occasionally get together?

Oh, we do every year as close to the earthquake as the Saturday night comes. We have a party and we've now admitted quite a group who were forty years in the paper and another younger group of twenty-five years, but we are the "Late Watch" pioneers.

One very lovely writer on the Examiner, Anita Day Hubbard, is one. Mr. Stanton Coblentz, who is now long retired and lives up in the country, is another. We are always featured at the speakers' table and given a great deal of aplomb. Of course, we lessen from year to year.

But in those days I was a social reporter, and one night in a tearing rain I was asked to go out to the skating rink. And I said to the editor, "I can tell you something; I can do it all with my
Norris: eyes shut. I know who's going to be there and I know who's going to lead the cotillion." He said, "Go out and give it a once-over." So I went out and this very charming girl that I had known all my life came up to me with a large, dark gent and she said, "Here's a man who wants to meet you. He knows your brother Fred." And that's how I met Mr. Charles G. Norris.

Duncan: Your future husband.

Norris: Yes. And about an hour later, he said to me, "Can I take you home?" I said, "I'm not going home. I've got to go down to the paper, and turn in a story on this." He said, "I'll take you there."

And for something over forty years after that I had an escort. Whatever I did, wherever I went, he was right with me.

Duncan: Where was the skating rink?

Norris: It was after the fire, and...

Duncan: Was this 1908?

Norris: Yes, it was '08. Nineteen hundred and seven and '08, the winter of '07 and '08. And it was out facing what is called the Panhandle in one of those places that sometimes the Elks use and sometimes the Workers of the World use -- one of those big halls. But what it was called, I can't remember. It wasn't frozen skating, you see; it was roller skating. And fashionable that winter, because
Norris: nothing else could be done. And all the elect were there.

Duncan: It was a society event.

Norris: Oh, my, yes!

Duncan: Cotillion?

Norris: Yes, it was really a skating cotillion. And all the mothers and fathers -- you see, in those days there were chaperons. And the children couldn't go out and leap into a car and go running down to the Skyline. They either had to take the streetcar, which was very dull, or they had to walk. So that chaperoning was very, very comfortable, very easy.
MARRIAGE

Norris: And so that was the beginning, and then very shortly afterwards we talked of marriage and I knew I had no right to get married; I was still involved, but I was getting up to twenty-eight and that's a time when a person begins to feel very serious about these things. And two members of the family, two boys, had married, and --

Duncan: Which two of your brothers?

Norris: The oldest, Joe, who is still the light of my life, and Freddie was the next one, who's very, very happily fixed over in Stinson Beach. He has an ideal home there; it's a real old-fashioned captain's farmhouse. But inside, his wife has made it a museum. And Joe married, and then Fred married, was married when he was in the last stages of typhoid and they thought it was a matter of minutes, and his girl married him. And he has lived way past her lifetime. And then the family consisted of two sisters and my aunt, and finances had brightened up a bit, and I knew we could help, and Joe was helping, and so we were married. C. G. had lived in New York, you see, when his
Norris: brother Frank was there. Frank was ten years older than C. G. Frank has the rating of a great novelist, because what he wrote did picture an era. It could have been that it could be more poetic; might have been more eloquent; but it certainly was honest, hard work. And Frank's mother, a very dramatic beautiful woman, white hair, six-footer, she idolized Frank. She didn't want him to marry anybody, and when he did she didn't like it, and she was a woman of great violence of emotion. And she really didn't care whether her younger son married or not. C. G. was ten years younger.

But Frank had died, you know, of an appendix that ten cents worth of penicillin would have cured.

Duncan: Would have cured at the time. This was 1902.

Norris: Frank died about 1902. And left a little bit of a girl, less than a year old.

Duncan: Was it during an operation for the appendix?

Norris: Yes. It was an infected appendix. And they had thought that he was out of it. My husband was with him, and his mother was with him in the afternoon, and when Mrs. Norris got home to her hotel -- it was really an apartment house, originally intended only for bachelors, but they found that wouldn't work, so they let everybody else in --
Norris: and when she got home her maid said to her, "The hospital telephoned." And she turned to C.G. and she said, "It's Frank." And when they got back to the hospital, within that hour, he was feverish and raving, and he died the next day.

Duncan: Peritonitis, I suppose.

Norris: Yes. And there was nothing to do in those days, you know. And I don't know how many -- well, people can't live forever, but that was a sad loss.

Duncan: How old was he?

Norris: Frank was only thirty-one.

Duncan: So young!

Norris: And he left these big, heavy books that we have seen translated into German, Scandinavian. We had a Finn on a boat with us once, and if he didn't have Frank's The Pit, which is really a picture of the stock market. And C.G. just adored him. And, of course, his mother just adored him. And so when I talked to C.G. about getting married, I said, "I wish some time we could live in New York." Because I had never been further east than Piedmont. I had never been out of the Bay counties. And it seemed to me that New York might sort of spur you and stir you up.

Duncan: That was always the goal.

Norris: Of all writers. And so, I didn't think of myself
Norris: as a writer, but I had been on a newspaper for two years. They used to let me do an occasional -- if I did it well, they'd print it, you know. And he said, "Well, there's nothing remarkable about New York." Well, I said, "You know there is." "I've lived in New York for years." "Could we do it?" He said, "You know, we could get married in New York if we wanted to."

Well, of course, the sky just broke open. I knew it; I felt it! And so we were married on twenty-five dollars a week.

Duncan: You went back east and --

Norris: I went back with his mother. Nineteen hundred and nine, early 1909, I was married there. He had a job with the American Magazine. And so our whole affair went tearing through, at such a rate that a good many of the people who were interested in me when they saw it in the paper had no idea that there was even a friendship.

But an odd thing happened. A man who was a good deal younger than I, and never was in the picture as far as I was concerned, was writing me letters, and I snubbed him. And curiously enough, he was very fond of my husband. And he took these letters to him, and C.G. was dictating letters to me long before we met. And I noticed this sudden pickup in this young fellow's whole attitude; and
Norris: certain definiteness. And I thought, what had happened to him? That was what had happened; he had gone to C.G.

And then we met.

Duncan: Out at the skating rink.

Norris: And then almost immediately, I think it was perhaps a matter of -- it wasn't two weeks.

Duncan: That quick!

Norris: Before we decided that we were going to New York and write books.

Duncan: You had quite a little time of courtship here in San Francisco.

Norris: Yes, and then he went east. It was March to about -- I know he stayed for the Jinx, which is always the month of July. Then he went east, got his job, and I followed on with his mother. And we took a little apartment in the East Seventies, and the whole story began to unroll as if it had been written.

At the time I married, I had no recognition as a writer except that about three or four months before I married I changed from the Call, which was a morning paper, and went over to the Examiner. The Examiner was way downtown in a bunch of mud flats which wasn't considered very good walking at night, but it seemed all right to me. I enjoyed that experience.
It was during that experience that they sent me out to get an interview with a very beautiful actress, Margaret Illington. She was married to one of the Frohmans. I didn't know how to approach her. She was in a private hospital, so I went to the hospital and wrote on a little piece of paper. They said, of course, that she wasn't there, but I said, "Is Mrs. Frohman here?" They said, "No, no one of that name." I said, "Well, if Miss Illington were here, could you get this message to her?" So the nurse looked at me for quite a few minutes and said, "I'll see."

So I wrote on a piece of paper, "Dear Margaret: May I come in for five minutes?" And I signed it "Kathleen." I had never seen her nor heard her and of course she knew nothing of me. And in five minutes the nurse came back and said, "Miss Illington would like to see you."

So I went in and when I got there I walked over to her bed; she wasn't well and she had a nurse there with a beautiful woman. I said, "I have to tell you first that I'm a reporter from the Examiner and this was my maneuver. All you have to say is, 'Well, your maneuver did not succeed' and I will walk out. I'm sorry, but I had to go this far." She said, "Well, sit down..."
Norris: and let's see how far this is." So we talked and she finally asked the nurse to get her a very lovely photograph of herself and she signed it. She said, "With love to" -- and she put in quotes, -- "Kathleen." She said, "I've going to tell you something. I'm going to divorce Mr. Frohman and marry Bowes." You know, the great Bowes of the "Amateur Hour." I said, "Well, you're talking to a reporter, but if you say so, I won't use it. But if I may use it, it will be the biggest thing that ever happened to me." So she said, "You use it." So that was the "Darning Stocking" story. It is still quoted in newspaper circles.

And C.G., my husband, who had gone to New York to wait until I could go on and we could be married, he saw it in the New York papers signed with my name. Of course, he was electrified, and it was a great moment and a generous thing for her to do.

Duncan: Wasn't it Major Bowes who said, "The wheel of fortune turns and where it stops nobody knows"?

Norris: That's the one, and what a comfortable time he had with those amateur shows.

So that happened, which was very exciting.

Then, a few weeks later I went on to New York. We were married at St. Paul's there in April, 1909,
Norris: and we had a little flat on 72nd Street where one of the great big houses, Carlyle, stands. We had three rooms and New York was our front yard.
THE NORRISES

Norris: The Norries were Chicago people, and my husband's father was the wholesale jeweler. The firm was Norris and Allister. And I believe that it is still there under that name, although the family has long ago lost track of it.

Duncan: Do you remember any of the family still back in Chicago?

Norris: I know that my father-in-law was from Michigan. And he left home to go to school. And on the way with his father, he was so heartbroken at the idea of going to school that he ran away from his father and ran into this jewelry shop and asked the man if he wanted a boy. The man did want a boy. And for quite a little while Mr. Norris, as a little boy, slept under the counter. And then he wrote his father and the father consented, that if he had a job and was on his own feet, he could stay. And he did stay, and he was a very successful merchant. At the time of the '93 Fair, he had a complete concession for souvenir spoons, and so on. Anything silver was Mr. Norris. And, of course, I never saw him. So he brought his family to California.

Duncan: When was that?
Norris: C.G. was four years old, 1884. And they built a very beautiful house up on Sacramento Street. And he had three sons then. Frank, about fourteen; a beautiful child named Lester, who was ten; and, of course, C.G., who was four. But Lester was Lester Wallach Norris, because Mrs. Norris had been a very successful young actress. Lester Wallach Norris was named for the great star whose leading lady she was.

Duncan: That was interesting.

Norris: And she never forgot. And she acted to the last day of her life. She was dramatic, very handsome. She stood very tall. When I used to meet her, she used to come into the library and borrow the Browning books.

Duncan: You knew her, then, when you were in the Mechanics' Library.

Norris: Yes. Just that this was Mrs. Norris with her very impressive shoulders and white hair, and she'd come after Browning. Nobody else took Browning out. The English *Browning Papers* -- she was modeling her club on that club. So if I said to her, "Mrs. Norris, there is 32¢ due on this paper," she would say, "Who wants it? Notice this, my dear child, notice the number who takes it out. Four hundred and twelve, 412, 412, nobody else takes it
Norris: "Just the same, there is 32¢ on this book." Then I'd write it on the card, "32¢ owing." When it got up to two dollars or so, I'd rub it out and start all over again. She never paid. She felt that Browning was her special property. Sometimes with her was the beautiful and dashing Mrs. Frank, in her first mourning. Frank had died.

Duncan: In 1902.

Norris: Yes, and I had only seen him once. While I was over in Berkeley, a family named Soule had given him a reception and I was invited. He had just written *The Octopus* and he was in the glory of his success. He was about thirty-one and he had brought this beautiful wife, who was a San Franciscan, over to this reception, and the whole place was stirred up over this sensational success. You see, the *Saturday Evening Post* was running this story, serially, and none of us had risen to that dream, you know. I only saw him; I didn't go up to speak to him. I don't know what it was; I suppose it was a kind of pride. I didn't know his brother at all; I didn't know he had a brother. I looked at him. I watched him. And quite a few years later, I told his mother how he impressed me, and she put her hand over her eyes and said, "That's Frank."
Duncan: What did he look like?

Norris: Well, he was stunning. He had an olive skin and silver hair at thirty. But he had this trick of talking to you in dead seriousness and then suddenly lighting his face with a smile. And I said that to her; I said that I watched him for fifteen minutes, and she said, "That was Frank."

People loved him so. It was really extraordinary, the people in New York that knew Frank Norris. William Dean Howells and -- oh, it's impossible to remember -- the editor Richard Watson Gilder and his sister Jeannette -- big people in letters in those days. Dick Harding Davis, Richard Davis. All of them when they spoke, and both the Irwins, Wallace and Will. When they spoke to us years later of Frank, it was something. He must have been fascinating.

This mother, having lost this beautiful little Lester Wallach when he was ten, of diptheria, and having lost her marvelous Frank, she was very bitter. And when I was engaged to C.G. -- it was very sudden -- she disapproved very much. She didn't like the idea at all of his marrying a newspaper woman. And she however did her full duty.

Duncan: Even though Frank himself had been on a newspaper?

Norris: Yes, but it was different in our generation with
Norris: women. Women who worked were not quite of the type that she admired.

Frank had gone out to South Africa; they said that that was where his health had become undermined. Frank was gone.

Duncan: He was covering the troubles leading to the Boer War.

Norris: Yes. He was. And -- what were some of the big names out there then?

Duncan: Churchill was out there.

Norris: Yes... And she had lost him, and had lost her husband (he had gone away with another woman), and she didn't feel that my husband, who was a slow person to mature, according to her standards... she hadn't any enthusiasm for his marrying at all. But she finally rose to the Victorian duty and sent me a magnificent diamond. She said, "If you want to give that to your girl, give it to her." So C.G. brought me this diamond, and I said, "I trust that you're not starting into marriage with me, buying me a diamond like that." And he said, "Oh, no; that's Mother's. And she wanted you to have it."

Well, then, I rose to the situation and called on her. And she very soon became interested in telling me about her theatrical successes, "The
Norris: Lady of Lyons, "The Hunchback," "Diplomacy," -- she took all those leads.

Duncan: Was that in the eighties, when they first came here?

Norris: No; that was before she was married.

Duncan: In the sixties.

Norris: Way back. It was just after the Civil War.

Duncan: In Chicago?

Norris: In Chicago. And she had married with the understanding that she was to continue with her work. But the moment that she married, he felt that he didn't want her to. And of course she was immediately engaged in raising -- she had seven children.

Duncan: They were married in 1870.

Norris: Yes. No, Frank was born in 1870. I think they must have been married a few years before that, because there were three or four little girls who didn't survive.

Duncan: They lived through the Chicago fire of '71.

Norris: Yes. And then he started this business really on the ashes of that fire. And he must have been quite a strange study, because eventually he did run away with another woman. I think there was a divorce and they were married, but he had children and of course his wife was staggered by this thing.
Duncan: When did that happen?

Norris: That happened about '98, I guess, '98 or '97. And my husband said it was Christmas Day when his mother received the notice that her husband was suing for divorce.

But meanwhile he was so pious that he traveled with Moody and Sankey.

Duncan: The revivalists.

Norris: Yes, the evangelists. So it was very queer background.

I got very fond of my mother-in-law, and she was the president of the Browning Club. It had forty or fifty very lovely, distinguished women in it. And Mrs. Norris would allow the business of the club to drift over her head, completely indifferent. But when it came to reading, she would lay this book before her, and I have never heard more beautiful reading. Her diction was so beautiful, and her enthusiasm was so beautiful. When she died, I said to Mrs. Sloss, wife of Judge Sloss of San Francisco, who also has a very lovely voice and has had a radio program for years about the opera, I said, "I presume, Hattie, that you're going to be the next reader." She said, "No, there won't be another reader. We'll
Norris: have other readers, but not one reader." Mrs. Norris used to read through The Ring and the Book, just so much, every Friday, and the thing to do was to coax her to read. Read "My Last Duchess," or read Kipling's beautiful poem, "The Wreck of the Mary Glouster." She read that so beautifully that in the last few lines, where the old shipping magnate, Sir Anthony Glouster thinks he's on his ship and he's going down, to be buried where his wife was buried, you could actually hear the water gurgling into the ship and hear the timbers giving -- it was something to hear her.

But she wasn't a happy woman because she felt frustrated. She felt life had cheated her.

Duncan: She really wanted to remain an actress.

Norris: I think she did. I think she all her life --

When she was eighty, she gave, she played, a scene from Henry V at the Century Club. And she asked me to come to her hotel, which was about six blocks away, and go there with her. And I think it was Mrs. Sloss who played Kate.

Mrs. Norris, for some reason unknown to anyone but herself, had gotten herself up in dark green velvet shorts, a beautiful coat, heavy with embroidery, skirted, you know -- more the Restoration type of thing, a ruff, and a wig. A
Norris: periwig, tied here. And so she went through it with flying colors. You know, it's a beautiful scene. They're speaking French and English to each other, and getting all mixed up, and finally Henry the Fifth says, will she take a plain Englishman who has nothing to offer her but his hand and his honor, but between them, mightn't they perhaps compound a boy? Which is so beautifully put. And she just had all those people startled, it was so lovely.

And then, with her usual regal indifference to everything and everybody, she said, "I want to go home." And I said, "In this costume?" And she said, "Why not? It's only four or five blocks." We had walked there before she dressed. She had dressed at the club.

So I walked with her through the warm afternoon at five o'clock, and if there was a human being that didn't stop and look at this magnificent old lady of eighty in green velvet shorts, buckles, ruffles, slashed sleeves, and this coat, standing up, and she talked all the way as unconcernedly as if we had been in our own room. And I was really terribly embarrassed, because all the children rushed to the windows of the orphanage, and people stopped in the streets.
Duncan: Was it out along Van Ness or where?

Norris: We walked along Franklin. And then I suppose down Geary to the Richelieu, where she was living. And she really had a great triumph.

Toward the end she softened a great deal. She was very fond of my little boy, and she told him she wanted him to call her "Nana." And for me to call her "Nana." And my son Frank was about -- well, his years run with the years too, so I suppose he was about five, and he said, "Nana is a dog." Of course, that's in Peter Pan. And he wouldn't call her a dog. So he called her whatever he chose. He didn't see a great deal of her. But I wouldn't call her "Nana" either. So finally I said, "I know what I'm going to call you, Gertrude." And she really liked it. She liked to hear her name. No one was using it, of course.

Duncan: That was her first name?

Norris: Yes. She was Gertrude Doggett of Massachusetts. Her father ran a young ladies' seminary, and I suppose she got her English and her classics there. And she was a very extraordinary person. She died about 1919.

Oh, good heavens, I wish I had kept so much Frankiana that we had, and that drifted about
Norris: during the years. For instance, many, many little notes on the books that were current then. Frank had been a reader for Doubleday. Frank discovered Dreiser, you know. He fought for Sister Carrie.

Duncan: Yes. The first of the realists. How did you feel about Theodore Dreiser?

Norris: I don’t like him and never did like him; I think he’s simply a sweaty imitation of Zola, and I don’t like Zola. I mean all this perspiring and oh, I don’t know. Of course, that’s ridiculous, because Dreiser has a big place in letters and so has Zola. But it isn’t my particular type of reading.

Mrs. Norris used to be very fond of reading Frank’s books to us, and if she could nab us for a dozen evenings, she’d read right through one of them. She’d say, “How will you come? Every night? If you don’t, why —” and then three or four other people would drift in. It might be Charlie’s Field; it might be Bruce Porter. But she, of course, had a great gift of gathering people around her. And so in that way I got to like Frank’s stuff very much. But it was still tainted with...

Duncan: It’s really unfortunate that a good deal of Frank Norris’ early manuscripts are pretty hard to come
by now. We searched, in fact, all over the world.

Norris: You see, she was burned out. And she had most of them. She was burned out at the time of the earthquake. She was in her room -- she had a very handsome little apartment in an apartment house on Van Ness, and she had those manuscripts there, and had any amount.

What we didn't keep was perhaps the comments on other books which we would feel, "Oh, who cares what Frank thought about some book by Frank R. Stockton, or some book by some other current writer." But all of that is valuable. And I don't suppose that you can get any Frank Norrisiana because...

There was one book that we had, that posthumous book -- let's see if I can remember what it was. And we had that manuscript, and Doubleday, I think, had that. Do you know if Doubleday has any Frank Norris?

Duncan: No, I don't remember if Doubleday has that or not. I do remember searching for McTeague manuscripts.

Norris: McTeague. Yes, that was burned in his mother's room. And her room was destroyed completely. A great bust of Plato fell crashing to the floor, and the clock fell over, an old grandfather's clock that C.G.'s -- some person in the background
Norris: had had. And somebody said that time and art and so on couldn't crush the modern woman, because she got out.

Duncan: Weren't some of the manuscripts of McTeague put in the collected works of Frank Norris published by Doubleday, Doran in 1928?

Norris: Is that so?

Duncan: I think so, in 1928. One sheet to each collected work. I searched through Charing Cross Road in London and among the bookstalls along the embankment of the Seine for various copies of that.

Norris: Well, we have had out feelers for twenty years for Norris books, because my friends and my readers keep writing me, and CG.'s did, and everybody wanted Frank's. So that there isn't a bookstore that has a Norris book that I know of, because my friend, Bob Rose, had a bookstore in San Francisco, the Argonaut, and for years Bob has been looking out for them. And in England I asked Mr. Murray if he would keep an eye out for them. Of course there must be a lot because -- but they do get into the novel rows and you don't know.

It's fascinating. I should think that research would have been thrilling. Did you find anything?
Duncan: Well, do you remember an acquaintance of Frank Norris named Viola Rogers?

Norris: Oh, very well.

Duncan: Went to Paris.

Norris: And a beautiful person.

Duncan: What was she like, actually?

Norris: Is she living?

Duncan: No, she died in 1944, during the war.

Norris: Really. She was deeply devoted to Frank. It was a love affair with her. And I think a good many women must have felt that way about him. But Viola Rogers never made any secret of it at all. And after Frank died, she came to see me, and she told me what Frank had meant to her. And of course the fact that Frank had married a very beautiful and brilliant woman, but not at all...

Duncan: When did Frank marry?

Norris: Frank married just about the first of the century. I'd say 1900. Billie was less than a year old when her father died.

Duncan: Miss Rogers knew him about '96.

Norris: In New York. They all had places down around Washington Square. They must have had a perfectly joyous time, because it was a whole group there. I wish -- it's so silly to wish it -- but I just
Duncan: Wish we had done this before my husband died. Because he could have filled it in. Now it's just one of those tragedies.

Now, did you tell us that Bancroft made it a point to go up and down the state and interview people?

Duncan: Yes. Hubert Howe Bancroft. In fact, in looking for some of these manuscripts of Frank Norris, I went to Paris, and found the villa where Miss Rogers had lived during the war, and during the war it had been taken over by the Germans as a command post, and apparently she had a trunk of some of his letters at one time, written probably about 1895 or '96, and we haven't been able to locate those yet. But the search is still on.

Norris: I doubt if those would have been destroyed. Where was she, do you know, when she died?

Duncan: She died in Paris, in a small villa outside.

Norris: In wartime, you know, it's almost madness. It is madness. There was a book written recently called *The Schoenfeld Inheritance*, and it was the story of one of Napoleon's soldiers, who through some deaths in every direction inherited a tract here in America, and how they had to try to find it. It is fascinating to think of how you follow a
Borris: trail and nothing. And then you begin to think you've found something. And, of course, I had only to say, in apology, really, that none of us took ourselves very seriously. If anybody had said, "Now hold onto that, that may be valuable," there would have been a wild burst of laughter.

Frank left a daughter, a little girl. The wife, who was very, very beautiful, died last year.

Duncan: Did she live locally here?

Norris: She did. She married again after Frank died, as I think was inevitable, and lived on a cattle ranch up in Oregon, and made it a very remarkable place. Outside of Medford. And all kinds of people used to go up there to stay with her and Mr. Preston. And then they were divorced, and she married again, at something like sixty-one or sixty-two. Made a very good match.

And the daughter had married; little Bill married when she was twenty. Frank's daughter -- her life was a great tragedy, because she suffered a great deal from some kind of --

Very pretty, very witty, lovely girl, but she didn't like writers. She didn't want to go east and meet the people who had loved her father. She said, "They're all so old." And we explained
to her that your father is usually older than you are. And that was inevitable. But I know she met Amundsen, and...

Back in New York?

Yes. And I said, "Bill, you sat next to Mr. Amundsen at dinner. Was that interesting?" She said, "Katie, he's a sort of a traveler." I said, "I know that." She said, "I asked him what he did." I said, "Now, Billie, you couldn't do that." He was just back, you know, from the Northeast Passage.

She married, and she married very happily, but the time came when she went to pieces with nerves and took her own life.

When was that? In the twenties?

No, it was later than that.

She married about 1920.

Yes, she did. She was married twenty years. I should say it was about 1940.

Oh, it came upon us as such a stunning shock. We all loved her. But you know, you cannot enter into the mind of a person who wants escape. She had the feeling that she, these nerves, these pressures would come upon her. For instance, when we were in London once, and she and her husband went to the theatre there, and in the
Norris: theatre she said, (whisper) "Katie, I have to go home." And I said, "Oh, no, darling." It was something too beautiful, Shakespeare, I think. She gave me her hand. It was dripping. That kind of a nervous --

Duncan: Tenseness.

Norris: Tenseness. Some terrible kind of tenseness. And for her husband that was a very sad shock. But, of course, Bill was only a little baby when we were married; she was about three. Cunning as she could be.

Duncan: She'd be a little older than that, wouldn't she?

Norris: Oh, yes. We were married in '09, and she was born in '02; she would be seven. Beautiful little thing.
NEW YORK AND A WRITING CAREER

Duncan: How did New York first impress you?

Norris: Well, I presume many a young person who has gotten intoxicated for the first time has that experience. I was just drinking too deep of too heady a wine. It was fortunate, you see. C.G. went to do dramatic reviews for the American Magazine — Frank had been on it, and Frank had been book reader for Doubleday. Miss Tarbell and all that crowd were most hospitable and lovely to us.

Duncan: Most of them lived out of the city though, didn't they?

Norris: Yes: Mr. Phillips lived up in Goshen and Miss Tarbell lived up at Stamford, Connecticut, but we visited both those places.

Then, there was a little paper in New York and I think it was called the Telegram; it was an evening paper. They gave it to me for a month free because we'd just moved in. I began to read the little stories in that paper and New York was instantly fascinating.

Duncan: You felt very vivacious.

Norris: I knew that that was the atmosphere and the American
Magazine gave us a reception. They asked all the people that they knew to this reception at the Players' Club. Well, that was really a dazzling opening. We'd been married about three weeks when we had this beautiful party. I don't suppose most young people have it because it was Frank Norris' friends and the Doubleday people and the American people. My husband had lived in the Doubleday House for several months at one time and he loved them all and did right to the end. They had Booth Tarkington and a very charming writer named Josephine Daskam Bacon and oh, so many of the well known writers of the day. And walking home I said, "C.G. Like Mark Twain's frog, I see nothing about these frogs that is so different from all the other frogs." I think I had thought that writers would be of a very elevated, unapproachable type. They were all as simple as they could be. Juliet Wilbor Tompkins, and Josephine Daskam Bacon -- yes, that was the name.

What did you think of Miss Tompkins?

Oh, I loved Juliet. Oh, I think that she is a darling. She and I have kept up a friendship ever since and she was just as sweet and simple. Of course, her work was appearing constantly in
Munsey's which presently went out of existence.

Booth was writing serials for, I think, McClure's.

Beginnings as a Writer

Duncan: How were you affected by the whole stimulus of the times?

Norris: Well, with the terrific feeling that I perhaps had that in me. "All you're telling me is that I have it too." I think it was also about the time we were going to have a baby, and I wanted to make a little money (not that there was any pressure on me) because we could not get very far on twenty-five dollars a week. So I went home and wrote two or three little sketches for the little newspaper and mailed them in to the Telegram and they took them. They paid space just inch by inch, that was all, $17, $21, and $14. That encouraged me immensely. I presented my husband with three of these checks on his birthday. It was a great surprise. I put them in the gravy dish and asked him if he didn't want some gravy.

Then, he found my two stories in my trunk that I had written at the time of the earthquake.

Duncan: This is the "Alanna" story?
Norris: Yes. And untouched he sent the "Alanna" story to, I think it was twenty-eight magazines. C.G. you see, had been through it with his brother and all he did each time it was sent back was take the manuscript, typewrite two fresh envelopes, and mail it off again. He didn't have to go through all the heart-wringing and suffering and the shame that people feel when they come back, because if two places decline a manuscript you feel it's no good. It you send it to a third, it takes great courage and if that comes back you just realize that it isn't right. Now, it may be perfect. He went alphabetically down the line. At any rate, he sent this story back and forth, back and forth and the second time he sent it to the Atlantic they took it. That was the story that drew William Dean Howells' attention. That, in a sense, was accolade. In those days the Atlantic's fiction was the tops. They had had Howells, Lowell, Longfellow, Whittier, Emily Dickinson, Louisa May Alcott, and they were the open door. When I was in the hospital, very proud with a little boy, C.G. brought me the Atlantic with my name on the cover. That was the beginning.
Morris: The day it appeared in the Atlantic he came in to see me and I said to a young person who was just a week old, "You think you've got a smart mother," -- because Frank and the Atlantic were simultaneous. Then, of course, C.G. was smart enough to know that he had in his hands and his brain and his heart the power to really help me to get on my feet. He made it possible then for me to work.

It was a golden time because so many of our friends were struggling along at the same time and beginning to make their names and as we'd meet for these very inexpensive dinners, maybe way down in Greenwich Village, maybe someone would come in and say, "Do you know that Edna Ferber sold another story yesterday?"

Edna was one of that group and George Kaufman who wrote so many plays afterward. Presently Alex Woolcott came into it and this very lovely Alice Duer Miller who was a real aristocrat. Her sister, her maiden name was Duer, and they were right in the register, but oh, she was such a lovely aristocratic person.

Another person, a Californian who was very active in the magazines, Juliet Wilbor Tompkins, was writing stories. And the two Irwin boys,
Norris: Wallace and Will of San Francisco.

Duncan: You had known them in San Francisco before.

Norris: Oh, yes, I had known them on the Chronicle and they had been at some of these 85¢ Italian dinners down in the Italian quarter where we used to get a tremendous dinner with red wine for 85¢, the whole works. A great immense pot of soup, antepasto, marvelous spaghetti and chicken, and then some kind of ice cream, 85¢. We would arrive at about seven o'clock and we would be sitting there and singing at half past ten, so it was great. It was fun to meet these people again in New York.

Duncan: This was the great flush of creative activity.

Norris: Yes, and everyone beginning to feel his feet underneath him.

Teresa and William Benet

Norris: Then my lovely sister came on and she lived with us.

Duncan: There in the East Seventies?

Norris: Yes. We were first on East 72nd and then we took a larger flat and a less expensive flat over on West 92nd. That's where we were when the little boy was born. That is where my sister was when
Norris: she was married to William Rose Benét.

Benét was a Yale student and had distinguished himself with poetry, as his brother did ten years later. Colonel Benét and his three children moved out to Benicia in California -- that's an armament post. Colonel Benét was in charge. And Mrs. Benét, with this tall and lanky son, used to go in to Paul Elder's. And she very quickly picked out the beauty, the rarity, of my sister, who was a lovely, very much Burne-Jonesey girl (Burne-Jones of the English Pre-Raphaelite painters group -- "Ophelia," the most famous -- Rosetti, Swinburne, Millais, etc., 1880s - 1890s), braids of hair around her head, steeped in poetry. And when Billy, who was writing his first poems at Yale, met this party who could top everything he said and could open a book and say, "This is the sequel to that," he was perfectly intoxicated. And Teresa informed him, Teresa Thompson of Paul Elder's in San Francisco, that she intended to go to Europe and be a Carmelite. Which is a little dashing, of course. So that went on, and then when C.G. and I were married in New York, she came to us, and with a friend she actually went to London and entered the Carmelites.

She stayed in for about a year and came back.
The Carmelites, of course, date back before St. Theresa of Avila and their ideas are about as modern as hers were. So that where St. Theresa told her nuns that they must take a bath every two weeks -- well, in Spain, of course, that was unheard of, nobody takes baths, but she said, "No, they must be clean. Must clean their clothes and their persons." The London Carmelites do that still, that is their rule, because it was St. Theresa's rule. Well, I don't think cleanliness is next to godliness, but apparently they didn't feel they had to move with the times. Well, in many other and much more important ways, her whole viewpoint was the free American viewpoint and theirs was the old, rigid, holy, and utterly impractical.

So she came home; and the minute she came home, Bill came from California and got a job with the Century Magazine. He was with the Century people for years. The man at the head of that then was -- oh, they used to call him "Rubber Underwear" something -- it was Robert Underwood Johnson. And almost immediately Billy was with us practically every suppertime and every evening and that developed very rapidly. The four of us really owned New York. We often took Frank with
Norris: us on our little excursions, rolled him up, put him to sleep somewhere. We considered him no detriment to anything we wanted to do.

Duncan: Where did you go on your explorations around New York?

Norris: Well, we used to go up to the different parks and take lunch on Sunday.

Duncan: Central Park?

Norris: Central Park and that park that's up at 100th... what is the name of that park. Morningside. At any rate, the best of the city was ours because any Sunday there was a beautiful organ concert out at the college and then, I think every Saturday, there was a park concert of classic music. There was always something you can do in New York, either if you're poor or you're rich, but the middle people are the ones who really suffer. But we had it all to ourselves and oh, we did enjoy it so much!

Duncan: You knew how to explore.

Norris: That was it. And we knew what we wanted to see. I remember one very nice experience. One winter, three or four times we went way down to the East Side, down to Canal Street to a Jewish center and I saw there some of the most poignant plays I have
Norris: ever seen. They were, of course, in a language that I didn't understand, but they were beautifully played. Some of the old men and old women were such wonderful actors. The whole thing was a pageant for us, you see.

I shopped at first on Third Avenue and on Avenue A, from the carts, and we had no financial troubles because we were solvent all the time.

Duncan: You were a very good manager.

Norris: Well, I had had some hard experience. I had had seven or eight years, since Mother and Father died.

About a year later, my sister was then working with Putnam. She was a book woman, you see, and they knew it. She had been with Paul Elder, so she was really experienced. They put her in their old book room and she fitted it, she was a picture in it.

Collier's offered $2000 for a story. It had to be a certain length. There were other prizes, I think twenty in all. So I wrote my story and sent it in and we all talked about it. Then the time came and my sister and husband came home together. I knew that something was worrying them. I said to them, "Are the Collier's prizes announced?"
Duncan: Was it Collier's? Or Delineator, possibly?

Norris: Well, both were going. In any event, it would be very easy to place it. Someday I'll take the trouble to do that. Frank was born in 1910 and this would have been sometime in 1911.

Then they broke down and said, "Yes, the prizes are all announced and Miss Zona Gale won the first prize," and someone of whom I never heard again had won the second, but it didn't matter. I wasn't even honorable mention. It was a great blow. I said to C.G., "I had confidence in that story." Well, the strange thing, and I've told this to many young writers, if I had won it it would have been very much to my eventual loss because that story was Mother. C.G., to save my feelings and my face and everything else, said, "I'm going to take that to Mr. Phillips and if he doesn't take it for the American, I'll sell it somewhere."

Well, Mr. Phillips read it and he said to C.G., "Tell me, did Collier's turn this down?" C.G. said, "They must assuredly did." So they published it and that began quite a success.

From that, Mr. McClure of McClure's came to me and he was then publishing the most astonishing collection of stories that later were part of
Norriss: permanent literature. He published Kipling, the first one to publish Kipling's "Stalky and Co." stories. He discovered innumerable writers who later became very successful, English, very many of them.

Duncan: Do you remember some of those writers?

Norriss: Anthony Hope. [Sir Anthony Hope Hawkins.] The man who wrote the Shawnee stories, the "beloved vagabond," I can almost see his name printed. So I was delighted that Mr. McClure wanted me. AniWilla Cather was editor. I went and talked with her and they wanted some stories.

You see, I had had a long apprenticeship. It was more than ten years since my father and mother had died and in that time I had wondered how you broke through the iron curtain.

Duncan: It had been a long struggle.

Norriss: It had been. Of course, I had always been convinced -- I suppose a lot of writers, they all abuse it, they publish a lot that isn't so good. That's one feeling that keeps you going. But from that time on different magazines took serial stories and in those days you had to write a serial story in six or ten parts and each part must end with what they used to call
Norris: a "hook." The hook was the catch that takes people over.

Duncan: To the next installment.

Norris: Yes, it makes them feel that it would be terrible if it goes on that way. I even had a letter on one of those early stories -- the first was Saturday's Child and Good Housekeeping had that. Then the Heart of Rachel and I think that went to Mr. Arthur Vance of the Pictorial Review. They took as many, I think, as ten. Then the other magazines would say, "If you've done one for the Pictorial Review, well then, do us one." So sometimes I would be in three magazines. It went on and on.

Then I was just beginning to feel that writing wasn't just all chance, that it was a profession. And if you mastered it, even in the beginning, why, it was something.

You know what you can do. It's a feeling. It's very strange that the first few things you write are hit-and-miss. You think, "Well, that was very lucky, but I'll never do anything like that again." But after a while, you begin to think, "If this is the product that they like, this is what I can produce."
Norris: And then Teresa married Billy Benêt.

Duncan: Which year?

Norris: She married Bill about 1912.

He sent her, as an approach to this, Lincoln's letter to his lady-love, which it seems to me he couldn't improve upon. She came to me and said, "This is from Bill, but what does it mean?" I said, "Why Teresa, it only means one thing. He picked the highest authority he knows of. If it wasn't Lincoln it would have been Romeo or somebody else." So he got the answer that Lincoln got.

Duncan: One usually thinks of Lincoln in statesmanship.

Norris: Well, yes, that's so. But there was a love letter.

My little sister, meanwhile, had come on and married her sailor, and was living in Annapolis with the lieutenant in the navy, and everybody immediately began to be interested in nurseries. My three brothers were all married, and it was quite delightful to exchange pictures of these sodden-looking little parties who didn't look like anything at all.

Then Teresa and Bill lived down on Long Island.

Duncan: Was this out at Port Washington?

Norris: Yes, that's where it was. And C.G. and I bought some property down there. We went down to Long Island and we swam and we picnicked. And we
Norris: joined a club and we finally had two Dodges.

Teresa had three lovely little children, and I never had but one. My hopes of a family were dashed in that same year that she married.

Duncan: Nineteen hundred and twelve.

Norris: Yes. I had twin daughters. They lived -- one lived only a few days and one lived a week. And, of course, there was no way of going back and finding out why they didn't stay with the person who wanted them. They come to almost every slum in such rich numbers.

But I had my boy.

Duncan: You were ill for some time.

Norris: Yes, I was quite sick after that. Mind and body, I guess. It was a thunderbolt. Because I had always felt that I was more than equal to anything. That doesn't bother me, three children in nineteen months, why that's nothing. But it was something.

I have it in for the income tax people because the year they instituted it was the first year that we know of in our family that two of us went over $4,000 a year. I think it was about 1913.

My brother Joe, who had established a little
Harris: manufacturing business, electrical pole-top machinery, and I and C.G. had gone over $4,000 and we... It wasn't much. I think we had to pay something like $212 on $4,000. But we felt, "Why did you do it just when we came along?"

But it was a very gloriously exciting time.

There were several lovely homes down on Long Island. When I say lovely, they were very simple, but we used to have a very happy time comparing notes and working hard.

The Writers of That Day

Norris: And when we were at Port Washington, we began to meet the people who were writing. Richard Harding Davis and Mr. William Dean Howells.

Duncan: How did Mr. Howells impress you?

Norris: Well, I wrote a little story for the Atlantic in the very beginning. Mr. Howells saw it. And he wrote a very delightful comment. I think my second novel, Saturday's Child, was in Good Housekeeping. And he wrote such a very delightful and serious paper about it that I was immensely impressed. And so I wrote him. Thanked him almost in tears. And then he wrote and asked us if we would dine with him. And he came down to
Norris: New York and we dined at some hotel, I think, I thought he was adorable. I thought he was perfectly adorable.

He had been such a big man. Now people don't read him.

Duncan: Just this last year the Commonwealth Club prize was given to an author, Mr. Everett Carter over at the University, for his work on Mr. Howells.

Norris: Is that so? Well, I'm glad, because that was Americana of a very valuable type. And to me, what he did to me was accolade. It was simply unbelievable that William Dean Howells -- because we always had Harper's in our house. Harper's and Century and Scribner's. Father subscribed to all of them. And we tore through them. And we read all the serials and then we read the books when they came out. He was the tops, of course. And other people were writing; there were other very successful novels, but people seemed to feel that he was the --

I tell you, that other Bostonian has more or less taken his place now.

Duncan: John P. Marquand. H.M. Pulham, Esq.

Norris: Yes, that's right. It's the type of American stuff that is basic.

And then we met the beloved Tarkington.
Booth Tarkington.

Yes. And was he a charmer! He had just written The Gentleman from Indiana. And it was new and daring. Then there was Monsieur Beaucaire. We thought he was fascinating. But you see, a great many people were writing then, and everybody was in a state of great excitement. It was thrilling to get the magazine that somebody else was in.

Then my husband had his job on the American Magazine and Mr. Phillips and Mr. Foster, Finley Peter Dunne and "Mr. Dooley," Ida Tarbell, who was angelic to us -- had me come up in the country and stay with her and sent me home loaded with country eatables. She was doing a big Lincoln and a big somebody else. Then there were a lot of lesser lights.

Ida Tarbell

What type of person was Ida Tarbell?

She was rigid. Serious. Very spinstery type. She was very much interested in civic progress and one night, we -- Frank had a little sweater, and I said, "Miss Ida, I bought that for wool, but I don't think it is wool." And she said, "We'll soon find out."
So we got a saucepan and we put some water in it and we put the little sweater in it. And we looked at each other and she said, "Shoddy, this is cotton; this is some kind of a filler." Well, the poor little sweater disappeared as completely as if it had been a butterball, and that was what it should have done. Actual wool would do that. And it proved that it was 100 per cent wool. And then she very sweetly said to me, "Well, I owe Frank a sweater." So she sent him a little three or four-year-old's sweater.

She was a charming person. She was charming to the people she loved, but rigid, instantly looking into things. "What are the circumstances, what are the conditions...?"

Duncan: Didn't she write about Standard Oil?

Norris: Oh, did she! One night she took us to the Colony Club, which was great fun, and there was a little farce given there, and of course the Colony was so precious that it never gave out anything of its inside doings. But one of the skits was, "How I Rock a Feller to Sleep" by Ida M. Tarbell. Of course, she didn't write it, but she enjoyed it immensely.

She could laugh, but she was -- my sister used
to call herself a "j'iner." Miss Ida was a "j'iner."
If it's good, the question of extirpating this or that, why, she was with it. A person of very New England -- I think she was a Philadelphian, as a matter of fact -- but she had that quality. We had it. We had it mixed with Irish, so that if we got altogether too wrought up about something, it would always kind of break.

Humor?

Yes. It would always break out in some kind of humor. But she was very charming, and then Ray Stannard Baker was on that. You see, these are old names.

Yes, but they're all important.

They're all names that have held their own. And some of the poets. People who did lovely things. There was a Sarah Clayhorn, and Theodosia Garrison Pickering, and of course, Charles Towne. Charles Hanson Towne. All of those people were in that immediate group, and then -- it was hard to say, because my husband found Edna Ferber's first story, just as a reader, "The Frog in the Puddle." And he said to me, "You read that; I think it's unusual."

Eleanor Porter and Pollyanna

And then one day he brought home a manuscript and
Norris: I said, "No, this is pretty mawkish; I don't think the American can use this." It went away and three years later, when C.G. was on another magazine -- he was on a little magazine called The Christian Herald -- very important, but not in a literary sense, important in a church sense, tremendous, a missionary magazine. And again if this old manuscript didn't show up. And I said, "Here is this thing again, C.G. And it seems to me you can have this thing for three hundred dollars. And it will run for at least twelve months. And it is good, but, of course, it's simple." It was destined to create a cult, that little story.

Duncan: What was the name of it?

Norris: Pollyanna. That appeared in The Christian Herald. She sold it to the movies, she sold it to the theatre. I think it was one of the very, very few books that ran, in those days, up to three or four hundred thousand. In those days, of course, we didn't have the paper covers in all the drug stores. And then a big sale was eighty or ninety thousand. But Pollyanna was the Gone With the Wind of its day. There were "Pollyanna" clubs and there were pins. Her name was Porter. There
were two Porters. There was the Porter of *A Girl of the Limberlost*. What was her name? Gene Stratton Porter. And for a while, it disturbed me that Doubleday published her.

And you know, no matter what Dr. Kinsey has to say, I feel that jealousy is almost the basic emotion of human hearts. I've seen babies jealous. I have not seen a baby of six months who had any sex convictions, but I've seen a baby of six months jealous. And I've suffered over Mrs. Porter's sales. She wrote *A Girl of the Limberlost*, *Laddie*, and they were all of that country, you see.

And then the other Porter, Eleanor Hodgman Porter, was the *Pollyanna* Porter. And she was a very sweet and simple woman, but she really made a great fortune out of that one little book, and I don't know that she ever wrote anything else; I never saw anything else. The little child that makes glad about everything; she's going to find some reason to be glad. And it's the child of a missionary family, and they get a great barrel; this is the beginning of it. They think there is something very valuable in it. Oh, it's dresses they can't wear and it's a pair of
Norris: crutches, and all sorts of junk.

Duncan: Very sentimental.

Fannie Hurst

Norris: Then Fannie Hurst came to New York, and she comes of a wealthy family. There was no bread and butter with Fannie. And the first thing she did was go on the stage. And it was a man who played in a play called "The Concert." And in this play he was a music teacher about whom they were all languishing, and he would tell his wife that he had to go away and give a concert and take one of these girls away with him. And Fannie was in this languishing crowd of seven or eight girls, and she did very well. Then she stopped and went to college; I don't know what college. I don't think it was in New York. And she took on a course, gave a course in something. Course in mathematics or something. And she liked that very much.

Then she came back and decided to write.

Fannie Hurst was a very voluptuously handsome woman. Big, glorious person. She has starved herself down now to a perfect twelve, but I don't think she's as handsome as she was.
She wrote her first story and sent it to the Saturday Evening Post, and she thought it was worth $75. And they wrote back and said they differed with her; it was worth $300. And that was Fannie's start, according to what we all heard, from the first story.

Then there came these halycon years when we were all in the full flush of self-expression, which, of course, is life. I have known women who sent in preserves to the county fairs and had just as much pride in their tomatoe pickles as any woman could have for a story in Everybody's. But everybody was doing something.

My being in writing in that very prolific kind of way launched us into acquaintances and friendships, quite naturally. They were always giving those big book parties.

Duncan: Who were some more of the authors and writers you remember?

Morris: Well, some of Mr. Doubleday's people were, of course, Gene Stratton Porter. And, of course, Ellen Glasgow, who was a very lovely person. And then there was a sweet, sweet woman who never got the recognition that she should have had because she was a real, true stylist, and that was Agnes
Norris: Repplier. She used to do very exclusive little essays for the Atlantic, but I don't think she ever had any popular success. Then, as I said, Miss Hurst came to New York, and Miss Ferber came to New York, ardent and eager. Then delicate little Edna St. Vincent Millay began to be heard of. We knew these people. Those we didn't know ourselves, we knew through Bill Benet, who had married my sister and was on Century Magazine.

Duncan: Do you remember Emily Reeves?

Norris: Oh, yes. She was a little bit older. Not Emily, Amalie. She wrote the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Mrs. Alice Meynell

Norris: Of course, there were English women writing at that same time and they would come to New York occasionally.

Duncan: Who were some of those?

Norris: I'm trying to think. I knew Mrs. Alice Meynell came over. She was a very gracious and lovely person and very fond of my sister. She once wrote quite an important letter to my sister. This was before we were married. She came to San Francisco and she visited the Tobins. Alice Agnes Tobin was quite a poet. She loved Beatrice
Norris: Tobin and she wrote to her a beautiful poem called "The Shepherdess of Sheep." "She walks, the lady of my delight, a shepherdess of sheep." Those were her thoughts, you see, she kept them white.

So she got to know my sister before we were married and she wrote my sister a letter with her beautiful British script and said, "My dear Miss Thompson: Knowing your very definite attitude toward the Pre-Raphaelites..." I looked at it. I was Miss Thompson, of course, and Teresa was Teresa. I thought, "Is this poor Englishwoman off her rocker? I don't know what Pre-Raphaelites are." I guess it was two or three days later when I said to Sis, "Sis, what are the Pre-Raphaelites?" She said, "Why that is a group of people in New York who went back to a very classic and primitive type of painting and called themselves Pre-Raphaelites." I said, "Well, why should I have a definite opinion about them?" She said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Well, this lady who was visiting Beatrice Tobin, Mrs. Meynell..." "Oh, no," she said. "That was for me. She came into the store and she talked to me and we talked of the Pre-Raphaelites." So she took
Norris: the letter and Mrs. Meynell had asked her to tea and it was too late. Teresa's heart was broken. Of course, she never said anything disagreeable in her life, but I know her heart was broken.

So I went to Agnes Tobin's house and asked to see Mrs. Meynell. I said, "I'm Miss Thompson's sister and I got that letter by mistake and she is so anxious for that cup of tea." So Mrs. Meynell very graciously said, "Well, tell her to come tomorrow, of course." So she did. And when she went to London, the Meynells entertained her.

Vachel Lindsay

Norris: Then, another person we loved was Vachel Lindsay. He used to read us his poetry. I remember in those early years Vachel Lindsay played quite a part. I still consider him one of America's great. There was really the divine thing there, which a lot of them missed.

Duncan: Was he also in the Port Washington group?

Norris: No, he wasn't, but we would be dining at some low joint in New York, 65¢ dinner with a 10¢ tip.

Duncan: How did he impress you at the time?
Norris: Oh, of course, he was an absolute freak, but he used to read us the "Jungle" poems and while he read them he wanted us to keep going, "boom, boom, boom," everyone in the room, and the effect was terrific. Then he read a poem that I think is one of the great American poems. It's "General William Booth Enters into Heaven," and he describes how Booth got to heaven. Booth led sinners and he looked the chief, eagle countenance in bold relief, and when he got to heaven all these frightful people followed him, drabs and criminals and murderers and people with cauliflower ears, drunken women, all sorts of things. But as they reached heaven, they all changed into what they really were, angelic, glorious personages. And the drabs -- let me see -- drabs wore haloes and the tambourines jing, jing, jingled in the hands of queens. And then Booth comes up across the market place and the crowd is quiet and Christ comes slowly with the heart and the crown for Booth, the soldier, and the crowd knelt down. Booth saw his Master, face to face, and he fell a-weeping, and then we all had to shout, "Are you washed in the Blood of the Lamb?" It was really great fun. Oh, he was really a great person.
Duncan: Where did the readings take place?

Norris: Well, in his apartment in New York. The Benets used to go and we used to go and we all sat around and presently got him to read some of these things.

Duncan: Did you have to encourage him?

Norris: No, I don't think we did. I think he took it for granted that we weren't going to go home until we had Washed in the Blood of the Lamb, but it was perfectly lovely.

Theodore Dreiser

Then I remember Theodore Dreiser, who came over to our table and said that Frank Norris, the great, had been the first person to recognize *Sister Carrie* in Doubleday. He was reading for Doubleday. Dreiser came over to tell us, to C.G., "Your brother was the man who put his hand on my shoulder when I really needed it." Frank did see that, because Frank Norris was completely infatuated in that period with Zola and there's a likeness between Dreiser and Zola. Frank saw it and praised it and he took the book, *Sister Carrie*, and it still is held to be a classic.
Frank Norris had known Stephen Crane, who died in 1900. At that time his *Red Badge of Courage* was considered to be the bloodiest, most frightful battle story. Now, of course, it reads like the *Sunbonnet Babies* beside what your generation has produced.

Such as Hemingway.

Erich Remarque and all the rest of them. The terrible and gory realities of some of their stories. For example that scene in *Farewell to Arms* where those Italians and Hemingway are trying to escape being shot by their own superiors for some fancied thing! There was one French colonel in that war, the '14 to '18 war, who had every tenth man shot in the regiment. They were under orders, but they lost a bridge or lost something and they ran and that was the reason to pick every tenth man and shoot him, whatever his status as a family man -- well, we all know it was pretty bad business.

I read Crane the other day and thought, "Well, you wouldn't get a reputation on this today, Steve." But I do know his short story, "The Men in the Boat," it isn't short, it must be about twenty thousand, but it's a masterpiece. It's
Norris: the story of four men rowing away from a wreck through the wide heat of the Pacific. It just goes on, the everlasting waves, and these two that are spelling each other. The captain crippled, lying in the bottom of the rowboat, someone steering. These two fellows, "Will you take the oar for a little while, Bill?" — dying, more than exhausted. Isn't this a strange thing that only in this last fifteen years have they put bait lines and hooks into lifeboats?

Duncan: And survival kits.

Norris: Just think of it. And aspirin and sleeping tablets.

Duncan: At least to give them a chance.

Norris: Yes. You can eat raw fish if you must and you can also find in the fish's belly good clear water, which is a life saver. I think of the times that they could have been saved by dropping out a line. The fish were hitting the boat. It's incredible.

Some Women Writers

Norris: And then there was Amy Lowell. You know, it's rather sad, Mr. Duncan, that these people who were so important forty, thirty, thirty-five
Norris: Years ago aren't known. I don't think people read Amy Lowell.

Duncan: Not very much, no. But she had her place then.

Norris: Oh, she did. All of them, they had their place in forming the growing American attitude.

Duncan: How did you feel about that? Let's discuss that for a minute.

Norris: About it?

Duncan: The whole mood of, say, the "new woman" for instance...

Norris: Yes?

Duncan: ...which so many were working on in this period?

Norris: Oh, my, well, you see, it was the time when the Nineteenth Amendment was a matter of bitter controversy. I am very proud to think that the war that the women fought was bloodless, because it was a war. And it enfranchised forty-two million people which no other war had done. It accomplished something. But the matter of votes for women was very bitter.

Alice Duer Miller was a writer then and my very warm personal friend. I loved Alice Miller and she had a column in one of the papers, I think it was the Herald Tribune, called "Are Women People?". She gathered from all over the union little odds and ends and filled that
Norris: column to show that women, who were then classified with the insane, alien, criminal -- those were the classifications -- were fit for the suffrage. She was one of the women who helped to clear the whole thing up.

And a very lovely woman named Inez Millholland who married Boissevain. Boissevain, after her death, married Edna Millay. And some of the other people who used to be in the picture, quite a lot of the various people who wrote then and, as I say, it's really quite strange that they don't count now. They aren't important now.

Duncan: Do you remember Miss Jewett? Sarah Orne Jewett?

Norris: I never met her, but of course her name is New England personified and we battened on her books in the earlier years. I think I read everything she ever wrote. And there was a Mary E. Wilkins who wrote very wonderful New England stuff, little, bitter little frozen sketches of winter in those little towns.

Duncan: In the mill towns.

Norris: Yes. And the poverty of some of those people there and their pretensions. One of two maiden ladies who had one good dress between them so one would go early to a corn husking or an apple party or whatever it was and then she'd go home and rip off her velvet and the other would sew on the lace and
Norris: go. Oh, those stories were wonderful, really classic, and nobody reads her anymore.

But some of that stuff we do save, some lives, some in collections, and you'll find one or two of the wonderful old people who were writing all the time.

But I tell you, it was a very thrilling time because a lot of things were new. Planes, at least motor cars were new. That meant we could get way up into New England.

I remember the night that Irving Berlin, at his house, asked us if we'd like to hear the new song, but we mustn't get any impression of it because it wasn't going to be sung for about two months, I think. And he sang us "I'll Be Loving You Always." And of course, we were wild with excitement. And that night we, the wonderful Ruth Draper who was, well, the children used to call it a 'disease,' but it's a person who does those beautiful monologues. I don't think there's ever been anyone like her.

Duncan: She's very famous.

Norris: Did you ever see her?

Duncan: No, I never did.

Norris: Well, you'd have to had seen her at the very end, I think, because if she's living she's not doing
it anymore. But I have known people to seriously contend that the stage was full of people when Ruth Draper was doing a monologue. They'd say, "But that old Italian woman was there. And that organ-grinder was there." "Oh, no, he wasn't," because she really placed them. She did it herself, and I think she must have written her own stuff. She had one or two that reduced the audience to something, it wasn't crying, it was just people gulping. She had one of a French woman taking her baby to see the troops come back after the war and talking to her baby in the most beautiful French. "You're going to see your daddy. You've never seen him. Now, I'll tell you when he comes and then you wave this." And, of course, Daddy doesn't come, and the chill that went down our backs when she turns to this other man and says, "Well, Robert, what, what? Where's Henry? But wait a minute, Robert...." Well, we were all just cold. Oh, she was very attractive.

I remember she was there that night at Mr. Berlin's, before he married the very lovely Miss Mackay. Alice Duer Miller was her aunt and that was a very lovely group.

So then, with this new success and new leisure and new comfort, I don't think we really
Norris: went nouveau riche; we both had known what it was not to have money, but we certainly got a great deal of joy out of it.

Sinclair Lewis

Norris: Now, I'll tell you one man who did take himself seriously. He knew he was important and that was Sinclair Lewis. Long before he wrote Main Street.

Duncan: When did you first meet Mr. Lewis?

Norris: Well, just a year before I was married. Bill Benét began writing very charming poetry when he was still in Yale. It used to appear in the Yale paper, in the little periodical they had there. Sinclair Lewis also graduated from Yale.

The Benets, both Bill and the wonderful Stephen Vincent Benét, went through college and distinguished themselves in college writing. Then, when Colonel Benét came out to California with Bill, Laura, and Steve (he was a little boy about seven), this wild, red-headed man came out as a visitor and we all became immensely attached to him. He felt, I think, his own destiny.

You know that Francis Thompson -- I often have wondered what the love affair was between Alice
Norris: Meynell and Francis Thompson, they were both virtuous Catholics and highly spiritual people, but certainly some of his poetry that he calls "Love in Diana's Lap" is very exciting reading for a perfectly pure and Catholic woman. He says of her that when she was a child they knew she was exceptional. He used this phrase which is so beautiful, "Flat in the grain, the wine they knew." That is the way we all were with Stephen for we knew Stephen Benet was a rare bird, but Red saved us the trouble by being completely inflated with his own future when he wasn't more than twenty.

Duncan: He had a real sense of destiny.

Norris: He knew. He said, "I'm going to write knock-outs some day," and, of course, he became a great prize winner.

Duncan: Nobel prize.

Norris: He stood way over his generation. So when he was quite young he was going wild around San Francisco. I think he took a room down at Carmel for a while, or perhaps it was out on one of the beaches. He was a very interesting, thrilling kind of figure.

Then, when we went -- destiny took all of us to New York -- Billy went on to finish college,
Teresa, my lovely sister, went on to become a nun. I went on with C.G., just married, and Red was there. He was still ballyhooing around. We always loved and adored him, but he was wild. Not in a drinking sense, not in a degenerate sense at all. He was the kind who wanted you to go to the circus and then when you got there he'd say, "Let's see if we can't all ride on the elephants." Things we never would have thought of. He did lend a kind of glory to life. And then married one of the most conventional women that ever lived. She was not only conventional, she was pretentious. She immediately changed his name to St. Clair. She always spoke of him as "St. Clair." On her cards it was "Mrs. St. Clair Lewis." Afterwards they changed that.

Then he worked for Doran and edited Doran's monthly little book magazine and that, you'd almost have thought, would have satisfied him, but it didn't. One day he went by the house in an open car with Grace, the picture of propriety, on the front seat; and he, with no tie on and his red hair blazing. And shouted at us, "I'm a free man, I've escaped from bondage. I told Doran what I thought of him today and I'm out."
Norris: I think I told you that he tried to read us the first chapters of *Main Street* and we were all so engrossed with what we were doing ourselves, there were five or six of us, Bill was one, and of course, my lovely sister Teresa. Then Lewis and his wife took the cottage we gave up in Port Washington, a lovely cottage, but we wanted a bigger place. There was great friendship between the families. There were dinners. Teresa and Bill were down in a very humble little cottage. At the time they took it it was one of those unpretentious places with the plumbing mostly in the backyard. That was changed.

But I'm glad there's going to be a biography of Lewis. He divorced Grace Hegger Lewis finally. She was a very brilliant, cold...well, I don't say cold, but she was a little hard on this kind of a gypsy. Then he married again, married Dorothy Thompson.

Duncan: I have some questions from Professor Mark Schorer. Perhaps these will help you to recall. From January to June of 1909, Sinclair Lewis was in Carmel and in and out of San Francisco. For the first two months of the summer of 1909 he was at Benecia with William Rose Benét and then from
Duncan: mid-August on to the end of February of 1910 he lived on Scott Street in San Francisco and was employed by the Bulletin and then in the office of the Associated Press. After three more weeks in Carmel in March of 1910 he went east. In a letter to Benét dated October 13, 1909, he said, "I'm taking Miss Teresa to the second night of the Passion Play this evening." The only mention of Lewis in your recollections so far, you said you knew him in the year before your marriage.

Norris: Yes, and before his.

Duncan: You were married April 30, 1909. Then went directly to New York. Lewis arrived in Carmel January 5, 1909, so it was probably between January 5 and April 30 that you met him.

Norris: Yes.

Duncan: Was it through Benét and Teresa? And what was he like?

Norris: No, it was through Benét. Teresa, of course, was living with me. So that it must have been, they must have come to our house together. But it was a very easy relationship. CG. might call to me and say, "Bill can't come, but Red's here." It was that kind of a thing. We were all young together. I wouldn't know where to place him in
Borria: But that's easily enough ascertained. But he was very fond of my sister too and she of him. Then she went away, yes, after that period, and tried her London experiment of being a nun, and then she came back and she would have been married the year we went to Port Washington. It was just before the war, about 1912 or 1913.

Then Red and his Grace came into the picture again. But it was always a great friendship with Bill. Those two were close friends.

Then Grace had this child. Oh, they came east. He bought a terrible jalopy. I think it was a Ford. He drove west with it. The pictures they sent back of Grace sitting rigid in the front of this disgraceful car, Red all over the place, one leg hung over the door, all the rest of it. Wherever they went through the towns, he was gregarious, he picked people up. Grace didn't warm up to that at all.

I think the child was about five or six when they were divorced. There was a very distinguished English actor who had played Disraeli in New York -- the name will come to me, but I am sorry to tell you that when you get to the seventies names betray you. Names are very hard to catch. Oh, he was so nice. They had rented his house and
Morris: for that occasion -- Grace is still living, she's a Mrs. Taliaferro. I know her.

Duncan: She's still living now?

Morris: Oh, yes. The boy was killed in the war. He was H.G. Wells Lewis. A magnificent child. He was lost in the last war.

Her name is Taliaferro, I think, a beautiful Spanish name. She was one of those people, and she's the first to admit herself, she was colored by her environment. When she moved into this beautiful flat, somewhere up about the East Eighties, I guess, of this actor, she went quite British. Her accent became British, her whole idea was one of Grosvenor Square and Berkeley Square.

Duncan: Sort of West End.

Morris: Oh, yes, very much. I remember, she called the cook by her last name. When it was time for dessert she said, "Bateson, the sweet, please." I know we were quite impressed. Well, she was a very elegant person. She wasn't a person to marry at all, but at any rate she then had a little boy. I don't know how much Red saw of his son. Then he had later another son, I think by Dorothy Thompson. That boy, I think, is still
existent, but the first boy was lost, and he was a nice boy. Too bad.

Duncan: Mr. Schorer has another question on that same period. He says, "In an unpublished autobiographical account, Lewis named Charles and Kathleen Norris as among the people he was seeing in and near New York in the years 1910 to 1915. This has never been published. In those years he was employed by Frederick Stokes, Adventure Magazine, publisher and newspaper syndicate, William Woodward, and Doran & Co.," which you mentioned. "He published a boys book, Hike and the Airplane, under the pseudonym of Tom Graham in 1912 and Our Mr. Wrenn in 1914."

Norris: Yes. That, I think, was serialized in one of the magazines.

Duncan: "...and the Trail of the Hawk in 1915. Did you know him when you were living in Manhattan, as he lived at times in the Village, but then he must have moved over to Port Washington."

Norris: Yes. He and Grace came down to Port Washington, I think when he was married. Does it mention the year he married Grace?

Duncan: Yes. "After his marriage to Grace Hegger in 1915..."
Norris: As late as that?

Duncan: "...Lewis lived in a rented house in Port Washington and continued there until he left the New York area at the end of 1915." This was your own home?

Norris: Yes. That was the house we had there. We rented it and when we had lived there one year with our little boy, Frank, we bought a home on the other side of the town and that house that belonged to a very old Quaker family was rented to the Lewis. It was on Van Devanter Avenue. Then, of course, we did see him.

Now, it says he left that area. He went to New York.

Duncan: At the end of 1915.

Norris: He stayed there only about a year, but didn't he then go to New York?

Duncan: I think he did.

Norris: Then what year was the year of Main Street? It must have been 1920.

Duncan: Just after the war.

Norris: So he was free-lancing. He left Doran after telling Doran in no measured terms what he thought of him.

Duncan: This was his emancipation.
Yes. Then he free-lanced and did sell short stories, and then Main Street broke like a boil all over literary New York. Everybody was in an uproar. Letters and letters and letters to the paper about it. Who ought to play the lead when it went to Hollywood and all the rest. It was the sensation of its whole period. And it was a remarkable book.

Duncan: It was the first Nobel prize in literature for any American.

"In November-December of 1916 and then in January of 1917, during the war period, Lewis and his wife, Grace Hegger, were in Carmel and San Francisco. Did you know them at that time?"

Norris: We knew them because he wrote to Billy from Carmel that Grace expected the child. The child must have been born some months after that experience because my sister was going right straight ahead with her third baby. That would mean, little Wells would be thirty-five, thirty-six now. But they stay children to you when you only know them as children. I remember that Grace was quite upset about it. She didn't think it was right to have a baby, starting on a trip like that. Teresa said to me, "Well, life
squares things up sooner or later." The baby, I think, was born in New York. I think they had come back, but that was the trip on which he drove.

At Carmel there were several writers. There was Jimmy Hopper, who was doing a good deal of writing at the time. Your generation doesn't know those names. And there was Harry Leon Wilson and there were also two sisters, both writers. Harry married the daughter of one of them when she was only about seventeen or eighteen. Harry was in his fifties. He had married an artist first, Rose O'Neill, she did the little kewpies. The girl who invented the kewpies. That was Harry Wilson's first wife. This second wife was a good many years younger than he. That marriage didn't start off at all successfully because she went home to mama. Later she went back to Harry. Harry Leon Wilson was the one who wrote *Ruggles of Red Gap* and a lot of top sellers. He was writing steadily, I think, for the *Post*.

And Jimmy Hopper was selling stories. We had other writers down there. A very charming man named John Fleming Wilson, who wrote the

But Red didn't do any writing there. He and Grace alighted like a couple of foreign birds upon them and that little literary colony had a great time.

Duncan: Was that at Carmel or Pebble Beach?

Norris: Well, Pebble Beach is the same thing, they run right into each other. I don't think Pebble Beach was being so much featured then. I think Carmel was really an artistic, little literary colony. George Sterling was down there. Sterling wrote some beautiful things and his idol in years that followed was H. L. Mencken. Sterling was one of the many, many talented people who was an alcoholic. I don't know why writers need liquor because writers are born drunk. Born in a high state of alcoholism, there's no question about it. My father used to call it in me a "high heart," but that's an Irish version of living in a continual state of excitement, so that any event is important. Sterling especially had such a gift and people knew it. I remember Mr. Phelan, who was senator from California and I believe mayor of San Francisco for a while, I
Norris: remember him talking to me about Sterling -- where did he get his wonderful phrasing.

When Mencken was coming, he lived in the Bohemian Club, and the excitement over Mencken's coming was so intense and terrific -- Mencken was the person at that time.

Duncan: From the Baltimore Sun.

Norris: I remember that Edna Ferber sent me every book that Mencken wrote and that must have meant that she took him very seriously. I liked him very much. Of course, I'm a feminist and I could find fault with some of his ideas, but I liked him later when I met him too.

Sterling got into such a state that he couldn't even go downstairs to the Mencken dinner. He couldn't take it and he killed himself.

Duncan: This was his suicide, in 1926.

Norris: Yes, and my husband knew it because he went up to see him before the dinner, in his room. He said, "Oh, George, come on. We'll give you a couple of lemon sours," or whatever they do. It was no use. He was, of course, an intense man, and that was his big opportunity.
WAR AND TRAVEL

Norris: Of course, all the time I was writing, and finally in 1914 we decided it was about time for us to take a look at Europe. My little sister then had married her sailor and they were living in Annapolis. Teresa and Bill had a little house down in Port Washington. Bill was writing poems all the time. He had a job, but he was writing poetry constantly. It was published in the different... well, sometimes in the weeklies. Sometimes Century, Scribners, Harpers had a poem by William Rose Benét.

As I recall it, Frank was with Teresa and we went across in 1914. I think we were going to take him because we actually had the tickets. Then came the Sarajevo episode and the thing worked up like lightning, and of course we had to cancel that. They stopped all traffic. The "Lusitania" came in there somewhere. It was a terrible time.

In 1915 C.G. and I had our first car and
we, with Bill Benét and Teresa, went through New England. I don't know what we did with our respective babies, but we left them somewhere safe. We went to all the landmarks, Louisa May Alcott, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Lowell, all the points that we had been reading about all our lives. My sister, of course, was an absolute collection of poems and she would find the appropriate poem for every one of those places. Those were wonderful days.

And then in '16 C.G. went right into an officer's training camp at Watertown and came out with a captaincy. He was at Camp Dix, and then we rented a house over in New Jersey and my sister from Washington, with her two, and my sister from Augusta, Georgia, Mrs. Benet, with her three, and ourselves with our own boy and our adopted boy, we were all there together in a great big, old-fashioned, country mansion and the men came whenever they could. We had sometimes all of them, sometimes none. Bill, meanwhile, was writing poetry. Stephen was beginning to write. We had that summer there together.

Duncan: Which summer was that? In 1916?
Norris: No, 1918, just before the end. We were in the war. It ended in November of '18, and my lovely sister, Mrs. Benét, was expecting her fourth baby. Billy wrote some exquisite poetry to her, oh, so beautiful because he adored her, and he might well. Oh, she was, I think, flawless. We all did.

C.G. was at Dix, then Camp Dix, New Jersey. Captain Hardigan was then a lieutenant commander; he had a destroyer, so he came and went. Bill Benét had enlisted and gone down to Florida to an aviation base, so our three husbands were all in and my brothers also. So we just waited for news and waited for them to appear. Gas was very short, we didn't have much for our little Dodguy. We had to live the life in that old mansion that they probably had lived there a hundred years before. It was wonderful to be together.

Then, when we separated, I saw my sister for the last time. We put her on the train and her children and of course I thought it was only going to be a question of days.

Duncan: Where was she going?

Norris: She was going to Augusta where Colonel Benét was
Norris: in the Ordnance Department there, head of that particular base. They all thought that for Teresa and the children, with Billy in Florida, it would be nice to have the children with them. And it was nice. They were wonderful to her. Little Steve was about fifteen or sixteen. A peculiarly brilliant, strange boy, with very strong glasses -- he could hardly see, even at that time -- but he had already written a book of poetry at seventeen. Stephen Vincent Benét of John Brown's Body. Then he went up to Yale and did everything in a literary way that he could do up there, but that was before he went.

Duncan: And your sister was going down to stay in Augusta?

Norris: Yes, because that was where her people were. It seemed so safe for her, but nothing was safe that year. Then, my husband wanted his mother to see him in his major's uniform and I had to come out to California for some surgery which turned out to be pretty serious so we came. We were here with Frank and I went through my ordeal. We started back the end of January, 1919. When we got back we had the news that my sister had gone. Her baby and she went
together. It was flu.

It was at childbirth, or flu.

She was pregnant, and the flu came. She was expecting a fourth baby. She had three darlings -- Jimmy was about six, Rosemary about four, and Baby Kathleen -- they were younger than that because Kathleen was still in arms. Billy was away and she was living with his parents and three little wild children. She had been with me all summer and she was coming back to me, but she got the flu and at that time there was no penicillin, no sulfa drugs; she didn't have a chance. She died out in the sunshine on a chaise longue. They thought she was better. But that damnable thing got people's hearts. She was out in the garden, the nurse had come out with her. She still had her nurse. Mrs. Benét Sr. was an angel to her and she adored the colonel. But she wasn't at home -- I think if I could have walked into that scene, I could have said, "Now come on Teresa, don't be utterly silly. Nobody can get along without you." She started up suddenly. Bill was there on a few days vacation. She put her hand on him, she said,
Norris: "Oh, no, Bill," and she was gone.

Duncan: Very sudden.

Norris: My yes. She was always ready for another world anyway.

Then we went abroad. C.G. and I went in '19, right after the war, and in a babyish kind of way England was still scarred with bombs, but of course nothing like what it was later.

A great friend at that time was Frances Hodgson Burnett of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* fame and she was an elderly woman, a very heavy woman, and she lived very near us down in Port Washington. It was within walking distance so we used to walk over there in the afternoon and hear her. She said, "If you're going abroad, go to Germany and go to a place called," I think, "Regensburg..."

Duncan: A medieval town?

Norris: Yes. She said that she had lived in an apartment over an old gateway there, the gateway was so enormous and so wide that there was a lovely little apartment above it. Then, of course, Mr. Doubleday, who went about every two years, he said he would give any money in the world to make his first trip to London. He had been so
Norris: many times that it was routine, but he told us what to do and told us what hotel to go to, old Brown's Hotel in Dover Street.

Duncan: That's still one of the favorites of royalty.

Norris: Is it really?

Duncan: Yes. An old brownstone.

Norris: Then we sailed on the "Berengaria." It was just magic, the whole trip. Of course, so many people had been interested, giving us advice, whatever you do, do so-and-so. I remember one man, I can't remember who he was. I think his name was Rutger Jewett, a real true New Englander from Rhode Island or something, and he said to go to have lunch at Simpson's on the Strand. Then we went up to Oxford and stayed there and then we went over to Paris and down to Rome and it was a wonderful experience.

We went on our tour with Mr. Doubleday's blessing. He had made out a little itinerary for us. They took us, we went to an old hotel called Brown's in Dover Street. My first experience in being superior to the English was the next morning when I said to C.G., "Let us go and pay our respects to Mr. Murphy." He
Morris: was the publisher, you see. "When we do that, then we're free and we can follow out some of this itinerary that 'the Effendi' has given us." You see, Mr. Doubleday's initials were F.N.D., Frank Nelson Doubleday, and when Kipling visited him he put the three together and said, "Effendi," and so Mr. Doubleday was always called "the Effendi" by everyone.

We went out; I said to the headwaiter at breakfast, "How do we get to Albemarle Street?" He said, "Use the other entrance, Madam." So we went out the other entrance and there was a great big sea-going taxi there. Have you been in London?

Duncan: Yes, I have.

Morris: I don't know where they got those taxis. They are the most cumbersome old things, but they were there last year when I was there. So I went out and said to the taxi man, "Fifty Albemarle Street, please." And the man touched his hat and said, "Did you wish to drive there, Miss?" And I got into the car and said to C.G., "Leave it to England. I stop a taxi, I get into the taxi, and he asks me, do I want to drive somewhere." So he drove us a hundred and
Norris: fifty feet and he stopped at 50 Albemarle Street. So I said to C.G., "Maybe I'm not so smart. Maybe everything they do isn't funny."

Then we had a wonderful talk with Sir John, and that's funny too. If you ever went to one of the beautiful, big publishing houses in America, Doubleday's, Doran, you go through corridors and you are shown in and there's a desk in the middle of the floor and there are beautiful great big windows, but Mr. Murray's office was about half the size of this. The head of the Murray Publishing Company. And they did Byron and they did Dickens and they did Quiller-Couch, and I don't know whose pictures they haven't in there. The room was small and a small fire was busily burning, a little coal fire in the grate. And all around it were about three hundred little pots of tulips and hyacinths because it was going to be Easter in about a week and they were going to put them all out of the windows as they do in London. You know the window boxes. And he was meanwhile nourishing them there right in his office. I loved it.

Duncan: The warmth of the coal fire, too.
Norris: Then he, of course, gave us all kinds of chances, not so much introductions as he'd say, "Do you want to meet so-and-so? Why, we'll pick you up on Tuesday. They are going to have a reception at this-and-that club." And C.G. loved it so. He loved the London clothes. He loved the London accent. Well, we both did but I remember at that luncheon there was Chesterton.

Duncan: G.K. Chesterton?

Norris: Yes, with spots all over his vest. And Belloc, whose story I happen to know through some friends of his sister who is Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, who wrote mystery stories, "The Lodger," and so on. I loved Belloc. He was Catholic to the bone -- of an old French family.

That whole Victorian crowd! Of course, Mr. Doubleday knew them all and some of them Mr. Hearst knew and I had worked for Hearst here.

May Sinclair was a little bit of a woman who wrote wonderful stuff. We had that feeling of going to London and meeting Benson, meeting Chesterton, meeting all of the crowd there. It was just glory.
Norris: I went to England several times afterwards and didn't do the social at all, didn't want to, but this was all great stuff to write home, make the people at home feel that you were really...

Oh, that very attractive woman, Clemence Dane, who has done a lot of good writing...

But, you see, these people all belonged to long-ago days, thirty years ago.

Duncan: This was right after the war and it's a pre World War I generation.

Norris: Yes, it was. Then this crowd of erratics came along who wrote. And of course, as Alex Woollcott pointed out in a very lovely little essay, there was a "lost generation." I am reading now a very peculiar life of a very peculiar woman and she was first, last, and foremost a hunter. She wanted horses, she wanted beagles, she wanted a master of hounds, and she was extremely wealthy. Her name was Mrs. Cheape. I met her while I was in London and didn't identify her with anything like this, but now her life has been written and it was all horses. Every picture of herself and her children was on horseback. Then she puts in
Norris: pictures of the trainers. It's a ridiculous old book.

Speaking of England, reminds me that Noel Coward was one of the people that mattered in our lives. I just this morning was looking at a great big picture of him and C.G. walking around the deck of one of the steamers. He was just beginning.

Duncan: When was this?

Norris: I know it was after the war. It must have been in the early twenties. Noel and Beatrice Lillie and Jack Buchanan and the wonderful woman who played Susan and God and played in Pygmalion, Gertrude Lawrence. Oh, she was wonderful! Lillie, of course, was always the same clown. And Noel, very young, I think not more than twenty-one with a play going in London. Then he wrote, during the years that followed he wrote the really wonderful plays, some of them they will always play. He was in New York a great deal.
Borria: Bill Benét was widowed and lonely. He came to me, oh, a year after Teresa died, and told me he had met Elinor Wylie, an old friend. She was Elinor Hoyt and one of a very gifted family. She had a sheaf of poems and the minute Bill read them he saw that he had something very unusual. So he handled them. *Vanity Fair* and *Vogue* used them every issue and very soon Elinor was recognized as a writer and her whole life blossomed out.

Elinor Wylie was a Washington girl, from a very distinguished family named Hoyt. She married at about twenty a man named, a different name, Philip Hichborn, and had a little boy. She left him and went away with Wiley and lived with him for several years, I think thirteen. Wiley was married and already had four children and one coming; she took his name.

Duncan: Hadn't they been traveling in Europe?
Yes, and they had been living in England for a long time. She told me they lived in their own house there which was full of moldy old British classics and that gave her a certain style. She wrote three books and they all had that dignified pace. One is The Venetian Glass Nephew and the other is The Orphan Angel, that's Shelley, and then one is called Mr. Hodge and Mr. Hazard and that is the best thing Elinor ever wrote, except her poetry, which will live, I think.

Meanwhile Billy's sister, Laura Benét, was writing poetry and Steve had just begun at about twenty to set the poetic world aflame.

Billy and Elinor had a mad love affair. Oh, tremendous adoration between them because he admired her work so tremendously. But she wouldn't let him put any poems to Teresa in his big collection of poems a few years later and they were among his best. But of course I have them.

Duncan: Have they been published?
Norris: I think since they've included them.

She and Bill were married. She divorced Wylie.
Duncan: When was that? In 1923?

Norris: It would be right in there, about three years after my sister's death. And his mother didn't like it a bit.

Elinor was a very difficult person, very fascinating.

Duncan: Was she very temperamental?

Norris: The word was written for her. She was emotional, jealous, excitable, and vain. One thing that I think is very brilliant, she wrote a profile of herself for the *New Yorker* and that profile exactly defines her, her own character.

Duncan: Very good at self analysis?

Norris: And that she could do. She said somewhere that she gives everyone an immense amount of trouble, but she never gives advice, she has to count that for herself. Then she says, "And she is vain. She could redeem the world in those long hours when her hair is curled. And she's always wanting to get away with children and live in the hills among the green, green trees of Peterborough." Do you know Peterborough?

Duncan: In England?

Norris: Yes. She wanted to get away there and write.
Norris: But she was, I think, one of the unhappiest people I ever knew, because she was so restless. Then, she had left her own little boy, you see, who was about eighteen months old, so she couldn't very well assume that she was maternal, and Bill's children were a great care to her. I had to sit by and watch that fail. I think she would have liked very much to think she could take his children and make them happy, but she simply couldn't. She did not understand them.

Duncan: Perhaps she wouldn't understand my child.

Norris: No, she wouldn't. They were puzzled. Eventually it was agreed -- I had had them for two summers -- that I should have them for the summers.
After Europe in 1919 we came back to California and bought the ranch down at Saratoga. We had two hundred acres and we had, oh, the most glorious redwoods and a hill, covered with oaks, all our own. We used to climb to the top of the hill and have breakfast. It was a very unpretentious place; it never had a handsome building on it. It had a main cottage which looked as if it came out of a book of "Eighty Cottages for Less than $7,000." That type of thing. We called it "La Estancia" because among our roamings we had gone down to Rio and stayed with some friends on what they called the main ranches, Estancias, and the others are all supplementary.

When the children were little, my brothers and my sister all came to us every summer and they had their own cabins and these children were very little then. And it developed into such beauty and such happiness that I sometimes couldn't believe it. I'd call the
Norris: children and I'd say, "Now, it's dinner time," and about twelve lovely kids would come roaming out of the woods, little ones toddling along, and we would go up to the grove and they would have their supper there. We would have supper in the house. And then we would build a cabin this year for the girls and next year take the boys' tent and incorporate that into a cabin of three or four rooms and put a bathroom in it. Then we built a swimming pool. Then we cleared one of the big redwood groves and had that for our dining room. And it grew to be paradise. And the little Benét children joined us for the summers.

Duncan: When did you first move to Saratoga?

Norris: We moved in there in 1920, when we got back from the first trip to Europe. We came out here. You see, all this time I was writing serials and wherever the little Remington went, my business went, so that we didn't have to stay in one place.

Then the different brothers came down and we would fix up some old shed with an awning and a bathroom and some mosquito wire and that
norria: would be Joe's house and Jim's house and Fred's house. Then my sister Margaret from the beginning had one of the little cabins for her own. Oh, that was a lovely, white-washed, sheepherder's cabin.

We had every foolish piece of danger that could be thought of. I've seen the children there, so high up in the redwoods, you know, that you'd have to be very gentle about saying, "Come down, dears. I have a surprise for you." Then you'd see the little wretches dropping from bough to bough. But we were very fortunate because with a pool you're in danger, but we were very careful too.

I became, of course, the famous cook out there under the trees.

Then we developed croquet and Alexander Woollcott was a great friend of the ranch, used to love to come there, never for more than a week or ten days, but always for croquet. Harpo Marx, of whom we grew so fond, he came. Then my dearly beloved publisher, Doubleday, Frank Doubleday, who was the head of the whole... young Frank, that is, Nelson, who we loved so much. The old Frank, "the Effendi," he never
Norris: came to the ranch. I think he must have been stricken shortly after we got it. In all events, all sorts of people used to come. Irving and Mrs. Cobb loved it. Then I remember, Elsie Janus visited us. She was a great imitator, but not like Ruth Draper, who was really an impersonator. You see, my brothers and my husband were Bohemians and they used to bring men down from the Bohemian Grove. They'd bring a bunch of them down and it got to be quite fabulous.

Duncan: From Russian River down to Saratoga.

Norris: Yes. The various summers all had their tremendous charm. Then, of course, when Colonel Lindbergh and his very lovely Anne were out here, they came out to us.

Duncan: How did he impress you?

Norris: Oh, I loved them both, but Anne especially won everyone's heart. Lindbergh doesn't make very much effort, he's a quiet fellow, you know. He's, I think, rather mysterious. It's hard to see exactly what he's thinking. I work it out that he was a naturally retiring kind of fellow and he became immensely, oh, tremendously famous.
Norris: for his flight.

Duncan: Was this before his flight?

Norris: Oh no, this was afterward and after the loss of the little boy. In the mid-thirties.

Then, of course, my husband was fanatically musical. It was an obsession. It was something that wasn't really normal.

Duncan: What instrument did he play?

Norris: He played the piano very brilliantly, if he could have kept his foot off the left pedal, but he really did play beautifully. When I was ill with the first bout of arthritis which led to an operation...I used to be upstairs in the quiet of the evening and perhaps with some little help to go off to sleep. And he would play all the Wagner operas. He would be downstairs. When he would come upstairs I would whistle an aria and it used to delight him.

When I was well again -- and I will say that a very pleasant feature of all of this was that the money was coming in so easily so we didn't have the usual difficulties of doctors and hospitals.

Duncan: It wasn't a great strain.
Norris: No, it was not by that time. So then we went to the four great Wagner operas of the Ring, the first March that I was on my feet. And anyone who loved him, and many people did, would understand that as he sat there in the big Metropolitan in New York holding onto my hand, the tears were streaming down his face with the joy of having me well again and me loving his operas.

Duncan: The Niebelunnglied.

Norris: Yes. And after, whenever they did the Ring, we went. Through the March afternoons they would give the Ring from one to five and we went every year.

Well, he had this great beautiful Capehart machine at the ranch, my brother gave it to him because my brother is also musical. By a very peculiar circumstance my brother Joe, as a boy, played the cello and my mother was so delighted with his talent so they worked together at the cello and piano and Joe was the one who had to lose his left arm. In a railway accident. He said it kicked him upstairs because it forced him to become the big engineer that he became, he had to give up the manual thing and go in
Norris: for his own brain. He's a very prominent head of a big electrical company now.

C.G., at the ranch, had these beautiful records and on those nights, about nine o'clock when the children were presumably quieted down, not always, perhaps we'd have eighteen or twenty children, cousins, and their friends, and then C.G. would put on this concert on the porch and it would pour quietly out of the redwoods. The loudspeaker was way up in the trees and it just permeated the whole place. That was his luxury and his delight. All through the summer evenings they would say, "C.G., are you going to have any concert?" "Yup, we're going to have a concert in about half an hour." People who came there, of course they all would say complimentary things about the ranch and I don't know what it meant to them. I know one man came, a Chinese, he came from China because my brother-in-law was there for years and he said, "Can you buy these trees?" Here were these redwoods standing up. "Can you buy them?" I said, "Well, you'd be surprised how many people in California have bought them and have them."
As the years went by we had theatricals. We had a little theater called Drury Lane. We had all these little cousins growing up, birthdays. As I say, I don't know, people were awfully kind and said beautiful things about the ranch but to me, I'm the only one who knows what it meant to me. To me it was simply, those summers when I would get down there with C.G., say, about the 8th or 9th of June and realize that the cherries were ripe, the roses were out, the pool looked like a great big emerald. We had a very happy time there. We never had an accident at the ranch.
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL VIEWS

Spanish-American War

Duncan: I'd like to ask you some questions about your social views and your views on war and international affairs. How did you feel, going back to the time of the First World War?

Norris: Oh, it's a shock always and we were ever so much younger and so hopeful. So much of it was general feeling -- you see, many of us then remembered the Spanish-American War, which was really a mere matter of...

Duncan: Let's see, you were eighteen at that time.

Norris: Yes. You have an awfully clear head for people's ages and times. But you see, we made gingerbread for the soldiers out at the Presidio and some of them came to Mill Valley and danced with us and the uniforms were very popular. But they sailed away to what was unknown, no radio...
Duncan: To the Philippines.

Norris: Yes, and there was no radio, no daily reports, and the consequence was that when that war was over America was victorious and to hell with Spain. I don't think any of us had any feeling about Spain or anything else.

**Muckrakers**

Duncan: Do you remember the whole period of time when Teddy Roosevelt was president?

Norris: Oh, yes.

Duncan: In this period of history, they usually call it the muckraker period.

Norris: Oh, yes, Miss Tarbell was a muckraker, you know, and anybody who exposed, oh, all the terrible conditions that prevailed. It was hard to believe that America was really blighted with sweat shops, with places where they paid girls as little as $2.50 a week. It was the beginnings, of course, of the labor unions. You couldn't believe that half a century could make that change, because there was no protection and the fights in Chicago over the big railways...

Duncan: The Haymarket Riot?
Norris: Oh, the terrible riots.
Duncan: That would be in 1886.
Norris: Yes, that was the very beginning of my being interested in hearing the big people, the grownups, talk about things. We were bred to that, to feeling that, oh, the conditions of working people...

I tell you, Upton Sinclair wrote "The Jungle," a terrible story of the packing houses in Chicago, and all the different people were exposing the abuse of human beings. And there was a man named Altgeld...

Duncan: Governor of Illinois.
Norris: Was he really? Governors meant nothing to me then.
Duncan: He was in the early Nineties.
Norris: Yes. But he stood up for the laboring people and one of Vachel Lindsay's most beautiful poems is called "The Eagle" and it's to Altgeld. Now, you see, we live in a day when people are very apt to say, "Oh, those unions. That Petrillo." But believe me, it's a better extreme than what held then, and that was an improvement.

Duncan: Do you remember the great Pullman Strike of 1894?
Norris: Oh, yes, very, very well. And the word "scabs" came in. There were shootings. And in England it was even worse. I was reading a history of England the other day, it was only about two hundred years ago that every sea captain who had any real cause against a sailor, an ordinary seaman, if that sailor had been impudent to one of the officers, that was enough to be whipped to death. He could be beaten to death. And constantly you feel -- I am not at all happy about the way some of the unions restrict you. My brother says he thinks it is a definite loss not to have apprentices; you see, they limit apprentices, three to every fifty employees, I think. Joe says, "If I could have a flock of young fellows in the office, why they could pick up electronics as they wouldn't get it in any school."

Duncan: Through practical experience.

Norris: But anything goes to extremes, you know.

Duncan: Do you remember Lincoln Steffens?

Norris: Oh, very well. He lived at Carmel toward the end of his life.

Duncan: What was he like?
Norris: Oh, he was most attractive. He was a rough kind of a person to talk to, but I liked him so much. In fact, at that time there was a magazine...

Duncan: McClure's did a lot...

Norris: Oh, McClure's was really the outlet for all of those great abuses and Miss Tarbell, I think, wrote about Rockefeller's oil...

Duncan: Standard Oil.

Norris: Oh, they did a great deal of research on that. And, of course, things have improved ever since then.

Duncan: Do you remember Henry Demarest Lloyd?

Norris: Just his name.

Duncan: He was one of the early exposers.

Norris: Now, Lincoln Steffens' magazine, it's gone out. I think it was called the Illustrated American. Now, what was the other time I had with that magazine? Something, I can't remember, but you see, as I told you before, we were all pretty self-centered in those days.

Duncan: But you used to do a lot of reading in the magazines?

Norris: Oh, yes. Of course, that was our market, and we kept a very sharp eye on what people were writing. If I saw some other woman's name
Norris: announced for a big serial, I would feel...
there was I.A.R. Wylie, do you know that name, an English woman?

Duncan: No, I don't.

Norris: She wrote very delightful books and she wrote serials. And who else was writing serials at the time? But it was like any other market, you kind of watched to see where you rated.

War and Peace

Duncan: How do you feel about the first war? Was this when you first began to...

Norris: It was at that time my first war, you see, and I was romantic. I had a little boy and I was very happy and I was writing. I kind of liked the glory. I'm sorry to say, I liked the glory. I used to pray that someday we'd get a weapon that would just wipe out the Kaiser and all the Germans, whom we are now supporting, by the way. It was natural. You see, in 1914 I was right in the middle of my hardest writing. I was about thirty-four. I run with the year usually; the last number is my number. I ran up a service flag and C.G. got right into the
Norris: service and got his captaincy and then got a majority. He was a sharpshooter and he trained thousands of men at Fort Dix. They went through his hands like so much rice going through a hopper. For four years he had the rookie shooters and he knew our men, Americans -- here I am again, screaming like an eagle -- but we knew that our men, as gunmen, were way ... why, an Englishman brought a gun over here during that time and he couldn't put it together. C.G. said a big raw-boned Virginia boy was there at that time and he spoke up and said, "Major, Ah kinda think ah could put that together for him." And he did. The gun the man had brought. C.G. said it was nothing to get expert riflemen out of those raw boys. Well, they're used to riding around a tree and shooting a ring on it.

Duncan: Sergeant York kind of thing.

Norris: Yes. This man painted, he was a great friend, painted a chase. He went over and painted some of the big figures in the war. In fact, he painted them all. He painted the French and Italian and the English officers and made quite
Norris: a book of it for some firm, I've forgotten which one. He painted Sergeant York. He said to Sergeant York, "There's a wife at home there who's going to appreciate those medals." He said, "No, I'm unmarried. Ah was always kind of a Mama's boy."

As I say, those were the days when there was a kind of a glory to war.

Duncan: How did you feel when you were in post-war London?

Norris: Oh, of course we saw terribly sad things. We saw men begging with decorations on. We saw it was demoralized. It was the terrible time of the dole. Then, of course, the literary end of it wasn't so much affected. We knew John Masefield because he had been in America. We weren't splurging, but we were not taking it too seriously, but as I say, when you really went to a lovely home to dinner you'd see a picture of some boy in his tennis flannels and some boy with his polo pony and then you'd see his picture there in a silver frame. Oh, it was devastating because with the usual British confidence they rushed their very best men into it to begin with. It was really very sad.
Women's International League
for Peace and Freedom

Duncan: When did you begin to feel strong feelings of pacifism?

Norris: Well, after we came back I met Jane Addams.

Duncan: Of Hull House?

Norris: Yes. At that time she was passionately involved in what they called... it was the traffic in girls.

Duncan: White slavery?

Norris: Yes. Now why should a person your age remember that when I forgot it. But white slavery. I remember, I said to Miss Addams, "We have to find some way of reaching the outskirts of it." She said, "There's no outskirts, it's got to be extirpation." Well, of course, when you extirpate men and women you will extirpate white slavery, because there is no stopping it. What I mean is, there is always going to be the outbreak. You remember in New York, they thought they had the thing pretty well sealed up and then about seven or eight years ago, oh, streaks of yellow poison broke out in every direction.
Borris: But at any rate, she was a marvelous person. Then she wrote me and asked me if I would come to Philadelphia to a meeting of women who were going to establish some type of peace organization. I suddenly thought of what the war had cost us all. My sister, Mrs. Benét, had died as the result of that war.

So then I began to talk peace. I went down to Philadelphia and we had a very — then's when she said "extirpation." I had never heard the word used before. We then had that meeting and shortly afterwards she formed the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Duncan: When was this?

Norris: About 1924. We said "Peace and Freedom" because we didn't want anyone to think that we believed that you should be stepped on, but of course I do believe that now. I think stepping on wouldn't hurt us at all if it meant peace.

I was then pretty well established as a writer with contracts. I didn't have to worry about selling the stories because C.G. had them all with contracts. He took that off me entirely.
Norris: Jane Addams talked of peace and that year we established there, with a very fine girl from Washington, I think her name was Dorothy Deetz...she was secretary to some senator or something, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. At that time nobody dreamed there would ever be another war. We were all so sick of trenches and funerals over there. The general feeling was that we had crushed something that was going to make the world better.

Then I began very shyly to make my first peace talks. And at that time I had to make notes and I read a great many of the post-war books, the Genesis of the World War, and a good many of the English books, and I would make notes to remember what I wanted to say. Then, I went down to Arizona and talked there and I went east and talked and gradually became known as a speaker for peace.

Duncan: Who were some of the other people?

Norris: I don't remember. We had a very distinguished crowd of people. The name Mrs. Lansing comes to me, Mrs. Hoover, both the wives of minor officials then in Washington.

Duncan: Hoover was Secretary of Commerce then, wasn't he?
Norris: Yes. Funny thing for him to do.

Mothers of America

Norris: Then, of course, I came west and then Mr. Hearst founded the Mothers of America. Along about 1930, '31, or '32 we began that. There were no dues, simply a registration, for peace, for adequate defense and world peace. Well, the two don't go together because Russia and America are attempting adequate defense and it's a farce. Through Hearst papers, a little blank was inserted in the paper, just your married name and your first name and your address and you signed a little document that said, "I do believe that if we can establish peace and adequate defense," because we didn't want the pacifists to think we were going to lie down and run over, and that boomed because the Hearst papers boomed it. I went down to San Simeon and discussed it all with Mr. Hearst. I was the first president, you see. It spread to -- oh, I think we had something like two million names of women, who just signed that and sent it in. "I want to join the Mothers of America." We had no rules. We
Norris: didn't have a regular president and vice-president. We had a major, then a captain, then a couple of lieutenants. We took these titles right from the war. It went on tremendously. And then the principals of it, who were three very fine women, quarreled bitterly among themselves.

Duncan: Who were they?

Norris: I can't remember all the names. One was a Mrs. Mary Ireland, who was Catholic. Then there was a very, very fine Jewess whose name ... I've got it all written down somewhere. I resigned, I had to resign, because they had notified me that I had no authority in it and must consult all of them; and as they weren't really agreed I stopped it and said to Mr. Hearst, "We'll take this up again. We've got the title." We'll wait until this storm blows over and then we'll take it up again and notify every one of these people that there is an organization going for peace, but before that happened, along in the mid-thirties, they formed in Chicago America First. And oh, there were wonderful people in that. And we were all so inspired.
America First

Duncan: When was America First started?
Norris: Just before the war. Oh, a little earlier than that. I should say '37 or even '34. I was a charter member and we had thousands of members.

Duncan: Who were some of the people in it?
Norris: Well, I knew Senator Robert Taft was in it and of course Charles Lindbergh and Anne, and there were a great many other distinguished people, most of them just names to me. We did have a couple of glorious meetings. We had the great big auditorium at Madison Square packed with people for one meeting with every ticket being violently debated at the door and the street outside black with people listening to the loudspeakers. Lindbergh spoke, Taft spoke. All kinds of people wrote in. But then for some reason it got a bad name and I never can work that out because it became something that after the war you didn't say you belonged to America First. For one thing, to my great regret, some of the people I really loved, who
Norris: were Jews or Jewesses, took it that if you
were against war you must be for Hitler. You
see, that's a very oblique way of looking at it.

Just about coincidental with my husband's
death, I lost touch with some of the people I
really loved. Edna Ferber was a friend from
the time we both sold our first stories; that
would have been about 1910. She took that
attitude, that anyone who belonged to America
First was not for her. Fannie Hurst was
another. George Kaufman, although George and
I afterwards talked it over. But it was too
bad because the simple idea was all the help in
the world you want to give other people, other
nations, but America first. America standing
as the Western Hemisphere that has never had
trouble like their trouble here. We never told
Brazil how she has to walk and talk; we never
forced the Argentine; and here in the north we
have the longest unprotected border in the world.

Duncan: For the longest time.

Norris: And we know it's forever. The little Mexican
children aren't being told that if they aren't
good an American will get them.

But that's the other side of my life and
Norris: it's been a very hard and bitter experience. Because I was for peace, I was blackmailed here about four years ago in the most frightful manner, accused of being a Communist, of having a Communist nest down in Los Gatos. I'll tell you who did that, you're local here. A man named Tarantino, Jimmy Tarantino. Tarantino is from Los Angeles and he had a magazine called Hollywood Nights, I believe. Very fine magazine, as we say, on coated paper, which means it wasn't a pulp. He put on the cover once, "Kathleen Norris discovered to be a Communist." Well, it struck me in midships. I was completely taken aback by it. I had gotten home from the East and the minute my son met me I thought something was wrong, one of the children has a mastoid ear, or something. I said, "Now Frank, who's in trouble." He said, "You are, Ma. This fellow suddenly attacked you and we all want to know what you want to do." I said to Frank, "Why don't you speak to McEnerney about it?" He said, "I have."

Duncan: Is this Garret McEnerney?

Norris: Yes. I said, "Well, I've taken my stand already in these first three minutes. No comment."
Frank took it as right. He said, "I think you're absolutely right." I said, "If he had hit me with a wet wad of manure from a side lot, I wouldn't return it, I'd go home and take a bath. I'm not going to give him the satisfaction of saying 'Kathleen Norris strikes back'."

But it went on for six or seven months and every Sunday night he was on KVA and every Sunday night he said, "Oh, and about Kathleen Norris." I was Stalin's little red dollie. I had a press here in Los Gatos and the police were trying to find it. I was getting out pamphlets by the millions. I was doing everything. I never spoke.

Well, Walter McLellan, you met him last time, my secretary now for thirty years. He was C.G.'s. I never had a secretary, C.G. was mine, but Walter was C.G.'s and then when C.G. died of course he went right on with me. He was troubled as he could be. He said, "Will you just make a plain statement?"

Newspapers called me up from as far away as Houston and Evanston and just said, "We want a statement from you," and I said, "No comment." It was very hard.
Then I was to talk at the Press Club and Tarantino said over the air that I'd never be allowed to get there. He said, "She's going to be stopped. There are about six hundred of us who are going to see that she doesn't get there." Well, George Creel very nicely said, "I'll take you down." I was with Frank in San Francisco and Frank said, "I'll have to take her down, Uncle George. I don't want anyone saying, 'Where the hell was her son that night?' if she got socked with a brick or something."

So they both went down with me. It was a beautiful evening and on purpose I didn't go in. I stood on the sidewalk talking to the policeman and talking with the friends as they went in. I didn't want to be smuggled in. Across the street a little car was stopped with two boys sitting in it, two men. Finally the head policeman said, "I'm going over to ask them why they are waiting." He said, "What are you fellows waiting for?" One of them said, "Well, we want to wait to see if Mrs. Norris has come." He said, "That's Mrs. Norris. She's
Norris: been over there twenty minutes talking." They said, "Well, we stop at nine o'clock anyhow." You see, they were paid.

So the next week Tarantino said that I had had practically the whole police force out there. There were three policemen there, I think. He said, "The cars went through. At least six thousand people drove by but they didn't stop." He said I was smuggled in through the kitchen.

Well, that went on until he finally wrote and said, "If Kathleen Norris wants a fair deal from me, let her come and talk to me and I will give full press room to anything she has to say." That we didn't answer, but I was really having trouble about it because I would go to some woman's club in some little back-water town and have the chairwoman say to me, "Mrs. Norris, will you deny that you've ever had any association..." and I'd have to say, "I'm not going to do that. I'll talk if you like, but if you really want me to do that...I don't want to talk, but if I do talk I'm not going to pay any attention to that."

Well, then Tarantino got hold of an obscure
Norris: Schoolteacher over in San Leandro, I think she was. He vilified her. The board of education of the state stood back of her to any extent. They looked at the documents, they looked at his accusations; he hadn't one scintilla of evidence. And he went to jail for three years.

Duncan: Was this about 1952?

Norris: Yes, it was after my husband died and I would say...no, it would be before that. It was something like 1948 because I know I was feeling myself standing rather alone. I thought, "If C.G. were here, I wouldn't give it a thought," but as it was, it worried me. Sunday night I couldn't help it, I was alone, I had a nurse in the house but I was alone with a cook and a nurse. She was here because she was doing work in different places in the neighborhood and wanted a base. I used to sit at my desk and I'd think, "I'll be darned if I'll listen to that man tonight," but I couldn't help it.

"And by the way, about Kathleen Norris," and he never had any satisfaction. He did if he wanted to make me unhappy, he did do that, but he was a blackmailer, you see. He told this nurse he'd contradict the whole thing for, I
Norris: think, $500. Eventually he would have said, if he wanted to talk to me he might have said, "Now Mrs. Norris, this is going to be an expensive business. Is it worth a thousand dollars to you to have me reinstate you completely and say that I was wrong?" And it wouldn't have been worth ten cents.

But that was all part of that America First stuff, you see.

Duncan: The after-effects.

Norris: Yes. Of course, the after-effects of war are very unfortunate anyway.

William Randolph Hearst

Duncan: Did you know William Randolph Hearst?

Norris: Yes.

Duncan: What were your impressions of him?

Norris: In the first place, before I was married I was a reporter. I went on the Hearst Examiner in San Francisco. I got the magnificent sum of three great big ten-dollar gold pieces a week, more money than I ever had seen. And I got it every Friday, which is known as the ghost walking. And the ghost walked with Mr. Hearst.
Norris: And other papers don't always, aren't always, so scrupulous about it. Then I began to register as an interviewer. I went into Mr. French's office one day. He was managing editor. He said, "By the way, I want to show you something." And he showed me a clipping of something I had written and written into the margin was, "I like this. W.R." Well, so I naturally had an affectionate feeling for him.

All through my childhood and youth, up to the end of my father's time with us, which was 1900, Hearst was in sort of a disrepute. People were making fun of Hearst or even worse, they were blaming him.

Duncan: During the time of the Spanish-American war.

Norris: Will Irwin and Wallace, who were very old friends of ours, both writing not very important stuff but very popular current stuff...Wallace wrote as though a Japanese were talking. Oh, they couldn't get enough of it. I think it was Will who coined the phrase, "William, also Randolph," from also-ran. Because he did run, I think as mayor of New York.

When I began to write for the Cosmopolitan much later...
Duncan: One of the Hearst magazines.

Norris: Yes. I met him and I was very delightfully impressed with perhaps the best manners that I ever knew in a big business relationship, just good manners. Hearst would listen to you as you are now obliged to do.

Duncan: With pleasure.

Norris: In all my relations with the Hearst papers, I had the feeling that the big boss...people said, "Well, he likes it, so that's all right."

Then I went to visit, with C.G., San Simeon, and he was host.

Duncan: When was this, Mrs. Norris?

Norris: Oh, I guess '32. He likes to show you his treasures and he likes to have you see his library. For a private library I never saw anything like it. He had built a room -- I guess that library's eighty feet long and about forty across and lined. You could go along with your mouth watering, you'd never catch up with it.

They issued you a room to sleep in. Beautiful room in a cottage. I think that and the bathroom were the whole cottage. So in this room was one of the first of the big, low
Nrris: beds that I ever saw, only about a foot or a foot and a half high, and a glorious piece of tapestry over it and everything de luxe. They turned it down the next night with the beautiful sheets turned into triangles. The bed went up to a point in the middle. So the next morning I got up early and I was swimming, I got up for Mass and went with the housekeeper. I was swimming before anyone else was up and Mr. Hearst came out to swim and we swam around very amiably. I don't know whether you know that he had a very unfortunate voice, very high-pitched and so very unimpressive. And he said, (in a very shrill voice) "What bedroom did they give you?" I said, "We are in the Richelieu room, Mr. Hearst." ("Chief," I think we called him.) I said, "I'm a good strong woman, but my husband is stronger and he got on the peak of that bed and I was out on the floor most of the night. There was a general fight to see who could push the other over the peak of the Richelieu bed." And he said, (shrill voice) "Well then, we at last begin to understand the celibacy of the clergy."

He was very, very delightful.
Norris: Then he fostered this terrific thing before the last war, from 1935 to 1938, the Mothers of America. He was tireless in his suggestions, his generosity, his press publicity, and we gathered in names of two million American women who were opposed to war.

Then came the sad and terrible time of Pearl Harbor. You know, the Japanese had delegates in Washington to talk peace.

Duncan: Mr. Nomura.

Norris: Yes, Mr. Nomura. It was Mr. Hull himself who walked across then with the proposition, and it was a disgraceful proposition. They were told they had to get out of China and they were established almost a million strong in China, up in the northern part. And they were told they had to make concessions that of course they couldn't make. It was too bad. But, at any rate, that crushed that.

Second World War

Duncan: What were your activities during the second World War?

Norris: Well, they were, of course, everything. We had
about nine young fellows in it, cousins and nephews. And we couldn't do any peace work, of course, we couldn't say a word about it. You have to shut up the minute the guns begin, but I was, of course, active in all the charities, all the home work that was done for the war. At that time we were having immense clothing drives for the dispossessed and all those things. I was busy all the time. I did some hospital work, just washing instruments and cleaning trays. Agonizing, of course. Oh, the waste of it.

One wonderful nephew, my sister's boy, he is now one of the very young captains in the Navy, I don't think Conway is more than forty, he was all through Midway, Coral Sea. A nephew of Mark's husband, a wonderful boy, Don Hamilton, starved to death in a Japanese prison. Oh, and we were all so tense. Everybody, all the news was bad, oh, it was terrible.

How did you feel in the post-war settlement, the United Nations?

I am sorry to say, I felt a little bit bitter.

In what way?

Well, I thought of Pearl Harbor, choked with the
bodies of the boys we loved, the men we need, and I thought, "Nothing touched that little Emperor. He's still strutting about." There was no real reason for Pearl Harbor. There was plenty of warning to get our fleet out to sea, but for some deep government reason it wasn't moved out to sea.

And I felt, and I think a great many of us felt, a lasting darkness in our souls that that should ever have happened. That so many, many of our fine -- and the world's fine young men -- should have been sent out for sacrifice. Now that we are carrying Germany to the greatest prosperity that she's ever known, carrying Japan -- everything you pick up in the 5-and-10¢ store is made in Japan -- it's hard to take. I don't say it. I have never said it publicly. I'll say it someday in this record, I suppose, but what was gained and what lost? And if there had been a warning there, the admiral of the fleet there in Pearl Harbor, it's all in the record in this remarkable book written by one of the admirals. It's on record, you know, he wanted to move it out to sea. He was told not to do so for fear the Japanese would
misunderstand. Now, when I think...I'm sorry for the Japanese too. I think if the women of America, and the men too, had been asked about the atom bombs, they would have said, "Don't use them." But they necessarily had to be secret and they were secret and I think that's the black mark on our register.

So now I'm wondering what form this new... I'm so afraid of those boys in Washington having got a bomb. Another thing one of the commentators said the other day that was rather frightening, "It isn't Russia that is going to drop a bomb; it's some other country that has some kind of complaint or cause." Once that starts...

Duncan: That has the ability without the responsibility.

Norris: Did you read Neville Shute, his last?

Duncan: Yes. On the Beach.

Norris: Terrible book.

Duncan: As a prediction.

Norris: A sort of a prophecy of what might come.

Duncan: How do you feel, from all your past experience, of what you can see coming?
Norris: Well, I was in China twice and once it was a rather comprehensive look at China because we traveled from Harbin in Manchuria, in the north, only a few hundred miles from the coast. We went right straight through to Moscow, in the winter.

I liked China and I trust China and I will say Communism can take no hold of the Chinese. Catholicism hasn't, Christianity hasn't. They are very gracious and receptive. They were badly handled, they were hungry and cold and drowning in the cold winters and dying, and they were getting rid of little girl babies, not because they didn't love them, but because they did. They were absolutely badly handled. They saw enormous wealth, golden earrings and golden chains, and they saw their own people abused by all of us, by the Americans, by the French, and especially by the English. Those barefoot boys dragging rickshaws must have given them a very queer idea of the world.

Yet, with all that, now China has an army and she means to occupy China and truly and
honestly, I don't think she cares that about Communism. I don't think she thinks of it. I don't think those rice paddy fellows are going around with Marx in their big blue pockets. But she is standing on her feet as a nation and I want to pass on to you as a young man that I think you'll find proved as the years go by... she has an army, but she has no navy. She doesn't mean conquest. She isn't going to take...she may have trade ships someday, but she's not going...there's no navy, not a bottom. She's got a fine army, she'll defend China and if I were in power I would say, "I think China should be encouraged. I think in time she will drop Communism, what shreds of it she's got, like hot bricks, and feel the other great republic is my friend and I'm going to do what she does. I know it."

But our people in Washington won't take a chance. They'll take a chance on war. They'll say a lot of you boys are expendable. Well, what if it costs us a couple of thousand boys, you've got to take it. But they won't take a chance on peace.

I liked China. I loved her joy, the racket
Naris: that went on in the night when they were all singing and laughing and bright lights were shining and Chinese running. You've not been there?

Duncan: Yes, I have.

Naris: Did you go to Shanghai?

Duncan: Yes, indeed.

Naris: Didn't you find, I don't know if you would now, a good deal of Marxism in it, but twenty years ago it was a gay city. Really gay. They might be barefoot and they might wear those old cottons, but the whole spirit of the thing was just laughter.

Duncan: I was there in 1946, as the war was ending. My impression was of almost a European city.

Naris: Oh, yes. With nonchalance. I met Pearl Buck there.

Duncan: What did you think of her?

Naris: Why, of course I admire her immensely. I think, as we all know, *The Good Earth*, it's like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is inaccurate, it's hysterical, the writing of a woman who was grieving over the loss of her only son; she had girls, I think, but was almost hysterical over the idea that a woman could be parted from
Norris: her children. But it did something. It ended slavery. In Brazil, in the English colonies, Uncle Tom's Cabin was a bible, and it brought upon us here the Civil War.

Mrs. Buck must know China and that is the book of China. That's Hans Brinker; or The Silver Skates. When Mary Mapes Dodge went to Holland she said that she wanted a book that gave a picture of childhood in Holland, and they gave her her own The Silver Skates in translation. I only this week finished reading that again. I hadn't read it for twenty years, but it's a remarkable book.

Did you do service in this last war?

Duncan: Yes. I was in the Marine Corps.

Norris: Were you pretty young?

Duncan: Well, I was in the Pacific. I saw quite a bit of it. Okinawa.

Norris: Well, this nurse who lives here with me, she's a very lovely person. Her grandson is a redhead, about six foot two, hated schooling, loathed schooling, volunteered for the Marines. He is back now in uniform for a short visit and his pride is something. There is nothing the Marines haven't done in the history of the world.
Norris: If anyone followed them up with any negligible action, that was all right, but the Marines did the dirty work. It's the old Irish challenge, you know. "You're boasting about O'Connor? What did he do?" "Oh, well, what didn't he do?" "What fights was he in?" "What fights wasn't he in?" That's the way the Marines appear to act. So I suppose you had your share of complacency too.

Duncan: Yes, indeed.

Norris: It was a great service, wasn't it?

Duncan: Oh, I enjoyed it very much.

Norris: What actual warfare were you in?

Duncan: Okinawa and the invasion of Japan and so forth.

Norris: Well, you went in rather young, so you weren't in the full war.

Duncan: Oh, yes.

Norris: Were you really? Well, my sister Margaret's son, an Annapolis man, about two years at that time out, was down there with a destroyer, second man on a destroyer, and he saw the sinking of one of the big boats. The little destroyer was her rescue ship. He was two hours in the Pacific, on a plank. So that when they finally called from the side of the vessel, "Come up the ladder," he couldn't raise this arm. It was paralyzed
Norris: with the cold and the water. He got through, he wears a good many decorations. His father was a rear admiral when he died. He wore the congressional medal with a lot of others. But Connie has practically all of them. He is now Captain Hardigan. At thirty-nine, he's a full captain in the Navy. Very young, but of course it has to be young. You wipe out all the older men and you've got to take the younger ones. He's at Norfolk. Have you ever been there?

Duncan: Not there, but along the East Coast.

Norris: Well, sometime make a little run down to Norfolk. Now, I'm a pacifist and what I've tried to do against war is a vital interest of my life. But when you see those ships lined up there in Norfolk waters with the sun shining behind them, some very primitive and disgraceful element enters into your heart and you feel like saying, "Who couldn't we lick!?" Oh, it is tremendous.

This doesn't belong in our little talk because this is a crisis we're at right now in the year 1956 and I suppose this will be read perhaps a hundred years from now, but I'd like to know what's going to happen about this.
Norris: Formosa thing. It has me awfully worried.

Duncan: I wonder if it hasn't simmered down a little.

Norris: I think so and I think the spirit of peace—you see, women got the vote but they still have no power, no position, no patronage, no influence, no decisions. The decisions are made entirely by your entirely too monopolistic sex. You see, all the authority goes to the male and the time will have to come when women do prevail a little more and say to these warriors, "Why not make peace beforehand?" The terms before the war are always better than after.

Have you children?

Duncan: No.

Norris: Not married yet?

Duncan: Oh, yes, I'm married, but no children yet.

Norris: How long?

Duncan: Three years.

Norris: Don't give up. They'll come. They've got the most maddening way. Sometimes I go to this little institution called "Jackie." I'm on the San Francisco board and they place children. I think you get $55 a month for each child you take and you tend them and love them and feed
them. You can get them three-days old, three years, and older. Invariably, people I know who have taken a child like that, Nature has looked jealously on and said, "Now listen, I can give you the real thing if you're that crazy about it." It's really funny, I know one woman who has three lovely children. One is a boy she took at three weeks and that boy wasn't a year old before the little girl started and she was followed up by another little girl, so she has the three children. But it is really funny. If you get at all discouraged, remember, that's almost a cure.
COMMENTS ON WRITING

Writing Habits

Duncan: Do you have any special formula for writing successful novels?

Norris: I have sometimes said to younger aspiring writers, "Of course, the way to write is to write and you must write continually. It's like baking bread, you can try it seven or eight times and it does not come out as bread and suddenly the tips of your fingers appear to have gained something and after that you say to people, 'Bread's no trouble. I can't remember when I didn't make bread.' It's the same with writing."

You get a plot and suddenly it falls into shape in your mind and you're perfectly quietly convinced, "This is it. I'm now writing a short story." You do have to work. When people say to me, "Well, my dear, I'd love it. I keep thinking those wonderful plots,"
Norris: but you see, I've got my husband's mother with me, and then there are the children. Unless you can get over that hump, you do not get the practice that keeps the machinery oiled.

Duncan: You recommend, from your own experience, steady application.

Norris: Yes. I would always go to my desk about half past nine. Then, as times got easier, of course, we always had someone in the kitchen. I could really concentrate. I'd be at breakfast with the family, get the children, who became four for many years because Teresa's children came to me, get them off to school, then go right to work and pay no attention...I had no telephone and no mail until lunch. That meant that my mind was clear.

Then, in the afternoon, I got a habit of an afternoon siesta.

Duncan: Is that from the California background?

Norris: Yes, I think so. It's a bad habit; I have it still. But it is restful. And then, just amusement, C.G. and I would drive or something. And at night the youngsters would all do their homework in my room, all four, five for a while. I went right on, clearing up my desk, rereading what I
Norris: had written in the morning, cleaning it up and putting it into its locker, its binder. Then, if there was any mail that was essential, I'd answer it and stop about half past ten and go to bed. But the rule at one o'clock lunch was, the children came in at about a quarter of one, that we didn't do any serious talking until we had had something to eat, because C.G. would be tired and I was just written out.

Duncan: Morning was your most productive period?

Norris: Oh yes, that was the time. Never at night.

Really, now and then I'd think, "Oh, I'll finish that up tonight."

But I've known writers...there was an Arthur Somers Roche, he wrote awfully good stories. Those were serialized too. He would work into the night, put a wet rag around his head. I never did that at all.

Duncan: You mentioned that the plots sort of came to you; you knew when you had one. How did you first become aware of a plot?

Norris: I became aware very curiously. Of course, I have done a great deal of reading and had read even then, forty-five years ago, I had read enough to know that you can't expect a new
Norris: There's no such thing. I think they say there are seventeen. Maybe they say there are seventy, but whatever they are, if your heart was in it you could write Macbeth today and you could put it in a handsome apartment somewhere and you could have the wife the one who was really the fiendish investigator of this man's ambition and nobody would know it was Macbeth and it wouldn't be plagiarism. Or you could take any story that you feel has a master plot. I suppose there are twenty written on the Jane Eyre plot, the virtuous little governess and the rather masterful, harsh man. It's inexhaustible. Like Daphne Du Maurier's Rachel. Rachel is a form of Jane Eyre, and I don't know how many others.

It's your use of it. Of course, Shakespeare used to go see a play and then go home and write it without any compunction at all. When it's Shakespeare, you're glad he did.

For instance, one day I was trying to think how I could make a very slap-dash servant that I had into a story. She was a great big girl, a beautiful girl, but such an utter slovenly uneducated character that I had to
Norris: train her. Well, I trained her so well that when I was away (I took Frank and C.G. and I went away in our first little Dodge car, which we bought the year they were put on the market, 1915, really, we did feel we had the chariot of the fairies,) Veronica would borrow something and perhaps accept some invitation from me. I wanted to put her, with her good heart and her slap-dash ways, into a story. So it happened that I read in the paper one day of a flood down in one of the Southern states, and of a colored girl who had saved two little children by sitting them on the mantle and holding them there all night. When the great flood got as far as her knees, coming into the sitting room of a one-story place, she said in this newspaper interview, "When it got round mah knees, ah thought, ah gotta stop prayin'. Ah've gotta begin bossin'.'" I suppose what she said to the Lord was, "Just notice this. I'm a friend of yours." But in all events, they found her there next day still holding onto those two little children. Frozen, of course, not dead, but oh, so cramped and so cold. She said, "Ah
Norris: sang some." She said, "About three o'clock, ah seen by the clock that the water was going down."

So I thought, "Here's my slap-dash Veronica. I'll put her into that, double up on that. That's what she'll do, and then, of course, the family will forgive her everything because there she has been holding the precious little boy all night."

As I say, the minute you get that way and pull it all together, you're so sure that you write it just as if you were reading it, it's so simple.

I know when my sister some years later, Mrs. Benét, with her children was living near us down on Long Island and she and I were walking across the road to see each other every morning, she said, "Really, the best of all your long stories is the one you live in." Well, it really was.

I'm only going to say one thing for a profession that I worked very hard at, I have been immensely rewarded, been altogether too well repaid, but I did something that I think younger writers must take to heart. Never write down. Always write as if Mr. Shakespeare had come down from Stratford and had said to you,
Norris: "Do you want to cooperate with me? Do you want to collaborate on a play?" Write that way. You might not write very big stuff. You might not be one of the tops.

I've known writers, and they're not so very successful either. I'd say, "Why don't you use that thing you were telling us about the other night?" "Oh, I'm saving that." Don't save anything. Don't ever feel that you're writing down to an audience, because whatever you write, you're not writing up hard enough.

If I might criticize a great master of English prose, a man that I think has borrowed from the Russians their manner of writing short stories, you known, the little masterpieces of Chekhov, that is Hemingway. I think Hemingway is really great, but he has written down occasionally when he wanted to and it is very disappointing.

I never got serious reviews. I got what I wanted. I wrote what people wanted to read. I got very affectionate letters. I got people writing...I remember a man from Canada writing and saying that he didn't know how I ever happened to know his mother. He was something
Norris: like sixty and I was perhaps thirty. But it was all a great adventure and of course part of it was because of the continual companionship of the very few people I loved, the brothers and the sisters and my remarkable husband who took all the responsibility, had things copied, had them sent out, talked to editors, talked to publishers.

We used to say when we were beginning to give dinner parties when we had a very beautiful apartment in New York, we used to say that every fourth dinner party was a flop and we might as well resign ourselves to it. Nobody knows why but when the company goes you simply say, "Well, what was the matter? Nobody had a good time."

It's a little that way with your work. As I say, you put your real heart into it. Whatever I had, I gave. Fannie Hurst, who was writing marvelous...and a great friend of mine, writing marvelous stories of the Jewish in America. And of course Edna Ferber who has a very extraordinary quality of wanting the vital motivations. But my stories were very simple and shallow, I presume. They didn't dig deeply into psychology or people's motives,
Norris: but they were stories I would like to read.

If I speak to some girl now who says,
"Well, what will I do to start, Mrs. Norris?"
I say, "Write something you wish you were reading. Just wished you had picked it up and said, 'Oh, I kind of like the way this begins!'" Of course, you have to learn a little technique about the first sentence and the last sentence. Those must hold. You can't just say, as Mr. Dickens was so fortunate in saying, "You'll be pleased to know that William married Priscilla and they were soon blessed with a numerous family and became an example to all their neighbors." I'm not talking about Dickens, because he's one of my gods, you know.

Then I was fortunate in that the magazines, the Woman's Home Companion, McCall's, Everybody's...

Duncan: McClure's.

Norris: Yes. Colliers...wanted serials, and they wanted them clean. It was right after the gushing, mushy stories of, oh, Godey's Lady's Book and all that kind.

Duncan: Very sentimental.

Norris: Then I was lucky to hit the serial market, which is dead. Nowadays they don't have serials. Now and then the Saturday Evening Post will have one
Norris: by Bud Kelland, who was a friend in old Port Washington days, he lived down there. But not the way we wrote them, about kitchens and babies and all those things.

Oh, another person who I knew and who wrote such 

sensationally successful stories was Gene Stratton Porter who wrote A Girl of the Limberlost and Laddie. I don't think they were serialized.

Juliet Wilbor Tompkins, who came from California, and her sister, they wrote serials. There was an immense market. I would say that there were twelve big magazines. The Pictorial Review was another, that used serials, so that some of us were basking beautifully along and having a glorious time writing serials.

Duncan: Did you write for quite a number of different magazines?

Norris: Oh, yes, I never wrote for just one, although there was one company that wanted an exclusive, but C.G. didn't believe in it. I said to him, "It would be a very comfortable feeling that we were going to have two big serials a year," because they paid as much as $75,000 for those stories. And we didn't have an income tax. Oh,
Norris: we did, but it was so very small.

At one time I was really carrying three contracts at one time. One was with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. One with some big serial magazine, I think that one was Ladies Home Journal. And one, a book that I was writing called Certain People of Importance. It's quoted from Browning and I still like it about the best of anything I've written. It never was serialized. It was a great big, solid, about...oh dear, I guess it was about... I don't know about how many hundred thousand words, but it was a long book. But I worked at it and then another one and then another. I don't know how good it was.

Duncan: How did you feel when you did that, when you had two or three irons in the fire, so to speak?

Norris: Well, I felt that I had a great deal to be immensely thankful for. My husband was a very, very devoted man. He had, I suppose, some flaws in his makeup, but nothing that ever bothered a wife. He didn't want anyone else.
Norris: C.G. took everything off my shoulders. He'd say, "If you give me a list, I'll stop at the market. You don't have to bother." And he said to whoever was helping, "Just keep the baby amused in the park until lunch time."

Of course, what a woman wants isn't only the leisure. She wants the sympathy. She wants the feeling...now, I know a girl who's writing very charming things, but her husband's not interested.

Duncan: You feel that your husband was a great asset.

Norris: Oh, of course. To C.G. writing was the sacred profession. It's the way a minister might feel about holy orders. His brother had been a writer, a great writer, and Frank Norris had been friendly with all the people in San Francisco who were interesting. Gelett Burgess. And Jack London was a great friend of Frank's. C.G. naturally felt, "That is the sacred flame. That's something." Whereas a musician might not feel that at all, but might feel it about the piano, or a mountain climber might think unless you were interested in pemmican and
Norris: crevasses, why, that wasn't life, but to him writing was sacred. And he would say, "Oh, Katie, if you can do it, heavenly day, we'll make it possible."

Then it began to be recognition, which, of course, was perfectly marvelous.

I remember a letter from William Dean Howells, who was one of the great people, and a letter from a man named Richard Harding Davis, who wrote me. And a good many of the people were so generous and so pleased that it all began to be like a dream.

Of course, C.G. had a few flaws, but nothing serious. On one occasion when he was nervous and unmanageable I asked him if he'd drive down to Morgan Hill to buy some plants. I said, "I want to pick up a couple of little apricot trees." So we drove down and he said, "I don't suppose we could drive to Los Angeles, could we?" He said, "I'd just like to go on this way, just drive and drive for a while." I said, "You can drive further than that. You can drive to Columbus Square in New York. Because," I said, "Your bags are packed and in the back of the car. I told the children not to expect us until
Norris: we got home." So we were gone for about three weeks and he was matamorphosed because everything was off his shoulders and he and I could talk.

Publisher: Doubleday & Co.

Duncan: You had a long-standing relationship with Doubleday, didn't you?

Norris: Oh, yes. My first book was published by Macmillan and if it had been left to me, I would have gone on because they treated Mother beautifully. But Doubleday, he was my husband's old friend. In fact, when C.G. and Frank Norris were young, they in turn had lived with the Doubledays, right in their lovely family, down on Long Island. So it was very close intimacy.

Doubleday was away in Europe and Doubleday's readers turned down Mother so C.G. took it to Macmillan.

Duncan: That was back in 1911.

Norris: Yes. Then Doubleday had a talk with C.G. and he said, "You know, C.G., we've got to have Kathleen's stuff. I don't know what the fellows
Norris: were thinking about when they turned that down."

So we went and had a talk with this very nice Mr. Breck, who was the head of Macmillan. He said, "Now look here, Mrs. Norris. We got hold of you and we kind of feel you belong here."

It wasn't very happy for me at all. As I say, if I'd been doing it, I'd have said, "No, you held your hand out and I took it." But we did go to Doubleday and all the books have been published since by Doubleday.

Duncan: All of them?

Norris: All of them.

Duncan: Was the firm always called Doubleday & Co.?  

Norris: No, that's since about 1945. It was Doubleday, Page & Co. from 1900 to 1927, and then Doubleday, Doran & Co. until this last change.

Duncan: I noticed in Sunday's paper your very charming picture and your seventy-ninth novel.

Norris: Yes. And one or two haven't been published.

Then, of course, there were many short stories and then there were articles which go on every week. So it was really quite an out-put. I talked in England to a man named Oppenheim and we debated and he said I was ahead of him, he
Norris: couldn't produce them that fast. There's another man who wrote -- not shockers, but adventure stories -- he would write three and four a year.

**Problems of Creative Artists**

Norris: There were very delightful things in connection with writing, very disappointing things too because it's a competition and you watch the pulse very closely of the people. You feel a pang if you think, "My, I'm slipping." It has to happen.

Duncan: It probably happens fairly frequently.

Norris: It surely does. Now, I think a remarkable instance was Mr. Hemingway's. He wrote a book that was so bad that why it didn't kill his popularity right in the egg, I don't know, and then he wrote *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Duncan: Wasn't that *Across the River and Under the Trees*?

Norris: Yes. It wasn't only cheap, it was kind of vulgar. It was a man who was dying and he was carrying on with a young countess who was married, I think, and with all of his lush attitude toward her, he called her "Daughter," which was the last straw to me. To be having illicit relations with a woman and be calling her
Norris: "Daughter" strikes me as pretty cheap. But he followed it with a classic that I think is one of the finest things, not only that he ever wrote, but that America ever produced.

Duncan: That was written only two or three years ago.

Norris: Yes, and written almost right after that other silly sort of thing. But like everyone else, he has his weak spots. Everyone slips sometimes. Isn't it too bad. I've known it to happen to various actresses.

Duncan: Artistic temperament.

Norris: Yes, and Hollywood has had at one time various actresses I knew on Broadway, who had their names up in blazing lights and then they disappeared for some years and then they showed up in minor parts, little bits of TV pictures. I don't know that an actress's life ever really has a sense of triumph. You see, I knew Blanche Bates quite well, the last years of her life. She married George Creel. Blanche Bates had been a Broadway favorite, it wasn't just being a popular actress, she was a great favorite. She was a perfectly sane, self-controlled woman, there was never any talk of alcoholism. She
Norris: married George and she had a fine boy and a
girl. She settled down, but to an actress there
is only one time in her life and that's when she
is in a good play. There's no other. And
Blanche's parenthood and her very prosperous life
in San Francisco, she could have a bridge game
every night, she loved hospitality. I don't
think she ever really lived as she did when
she was playing "The Singing Girl" and "Under
Two Flags," I think they called it "Cigarette,"
but it was the old Ouida story. To the end of
her life her room was full of souvenirs and
paintings of herself. I don't think an actress
is to be envied, even a great successful
actress. Because with writing as long as you
can read -- what is it Shakespeare says, "As
long as men can read and eyes can see, so long
lives this and this give life to thee." That's
the girl he was writing the sonnet to. As long
as you can write, you can always hope for a big
blazing Pulitzer, but the actress can't.

Poets have kind of sad lives too. I don't
know why they run to melancholia. I think the
end of Edna Millay's life was very sad. My
special genius, I only use that word for one woman in the whole history of women, that's Emily Dickinson. A little, quiet, New England woman who lived in a professor's family. Her father was a professor, head of a college, Amherst, I believe. She wrote these poems and put them on little scraps of paper, rolled them up, tied them with silk, and put them in the bureau drawer. Higginson, who was then editing the Atlantic, and of course the Atlantic was then handling Louisa May Alcott and Lowell and Emerson and Longfellow and all the great writers of that day, let's say the Sixties to the Eighties, didn't pay much attention to Emily, but the only reason now that Higginson's name lives at all is because he wrote a few letters to Emily Dickinson. Who's ever heard of Higginson? But Higginson was very pompous, told her her lines didn't quite scan, he wasn't very pleased with her poetry. But she is extraordinary. So they have now books and books about Emily Dickinson, I must have about ten of them. What happened after she died. She never married. She was never accredited with a love affair but
Norris: Nobody ever had any real data on it. She wrote a little love poem called "The Empress of Calvary," for the suffering of the woman in love. She did write love poems, but some of them her sister Lavinia thought were a little too warm and she destroyed them, about forty poems. And the few that leaked through are so full of terrific passion that I don't know anybody who ever touched her. She wrote the lines, "A wife at midnight I will be, morning have you a flag for me?" And what she leaves unsaid between those two lines!

I don't know if you've ever heard of a woman in England named Laurence Hope, she took that name, her real name was Mrs. Adela Florence (Cory) Nicolson, she wrote those terrific poems about, "Pale hands pink-tipped beside the Shalimar," and so on, but she never touched Emily.

But Emily died as she lived, a little, remote, frightened character putting up preserves and running upstairs when company came.

And of course Edna Millay's life at the
Norris: end was very sad. She fell down the stairs and they don't know how long she lay at the bottom of the stairs.

And Elinor Wylie, who was a great poet, I like much of her stuff as much as I like Miss Millay's.

While I only call one woman in poetry a genius, not even Christina Rosetti or Mrs. Meynell, I do call Emily Dickinson a poetic genius. When she writes a poem it chills you right down the middle of your back.

Duncan: It's very interesting that you have reserved the name of genius for Emily Dickinson. I remember that Gertrude Stein had only three people she considered geniuses. One was Pablo Picasso, I think one was Alfred North Whitehead, a mathematician in Cambridge, and I forget who the other was, but a very limited number.

Norris: Well, the thing is, men bestow that name very lightly upon each other. Everyone's a genius. William Dean Howells was a genius. I don't think anyone reads Howells now. Richard Harding Davis, who lived near us in Port Washington, was
Norris: a genius. They throw that around. I wouldn't do that. I'd, of course, give that name to people who take your breath away. If you lose your breath, if you say, "God, isn't that wonderful!" that's something outside of just the very wonderful gift of being able to write readable stuff. That's what ninety-nine percent out of a hundred writers do and you enjoy it, but when you come to saying lines in Shakespeare, you put the book down, you say, "Was this man human?" and I've doubted it sometimes. About Dickens, too.

Preferences in Her Own Work

Duncan: Among all the types of writing you've done, and lecturing, serializing, novels, a poem here and there, and a play too, which type do you find that you preferred over the years? How would you evaluate them?

Norris: It's very hard to say. My son Frank is a very curious combination of some of his immediate ancestors, and one of his very strange gifts is being, more or less, psychic. He has always had, since even when he was a little child, he could come and stand beside me and
Hornis: more or less analyze, "What's worrying you, Mother? What makes you happy, Mother?" and so on. And Frank says, "When everything else is done, the one thing she's going to be most proud of is her poetry."

And I have done certain verses through the years and I suppose they're somewhere here in a big envelope and I get a great satisfaction about trying to write a quatrain or twelve lines, or is it fourteen for a sonnet, just for the joy of it, for some family occasion or some special feeling.

One thing is that when the oldest of the nieces and nephews was born, that is, the oldest of my nieces...she's a woman now who'll be forty-eight. She's married and lives in Mill Valley and has three fine big boys. One's in the service. I wrote a verse and had it cut around a silver bowl that we got in Tiffany's. The bowl then was $12 and they've now gone up to $30. But for the more than forty children of my brothers and sisters and their children, they're all grandparents now, I've done a bowl for every one of those children. There are
Norris: more than forty bowls. And those little verses, I take a good deal of trouble with them.

And now my little great-granddaughter just got her little verse. And Frank, with a good deal of shrewdness, said, "I think she's secretly a little bit prouder of her poetry than anything else." I don't really call it poetry.

Duncan: Does the poetry come easier or harder?

Norris: No. Poetry is the very fineness of writing. You must condense, you must...

Duncan: The essence.

Norris: It is. It's a thing for which I've always had an immense respect and love.

Duncan: Among your many books, especially in the earlier period, the first World War time and the 1920s, how would you evaluate them? Which ones do you now recall, ones that gave you particular pleasure?

Norris: Well, if I read them now, I'm very apt to feel that I would make that much more sound. But the books that gave me the most pleasure -- I would say that Mother, which is very simply written and no attempt at high philosophy in it, Mother has given me immense pleasure because
Norris: it has had a quite phenomenal success. I don't know whether I told you that Theodore Roosevelt picked it up and made much of it. It still sells. I presume now it's over the million mark, a good deal. But the book I took great pleasure in writing is called *Certain People of Importance*. That is from Browning, who was writing a poem to his wife. He called her attention to the fact that when Dante really wanted to make a hit with his girl, I suppose it was Beatrice, he drew her a painting, he painted her an angel. His business was writing, but he had to do something extra. Who was the other one who did something for his girl, whether it was Milton composed music -- something of that sort -- showing that when people step out, really make an extraordinary effort...He said that Milton was starting to draw a picture for his girl or something like that, in came certain people of importance and nothing will happen, so these people are utterly unimportant, of course. So I gave them that title.

The other book that has a lasting success is a book called *Little Ships*, and that's a study of the Irish-Catholic element in San
Morris: Francisco, which, of course, was very largely my own background. My mother's mother was a very devout, old-fashioned, of course, she was fourth generation in America, but she had been born in Macon, I think. She came on as a young bride, across the mountains, and the city was a great miracle to her. So I wrote that book, *Little Ships*, of the rich, opulent, and, oh, exhibition Irish, and then the very poor Irish. That put something of, it was not love-fiction, it wasn't for the magazines, neither of those were ever serialized. I think perhaps *Little Ships* and *Certain People*.

**Autobiography**

Duncan: In 1925, I think, you wrote *Noon* as your autobiography. Do you perhaps plan at some future time to write another chapter, say "Afternoon" or "Evening"?

Norris: That was written after Teresa died and that is dedicated to her children. They weren't with me at the time and I was moving heaven with everything I had to get them, and I did get them eventually and for twenty years they were
Norris: my children. All three married and with children. But I was really in a kind of loneliness when I wrote that book because I missed my sister so terribly. We were living in Italy. C.G. said, "Suppose we get out for a while. You'll feel better when we come back." So we went to Sicily. We took our boy and one of the cousins with us. We all like to look back at that time. We really all had a very good time. And I wrote that.

Now Doubleday would like a finished biography. Everyone has done it. Edna Ferber has done it, Mary Rinehart has done it, Clare Boothe did it. They would like a biography, but I find a great difficulty in writing it. I was more than thirty years younger when I wrote that first one. There's something a little flat about it when I start to write. I don't want to have just to say, "We met the very wonderful H.G. Wells. Mr. Wells, of course, was at that time living with his second wife, a French countess, and later..." and so on. I don't want to just say they're all charming, that Sir Henry Irving was very charming, that Chesterton... I liked Chesterton so much. I met Mrs. Belloc
Norris: Lowndes and her very fascinating brother Hilary. I don't want to put in what I knew about some of them, especially in the New York group. And I don't want to, as I say, just put their names in.

So I said to Mr. LeBaron, who's my special friend at Doubleday since Nelson died, "It will be a family record. It will be what Joe's children did and Teresa's children did and where Fred is living." I said, "All that part of it has been so happy and so developing."

Well, it makes us laugh now sometimes, when our children are making their bow into a society that didn't know we existed fifty years ago. But I don't like to put, perhaps, the rather poignant stories I do know about people from having lived along with them. I've tried to write it once or twice. Mr. LeBaron says, "Start in anywhere. Start in yesterday, if you want to. Just write it. Then cut it as much as you like."

But as I read those of my contemporaries, I'm not impressed with their importance. I don't think you see yourself...

Duncan: Wasn't it Robert Burns...

Norris: Yes. I've asked one of my nieces, that's Bill
Norris: Benét's oldest daughter, who's now Rosemary Dawson and who's very, very clever with her pen. I've said to her, "You are my executor and you can find letters. One family in New York has a thousand of them, at least."

Duncan: Which family is that?

Norris: Well, I have two very close friends in New York. They were cousins of my friends in San Francisco, and when I went on to New York I met these two young women. That was 1909. Almost fifty years ago. I'd have my golden wedding in '58. We became very, very close friends. We followed the fortunes of the world, we shared the coming of children. We lunched together practically every day. Then, at night, I did anything C.G. wanted to do, theater, first night, dinner, but almost every day he went downtown on some kind of business or he worked and I went and had lunch with them. Then they came out to the ranch. Of course, when we weren't together, I wrote them. Both are gone now, but the daughter told me a few years ago, said, "Aunt Kathleen, there's a box of your letters and when you want it, I'll send it." That is really the history
Norris: right through. If C.G. and I went to Honolulu, I wrote them about that. We exchanged letters at least twice a week for all those years.

Duncan: Those would be extremely valuable.

Norris: Those would be the actual record, which I can't write. But that was a friendship that was very important to me.

Duncan: Would you be interested in having those letters returned to you?

Norris: I thought perhaps... it's very recently that the mother died, but I thought that I would write to Mary Adams and say, "Will you ship them here to me, because this is what Rosy is going to construct the story from, eventually." Because I think, with all due respect to everybody who writes an autobiography, I think they're extraordinarily flat.

Duncan: It's very difficult.

Norris: Now, Gertrude Lawrence did one and she named it so charmingly, A Star Was Born. When they make it an autobiography, it's awfully hard. You don't want to overpraise yourself and yet you want to be fair to the generosity of life, to the fact that you have been fortunate.

Oh, yes, it was a very lovely singer named Grace La Rue and she came to me about three years.
Norris: ago, into this room. We had never seen each other before. She brought with her a secretary and we sat here and talked. She said she had come to me to check on her autobiography. She had written it. What did she call it? She called it, The Red Hat. She always wore a red hat about that size.

Duncan: Back in style now.

Norris: Yes, they are. Aren't they horrible? (they laugh) She had written this autobiography of hers and I thought it was very interesting, but being a singer, she was what they advertised as the vaudeville singer with the opera voice, which she did have, -- being a singer, she couldn't help saying, "I was the sensation of London that year. Crowds stood out in the street to wait for me to come out." Well, just as I got to the awkward part of it, because I had submitted it to...I had licked it into shape, pulled it together, made it sequential, and then, tried to sell it. And after about four refusals, because people said that Grace La Rue was really forgotten, I went up to her house where she was boarding in San Mateo one day to talk to her about it. And she had quite suddenly died.

Grace La Rue. Oh, she was a lovely figure.
Norris: She used to have a black stage and she would come swinging out with these beautiful gowns on her, fans like that, like Nora Bayes, who was way before your time.

Clare Boothe Luce

Norris: It was after the depression that we built a house. That house is now the Newman Club at Stanford University in Palo Alto. Clare Boothe Luce, about five years ago, built a beautiful chapel for them, got a Frenchman to come over and do the windows and personally, herself, picked out the very soft, beautiful wood that the pews are made of. It's really quite a place. The windows are extraordinary. She built them as a memorial. You see, her only daughter was killed right in this town. And she's coming out again next month to take a look at it, see how it's coming.

Duncan: You've known Mrs. Luce for quite a number of years?

Norris: I saw her first as a girl. She and Irvin Cobb's daughter, Buff, both of them now in their fifties, were schoolgirls. I had perhaps a twenty-year
Norris: lead on them. They were over at a school on Long Island, I think Garden City. Irvin and Mrs. Cobb took us to see Buff, the usual little schoolgirl, running out, "What did you bring me?" and all of that. And this very beautiful blond child was with them. All the time I remembered this little Clare Boothe.

Sometime later I said to Buff, who was then about twenty, "What happened to that little blond that was so attractive that day?" She said, "Oh, she's married. She's in Europe." And she went on to tell me that she had the most beautiful fur coat on that she ever saw. Well, that was when she was Mrs. Brokaw.

Duncan: Was she related to the Booth newspaper family back in Detroit?

Norris: I don't think so. No, it was an English family. Her father was English, I think.

Then, of course, she began to do some very brilliant writing on *Vanity Fair*. Then she married Henry Luce, who was one of my husband's friends, kind of a business friend in the magazine world. Then we used to dine together. She's quite, I was going to say a well-rounded
Norris: character, but gifted, out of the normal. Very beautiful. Very shrewdly keen. And also with a very good sense of humor, which is thrown in. She doesn't show that in any of her pictures or any of her interviews, but she's very quick with a joke.

I have seen more of her of late years because of her building this chapel and then she came out here once or twice, but all through her Rome years I didn't see her. We reached Rome last May, a year ago, and she had just broken that newspaper story...

Duncan: She had been ill.

Norris: Yes, and she had been flown to New York for special treatment. So I haven't seen her for a couple of years, but if she gets here next week, I suppose we'll see each other and get together again.

Duncan: What are your impressions of Henry Luce?

Norris: Oh, he is a tower of strength, isn't he? Tremendous. His story ought to be...they make these silly pictures of silly, half-drunk girls, but his story is Americana of the greatest type. He began practically barehanded, you know, as
Norris: so many did. Mr. Hoover, a boy working during his kid years, no father, no mother, lived with his uncle up in Oregon and fished and sold newspapers and everything that a youngster does. It's a story I love because it is America and I think it's characteristic. No caste, you see.

Duncan: It's a little of the sort of Horatio Alger background.

Norris: Well, it is. I don't know how you happen to know the name of Horatio Alger. We used to eat him alive, my brother and I. Survive or Perish, Sink or Swim, all those books. Oh, my, they'd be flat reading, wouldn't they? And Louisa May Alcott. I tried to read her the other day, but you can't read her now. It's that smug New England, sort of smacking its lips, you know.

Duncan: This would be something before H.M. Pulham, Esq.

George Creel

Duncan: There's another man, George Creel.

Norris: Oh, George.

Duncan: What can you tell us about him?

Norris: George, I don't think in the last fifteen years of my life I've had a friend closer than George.
Norris: It's not too much to say that I loved him and I think he loved me. He was vital, furious, and frequently one who could say that he didn't always take the right side of an argument, but it was very often the unpopular side. He was the champion of lost causes.

He had married this brilliant Blanche Bates, the actress. When we used to know the Cobbs so well in New York, oh, thirty years ago, Buff -- oh, more than that because Buff and little Clare Boothe were girls then -- we knew the Creels. Blanche, of course, was then doing big plays and George was very important politically. He was very close to President Wilson. He would go down to the White House and he and Wilson would talk things over. Oh, I loved him so much.

Then Blanche's great fame as an actress faded, as it does. That's the trouble with that profession. You cannot help it. They all go into the movies now and take little parts as governesses or servants or something, but their day is over. Blanche came out to San Francisco and bought a house on Divisadero, I think it
Norris: was, with a beautiful view, and settled down to raise her children, two of them, and play bridge. And she did not talk of her career. She was very hospitable, beautiful dinners, and George was in the picture. George would go off to New York. He did stories for Colliers. He was terrifically active.

But at one time he ran for governor of California, and at that time Upton Sinclair was fostering a thing called "end poverty in California," EPIC. He was never a Democrat. George was. But Upton Sinclair filed as a Democrat and he spoiled George's chances. It was just one of those things. Nobody really wanted Sinclair, but he just had enough to queer it.

Duncan: How did you feel about his social scheme, his EPIC?

Norris: Well, very often George's...I was with him. We used to have marvelous talks.

Then, when Blanche died, and Blanche died of a long, dragging cancer, George then married a very lovely woman that I knew as a girl. Alice. They had a few years together and then Alice sank.
Then Colliers began to turn George down and to turn me down. George said, "They didn't lose any money when we were writing for them. Now what's the matter with them?" Well, he and I had a real affectionate intimacy in the last six or seven years of his life. He knew himself that he was pretty sick. We used to lunch at the Palace about every other week and talk ourselves to death about the old times and Blanche and Buffy and his daughter -- the son is in San Francisco, Bates Creel, with children. The daughter was unhappily married. It nearly killed George. I don't know where she has gone, but as a little girl Frances Virginia Creel was such an attractive little thing.

So, I don't think it's more than two years since I had lunch with him, on Tuesday, and he didn't want his lunch. Took a cup of tea. I didn't want very much lunch. We sat there and talked for about an hour and a half. His brother, you know, is a doctor in San Francisco, Creel. So I said, "Why don't you talk to your brother?" "Oh," he said, "He knows what's the matter." It wasn't a week before I read that
Norris: he'd gone. I miss him. I really miss him. That was so old a friendship that I could talk about anything. We knew everybody of New York who belonged to that time, all the actors and actresses. And those people that you can talk to are getting to be fewer, you know. They disappear.

Changing Literary Trends

Norris: But it's been a book-loving life. And so when we did meet people, Teresa, of course, was married to her poet and they had many intimacies that they shared with us. Vachel Lindsay was one. Then, Amy Lowell came down from Boston, and a lovely, lovely writer named Louise Imogen Guiney, who wrote beautiful stuff, a Boston girl. What with one thing and another, those years in Fort Washington, it seemed as if all doors were open. It was just great for visiting.

Of course, we did have the sorrow of losing little children. That damped me down for a long, long time. In fact, it's a thing you don't get over, but I very soon had my sister's children filling up the house. Oh, they have been
Norris: wonderful people, really.

That Benét background. Of course, I don't know what made Stephen what he was. We used to treat him as a little boy, you know. He was about seventeen and when he wouldn't eat at my table, and they were often there, I'd say, "Steve, how many ice creams did you eat this afternoon when you were walking home from the village?" And we would make him admit that he'd had four, perhaps. But he was always so loveable, and Bill was so proud of him.

Then, when he began to write, of course, they saw right away that he had something there. But he was never strong, his eyes were always terrible, and he was finally crippled with arthritis.

And almost all of those names of writers, so big to us then, are not important now. I know young girls who do read the stories that were being written then by Gene Stratton Porter and by another Porter, Eleanor Porter, who wrote young stuff. But my stuff had this condition, that it must have love in it and it must be clean. Well, that last thing didn't bother me much because I didn't know how to write any
Norris: other way, but nowadays I find that quite a few of them are writing things that we couldn't have printed. You could not have printed them fifty years ago.

Why, a little ahead of that, every time anyone said "damn," it was left a blank.

Duncan: Just a dash.

Norris: Yes, just a dash. But now you don't find many dashes.

Duncan: No, you find the words.

Norris: You find the words themselves.

I don't read much of Mickey Spillane or John O'Hara. What I think is so ridiculous, I was with my sister in a movement to see if we couldn't clean up the drugstore books and I read a few of them. The funny thing about it is, they can be as dirty and they can be as sexy and they can be as abnormal and they're not interesting. They can't make it interesting. Now, you take a person who is gifted, as, unquestionably, John O'Hara is, and I suppose Spillane too, in his way. They at least can make it thrilling, but this great mass of sin and shame and murder. There's one book called _Come Sin With Me_ and they're half-way up the stairs and the girl has
Norris: practically nothing on, some sort of chemise is falling off her shoulder, and then they try to take abnormal things. They push sex to the wall and it isn't interesting. They're not smooth enough. You get more out of *Alice in Wonderland*. Of course, it takes a good writer to know where to stop, unlike these trash writers who are filling the bookcases. I think even the children sicken of it. I think the trend has changed. People want articles now about physics, psychology, health, weight, children's morals, and you pick up...as I did...now, those magazines are lying there on that table because I want to place, if I can, a couple of stories of a friend of mine, and they are good, but I looked through a dozen magazines and one of them had one short story. I think it was the *Atlantic*. The *Atlantic* used to have six or seven, you know, in every issue. They want to find out why your husband doesn't love you, I don't know what...

Duncan: A psychological bent to it.

Norris: That's it. A girl of fifteen wrote me in connection with some of my syndicate articles, which go to a good many papers of the smaller towns of this Union, and even Canada, and she
Norris: said she was terribly afraid she was going to be a frigid wife. You see, that phrase has been going around. And that poor little innocent fool, working herself up over something that never will come into her consciousness at all. I think she was fifteen, but she had been reading some magazine story and she was all wrought up about it. And they have more diets. It is funny, with half the world starving.

Duncan: How do you feel about the reading public, say, back around World War I and the Twenties and of the present time?

Norris: Of course, the radio just came in after the first war and the TV later than that, only about ten years ago. Those two things have hit quite a mortal blow to fiction.

Duncan: Then how did you feel in the Twenties, because radio was just beginning?

Norris: Just beginning. Well, all people did a great deal of reading and of course, people exchanged books. "Have you seen this?" "I like this." "Did you see so-and-so's?" I remember that a man named Adams wrote, a Union man, Boston, I
Norris: think, he wrote a book called *The Education of Henry Adams*. We passed books like that around and we bought Millay's poetry and we bought all of Tarkington's books. Tarkington was a charmer. That was really a wonderful person. And his books received...what was the first one? Oh, *The Gentleman from Indiana*. It took us all off our feet.

And as for Kipling, everybody had sets of Kipling and everybody read him.

Of course, as soon as these other distractions came in...I'm just now beginning to feel that if I had to choose between radio and TV, I'd take the radio. You do turn it on for the very beautiful music. Now tomorrow, Sunday, they'll have that music festival in Europe and that means about an hour and a half of ecstasy. Oh, beautiful, it's been such a feature. For a little while it looked as though radio was out.

Duncan: Now it's coming back.

Norris: But I'm getting awfully tired of cool, cool, refreshing beer and filtered cigarettes and shaving.

Duncan: Do you feel that the decade of the 1920s, from
Duncan: a literary standpoint, was a transition period?

Norris: I think it was. I think that was the time. For one thing, we had an immense rush there of war books, and then the time came when nobody wanted any more war books. We had All Quiet on the Western Front and Mr. Britling Sees It Through. And that was, it wasn't Arnold Bennett. It was Wells, I think. We had a tremendous amount of war poetry. Then there just seemed to be a lull, people were just worn out with war.

Duncan: Sort of the disillusion phase.

Norris: That was it. You see, that first war, oh, Lord, how green we were. A very fine man came over here and visited us at the ranch quite a long while. His name was Irving and he was a grandson of the great Sir Henry. His father had written a book of crimes, Henry Brodribb Irving. Classic Crimes, or something of that sort. He was just tired out. He said that England was tired, just absolutely tired. She hadn't been bombed anything like what she was going to get, but she had seen enough. He said, "I don't know what I'd do if they began it again." Well, along about 1938 they were beginning it again, talking
Norris: about it.

Then another thing that held us all down in those years was the depression, of course.

Duncan: Yes, you haven't mentioned much about the depression.

Norris: No. People had to more or less come down to common sense and really scratch to...there wasn't the same production.

Duncan: How did you feel during the depression years, say in '32, '33?

Norris: Well, I had this very confident and optimistic husband. My brother Joe, who was carrying his electric manufacturing pole-top tension machines, two especially, circuit-breakers and transformers, Joe said to me somewhat ruefully, "People are never going to want a circuit-breaker or a transformer in their homes. The work I do is on pole lines. And the pole lines have stopped, that's all."

Everything stopped. Books stopped because only one in ten was produced. The criteria of the magazines went up tremendously because they were paying for paper, you know, and they weren't getting it.
Norris: But my husband and my brother, who were very close together, were both the sort that were not anxious, never anticipated anything. When Joe was struggling with a strike and depression and a horrible thing that meant over-buying of materials that weren't being used and getting old-fashioned, he and his wife lived in a very lovely little cottage and his wife did all the cooking and took care of the children. Joe said that the depression kicked him upstairs, he liked it so.

C.G. was very much the same way. He'd say, "Now Katie, we started empty-handed. We can start right over again."

We were cheated, not that he ever speculated, but he did do an awfully silly thing. He gave his broker -- he said himself it was silly -- his broker power of attorney, see, to handle whatever we had, and half was gone before he really looked into it again.

Duncan: In the crash of '29?

Norris: Yes. Then I said to him, "As long as we can stick together, the two boys and two girls and ourselves, I'd just as soon go back to a flat
Norris: on 92nd Street. "And if you're not afraid of a thing you weather it so much better.

Duncan: It's real confidence.

Norris: Yes, you really weather it.
CONCLUSION

Norris: So it amounted to a very full and happy life. A lot of travel, twice around the world and I suppose fifteen times to Europe. The children growing up around us and the years at the ranch. Of course, there have been set-backs, but on the whole... I think one reason it's been so happy is that I took the domestic end of it as all-important and the other as a very marvelous, gratuitous frosting on the cake, but did not go into these affectations that some writers do. Oh, I've met so many of them in New York. I felt that I had an obligation to take my work as a business really, but not ever to say, "Oh well, that's pretty nice for you, but I've got to..." On the contrary, I was very happy in it.

I play cards, you know. On my desk now, I have a pack of little miniature double cards. I play solitaire and then things clear up in
Norris: my mind. I wish I could darn while that goes on, or cut apples or something, but I can't. I have to have something that keeps my mind and my eyes kind of busy. And I can think.

I immensely enjoyed the luxury it gave us to entertain as we did on the ranch. We were often thirty there and sometimes more. We had this out-of-doors grill where I could cook to my heart's content. We had a big pool, when pools were almost unknown here. Have you ever flown over this part of California and seen the pools here? Everywhere.

Duncan: Oh, I have, and it's quite amazing.
Norris: I think Saratoga alone has seventy.
Duncan: You almost consider cooking as great an art as writing.
Norris: It was. It was a secondary avocation with me. I like to cook. I had good, hard training, you see. I cooked for the family for seven or eight years, pretty steadily. I got to be a comfortable cook and I enjoyed it. And I had the luck to teach all the girls, there were nine girl cousins and six boy cousins, and every one of them is a good cook. They'd come
Norris: around the grill there. "What are you doing there? Why do you do that? I'm not a cordon bleu, I don't know as I could make crepes Suzette very successfully, but I used to give them very good meals up there.

Those were wonderful years. The children would put on theatricals for us. We had a little theater there that they called Drury Lane.

Duncan: After Dublin.

Norris: Yes, exactly. And I do get this reward. These children now are all up between thirty-five and forty-five. The oldest of them is forty-seven this year. They have children of their own and the way they talk of the ranch years is a reward. It never was a paying ranch, and after I lost my husband I could not carry on. Not for finances, I could have done that, but the responsibility. The roofs, the sanitation, the pool, and the fact that all these kids in their teens were saying, "Granny, can we have the car? Granny, can we go to San Jose?" I couldn't take that responsibility. You know there's a danger in these pools. Every little while there's a tragedy.
Duncan: In talking with you, Mrs. Norris, I get the impression that the two great periods in your life are the New York-Port Washington era and then down at the ranch in the 1920s.

Norris: Those were the two. Yes, they were, although we built a beautiful home here and we had the youngsters in every Sunday night when they got to be college age. We had open house. We had some very lovely and exciting times. Going abroad, I don't know how many times. We just took flyers, to Europe. But those were, as you say... the ranch was self-expression for me, and the books were too.
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