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Paula Krotser : A Radical Change



Oral Memoirs from 1934 Describing the San Francisco General
Strike and Subsequent Membership in the Communist Party

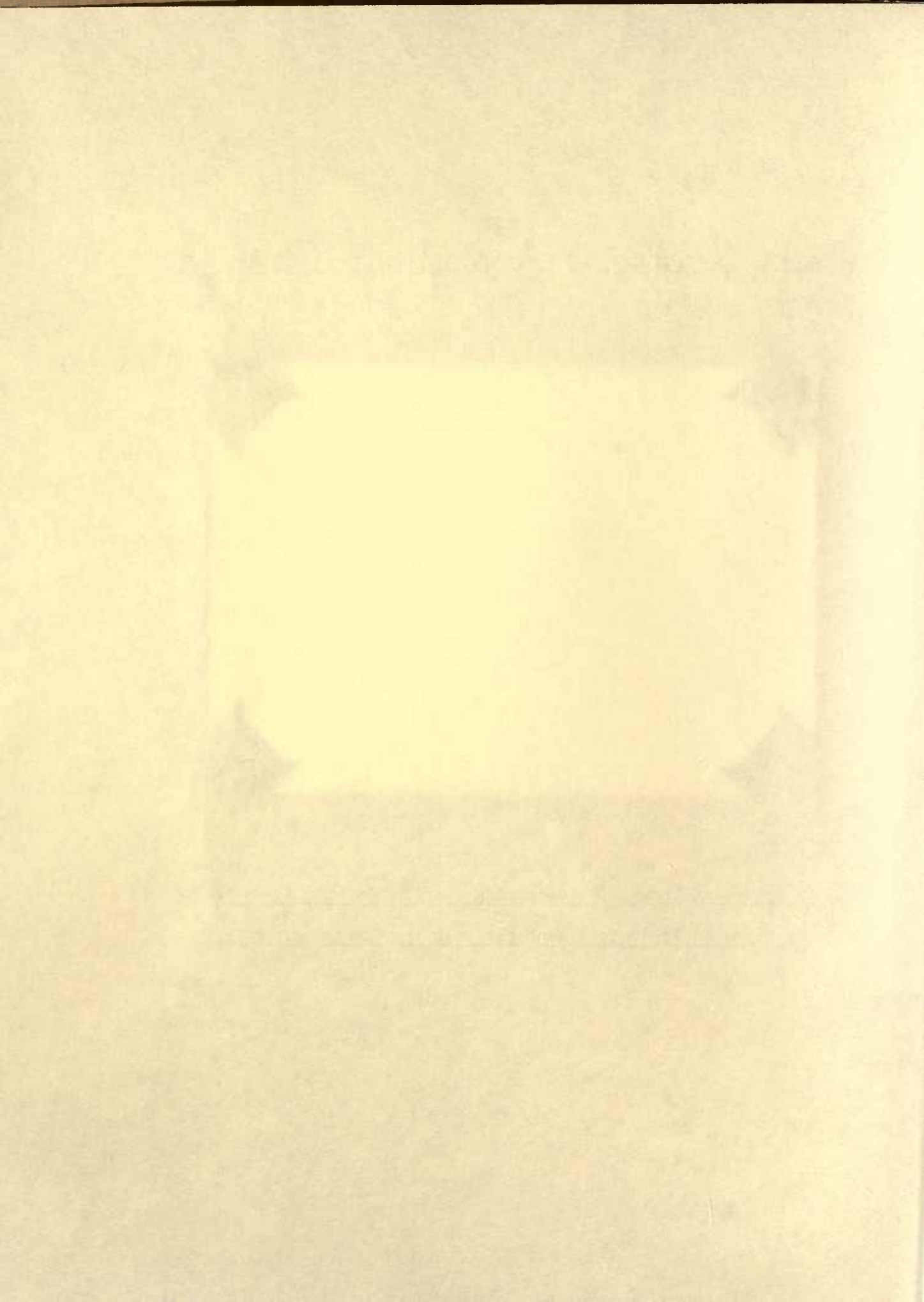


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Information gathered by:

Jim Broadstreet

Date: 10-29-85

Interviewer's phone: (415) 654-3190

GENEALOGICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SHEET

PLEASE PRINT :

Name of interviewee: Paula Homberger Krotser

Date of birth: Aug. 21, 1913 Place of birth: San Francisco, Ca.

Home address: 6403 Regent Street Phone: 655-8472
Berkeley, Ca.

Date of Marriage: Sept. 1934 Place of marriage: S.F., Ca.

Name of spouse: Raymond Krotser Place of birth: Woodland Ca. Date: Feb. 18 1904

Name of father: Heinrich Homberger Place of birth: Germany Date: 1873

Name of mother: Lilla Tautphaus Homberger Place of birth: S.F., Ca. Date: 1877

Grandparents

Father's father: Julius Homberger Place of birth: Germany Date: --

Father's mother: Pauline Hernzhein Place of birth: Germany Date: --

Mother's father: Peter Tautphaus Place of birth: Germany Date: --

Mother's mother: Elizabeth Corcoran Place of birth: New York Date: --

Please list names of brothers and sisters and dates of birth:

1. Elizabeth 1904

2. Julie 1908

3.

4.

5.

Please list names of interviewee's children and dates of birth:

1. Shira Krotser 1936

2. Donald Krotser 1938

3.

4.

Present Occupation:

1. What kinds of work have you done over the years?
politics and archaeology

Interview History

As a close personal friend of Paula Krotser and her husband, Ray, I was excited at the prospect of doing an in-depth interview on Paula's early political life. Since we have been good friends for at least ten years and know each other as "Jim" and "Paula", I will take the liberty to use these first names throughout the interview.

Paula and Ray Krotser live on the top floor of their large two-story wood-frame home. Below them on the first floor are the renters: Cal students busy trying to graduate from college.

The interview took place on Friday, January 17, 1986, in the colorful living room of Paula's home. This large, sunny room is also the dining room and sort of a grand-central station for various political actions, phone calls, nuclear freeze petitions and the like. The dining table is stacked with novels, periodicals and letters. Across the room the wood-stove throws off a warm glow and on the walls are vibrating treasures from Paula's archaeology work in Mexico. A small container garden on the rear porch provides fresh salad greens, and below, the vast vegetable garden and fruit trees allow for plenty of organic food throughout most of the year.

Paula is recently recovering from a serious case of pneumonia and a lengthy stay in the hospital. She has a glass of water nearby to aid in speaking and we agree to break the interview up into half-hour segments because of her shortness of breath.

I know this room well. Many long conversations, wonderful meals and generous quantities of wine and music have allowed our friendship to strengthen and grow through the years.

Jim Broadstreet
Interviewer

Narrator: Paula Krotser
Interviewer: Jim Broadstreet
Place of Interview: Berkeley, Ca.
Date of Interview: January 17, 1986
Transcriber: Jim Broadstreet

The Depression and General Strike of San Francisco

Jim: Paula, what can you tell me about San Francisco during the Depression and the strike of nineteen thirty-four?

Paula: San Francisco was in a terrible state of depression. My own family was a pretty good example. We skidded down from my father's reasonably well-paid engineering job and a beautiful house on Russian Hill to a fifteen dollar attic that we were living in at the time the strike was called. My dad had no income for a year. He sold off the best of his lifetime stamp collection to get us something to eat. And then at the end of a year the W.P.A. and those government projects began and he had a small income from that.

But we were very poor. I graduated from high school in June of thirty-one and in the following year and a half I must have had about thirteen tiny little jobs that didn't last and were usually quite miserable. I was really desperate when I was walking over Telegraph Hill and through some friends got a job in a restaurant there. This was my first really steady job that lasted for almost two years. During that time I was going to art school almost all day and at four o'clock at the end of art school I climbed up Telegraph Hill to prepare the restaurant dining-room for the evening's job.

Paula: The Longshore Strike was called because the conditions of the longshoremen were so bad that they all had to live on relief. The average weekly earnings of a longshoreman was twelve dollars. They had what's called the "shape up" for every ship to be unloaded: hundreds of longshoremen would show up in the morning and the shipowner's foreman would simply point out a crew-- you and you and you--and the rest of them would be sent home. One of the objectives of the strike--besides a decent wage-- was a union hall in which the work would be rotated among all union workers. This would eliminate favoritism and insure at least a minimum earning; and as it turned out the minimum earning was at least fifty dollars a week. This did wonderful things, not only for the longshore families, but for the merchants in the neighborhood and for the whole city you might say, since at that time shipping was San Francisco's main sustenance.

During the strike, as I walked over the hill to my job, I would stop up where Coit Tower is today and count the number of ships in the harbor to see how the strike was going.

Jim: How old were you at this time?

Paula: About nineteen. And I remember one day when I counted sixty-seven ships, because not only were all the piers filled, but there were many ships anchored out in the bay because they couldn't unload their cargo.

Jim: Was your family interested in the strike?

Paula: My sister was also in art school and she had a circle of radical friends who were "pro-striker".

Jim: What sister was this?

Paula: Julia. I thought they were rather crazy. I was sort of a pet in this restaurant job; the customers were all fond of me and I thought all talk of a class struggle was nonsense. Until the strike. When the strike broke out and these same nice people who were so polite and loving to me would come in and talk among themselves and to me, saying that the longshoremen ought to be lined up against a wall and machine-gunned, I learned that there really was such a thing as a class struggle. And besides the brash exploitation I was under--working for tips-- I quickly learned that there were classes and that people needed to organize to defend themselves.

Jim: What "politically" do you feel you had learned at home up to this point?

Paula: From my parents?

Jim: Yes.

Paula: Nothing, really. I think my father was quite sophisticated about economics but he didn't do much talking. He told me once he studied Marxist economics--among other kinds--in the university in Germany. My mother always said she was for the underdog but she was quite naive politically. She really didn't know what she was talking about, you might say. But my overnight turnover was literally caused by the man I worked for, the patrons of the restaurant and what I was observing down on the waterfront.

Jim: Tell me a little bit about the restaurant and your job.

Paula: When I went to work it had been a struggling little Bohemian restaurant run by a good cook with no business sense--rather

Paula: a nice man. The real boss had bought in as a partner and was putting money into redecorating the restaurant and reopening it. He was a man whose father owned a chocolate factory and he had a lot of fairly wealthy German connections; it was to be a German restaurant as far as the cooking went.

At first the two young men and I went to work for tips and there was no business. I remember going home one night with two dimes in my pocket after about six hours work. So it wasn't very cushy, but between the glamorous location with a beautiful view, the old historic building, and our own contribution of song and picturesque costumes, the place soon became popular.

Jim: What was the name of it?

Paula: The Shadows. It still exists. So I worked somewhat more than a year being pretty much of a rebel and fairly frequently fired but called back because the boss was afraid that the customers would fall off--they always asked for me when I wasn't there. So I brought a steady income into the house during those years, most of which was made on the weekends.

It's history, of course, that on the fifth of July, nineteen thirty-four, two of the strikers were gunned down on the picket-line by armed so-called "deputies" who were hirelings of the ship-owners. The funeral and the general strike that followed those killings were the turning point. The funeral was impressive. Market Street was filled from side to side and for miles by representatives of all the unions in the city. They marched along at a slow

Paula: march all the way up to Civic Center or farther.

Jim: Do you remember where you were at this time?

Paula: I think I was probably in school at the time. What I remember were photographs of this solemn procession...burying these two men. The whole city then went out on a general strike. For a solid week no streetcars, no services; it was a dead city. In the meanwhile, government arbitrators had been sent to try and settle the strike. At the end of the week both sides accepted the idea of arbitration and the general strike was ended. At that time my sister and her husband had decided to go to New York.

Jim: Was that Julie?

Paula: Yes, Julie. I was studying dance and wanted very much to go to New York to see if I could study with Martha Graham. So we all agreed to stay until the strike was settled because we wanted to know the outcome.

Jim: What was Julie's connection to the strike?

Paula: Tenuous. She had friends who were involved with the leadership but it was very tenuous. Mostly it was a group of artists that she knew and they may have helped paint signs or what artists do when they are supporting a strike.

Jim: Who was most influential on you at that time? Who helped shape your thoughts?

Paula: It was my boss and his patrons who influenced me. It was not my sister's radical friends. It had to be demonstrated to me by the people on the other side. Then I very quickly realized that they knew what they were talking about. Of course the whole country was radicalized by the Depression. The country was full of home-

Paula: less, jobless people.

Jim: What were the main arguments against the longshoremen by the people you were in contact with?

Paula: Well, they simply took the part of the shipowners, you know. That the shipowners were the owners and the workers shouldn't have anything to say about conditions or pay or any of these things; that they should be grateful for having work and they should be humble and obedient. Which was not the history of San Francisco. San Francisco has a long, honorable history of being a labor union town. So when the two strikers were murdered there was no hesitation that the whole labor movement turned out in support of the strikers.

Jim: Harry Bridges was the head of the local?

Paula: He was the head of what at that time was called the I.L.A., International Longshoremens Association.

Jim: How was he known in the community?

Paula: Well, in the community I don't think he was widely known until the strike and then, of course, the newspapers had him all over the front pages as a "foreign agitator" or "Communist"--all the things that people were being called. Because he was an Australian, after the strike four different attempts over about ten years were made to deport him.

Jim: Because he was a Communist?

Paula: That was the pretext. But they never could prove it and they never could deport him. But there were big important trials. He was very strong, but he was a tiny man, yet strong in his principles.

Paula: He was offered a fortune by the shipowners after the strike was over if he would resign as president of the union. I don't remember the figure but it was immense; but he would have none of it.

Jim: Did you every have a chance to see him or hear him?

Paula: Oh, yes. He was a funny looking man; he still is. But a real tough labor representative willing to risk his life and dedicate his life and very good mind to building and maintaining a good union. [Harry Bridges died recently.]

Jim: After the general strike began, how did people get along?

Paula: They walked. They got along pretty uncomfortably and very little business could be done, of course. I remember going out to get food supplies for the family: walking to the nearest store--the little mom and pop stores were still functioning. But it was a strong strike and a very effective one.

Jim: And were you still in the restaurant at this time?

Paula: The owner put a sign on the door saying "gone fishing"; that was how he managed to slide out of that crisis.

Jim: Did it change your family's life at home at all?

Paula: No, it wasn't that long, really. It was just very exciting as far as I was concerned. By that time I had met some of the politically class conscious people in the city--not members of the longshore union. There was a tremendous witch-hunt going on at that time. So some of the leading radicals went into hiding and I met them as they were in hiding.

Jim: Tell me about this witch-hunt, Paula.

Paula: Well, anybody that was reputed to be a Communist, there was a law--

Paula: I don't know if it's still on the books--called the Criminal Syndicalism law and anybody who could be convicted of conspiring to overthrow the government by force or violence was thrown into jail. There were both men and women who served terms in the years immediately following that strike under that Criminal Syndicalism law. I think the law was taken off the books; I'm not sure.

Jim: Who were these people you mentioned?

Paula: I remember one woman who was down in the agricultural fields organizing crop workers. She was one of the women who was jailed.

Jim: And how did you happen to meet?

Paula: Well, I think this was after we returned from New York when we joined the Communist Party; that was when we began to meet some of these people. But during the general strike just by chance some of them were right next door to where I was staying with my sister and being very quiet at the time.

Jim: Were you living with Julie at the time?

Paula: I was neither living with my sister nor my family; I was just sort of commuting. When I couldn't stand staying at home any longer I'd stay with my sister for a while.

Jim: Had you met Ray?

Paula: Yes, we had met a year or two before, I think, then he had gone off to Oregon on a job; there was a long hiatus. Then he was working up in Lake Tahoe country and would come down occasionally and spend a weekend with my sister and I would see him again.

Jim: Did you see the funeral of the strikers personally?

Paula: No, I don't think so; I only remember it from photographs.

Jim: Did you witness other things?

Paula: Oh, yes. I sat up on top of Telegraph Hill and I could see gun-smoke and masses of people confronting each other. In fact, I wanted to go down, but having a job on one hand and a family on the other, I didn't make it to go down the hill and mingle.

Jim: So it was dangerous to get down in the thick of it?

Paula: Yes, no question about it. Besides the shootings there were beatings and a lot of violence.

Jim: What happened after this agreement for arbitration in the strike?

Paula: Well, things became relatively calm. There were violations of the agreement by the shipowners and there were short strikes--generally not lasting more than a couple of days having to do with sling loads. [Here narrator describes loads and weights].

The rotating hiring hall worked very well and does to this day.

The I.L. W.U. is still, if not the strongest, one of the strongest and most democratic unions in the country.

Jim: How would you sum up how this strike affected you, Paula?

Paula: Well, I think it put me squarely on the side of the working class and with an interest in the Marxist point of view.

Jim: Had you read Marx at this time?

Paula: No, nothing. It was the strike and it was the job I had, the action, and the continuous petty exploitation that went on in the restaurant that reinforced the larger picture. Sort of laughable, really, but very convincing.

Jim: This was your first political action?

Paula: Yes. As far as I was concerned, it was the first awareness on my part of the existence of a class struggle, and the difficulty of resolving any of the broader problems as long as the power lies in the hands of the wealthy.

Jim: Were your friends affected by the strike like you were?

Paula: No, not the people with whom I was most closely associated.

Jim: What about your family?

Paula: Just my sister, Julie. She joined the Party before I did, as a matter of fact.

Jim: Do you have any other thoughts on the strike?

Paula: I just feel that it was one of the most important historic moments in the life of San Francisco; and although unions are under fire now, I don't think that basic labor feeling can be destroyed. It's being attacked, but there is still a strong awareness of the need for militant labor unions in San Francisco. It's one of the reasons that it's one of the best places to live...because there's more freedom out here. No company town. [Narrator discussed gold seekers and early history of area]. ##

Cross-Country Trip to New York

Jim: ##Following the strike you made a trip across the country?

Paula: We had planned--my sister, her husband and I--to camp our way across the country; and then Ray wrote from Tahoe that he would join us. As soon as the strike was settled we took off. We bought a nineteen twentytwo, seven passenger Packard for fifty dollars. My sister's husband built a cupboard on the back to

Paula: keep food and kitchen supplies in. Then we put a rack on one running board for our bedrolls and we had the whole space in the back for a couple to lie down when they wanted to. It was a beautiful old machine; it was tragic that we sold it and didn't keep it as it would be worth a fortune. [Narrator discusses some early problems in the trip].

We traveled down into the Southwest--took the southern route to begin with. We camped at Mesa Verde for several days and saw the ruins; it was a very beautiful experience. I went out at night on my own and saw Cliff Palace by moonlight. Unforgettable.

Then as we went further into Colorado we were stopped by a flash flood and became acquainted with a bean farmer who was a Communist and said the whole town was radical. He invited us to come and see how farmers lived in the great United States.

Jim: Where in Colorado was this?

Paula: The place was called Dove Creek. It was arid, desert country.

Jim: You met this person by chance?

Paula: Absolutely. The flood was crossing the road and we couldn't proceed. It took maybe an hour for the chocolate colored water to go down to the point where a car could drive across the dip--it was what we call a vado--a low place to let the flood-waters through.

And this truck with a man and a child--a homemade truck full of ripe peaches--pulled up behind us. Some acquaintances of theirs in Utah had written and said they had a peach harvest that they couldn't sell. And these people were really hungry,

Paula: so the village pooled their money for gasoline and this man drove to Utah and was bringing home a truckload of peaches. While we visited there the whole town--all the wives and daughters--turned out and canned peaches.

Jim: How big a town would this have been?

Paula: Well, just by guess I'd say not more than a hundred people. They were very, very poor and were getting a terrible price for their beans. Their main cash flow was a W.P.A. project to dig a well for the town because water was very short and they were working on that. We spent about three days with them. They told us they were ready for the revolution; they had their rifles in their haystacks. They were just waiting for the rest of the country to catch up. (Laughs)

Jim: At this point in the Depression they considered that a revolution was in the making?

Paula: Yes.

Jim: Did they say why?

Paula: Because people couldn't live the way things were. Every time we crossed a divide where we coincided with the tracks of the trans-continental railroad, we would see these freight-trains moving slowly with hundreds of people on top of them. Whole families, just homeless, jobless, hungry...drifting back and forth across the country looking for any kind of work, any source of food.

Jim: This bean farmer. Can you tell me about him?

Paula: Well, we slept in their front yard--hard as a rock--and he and his wife and several youngsters...he had been in contact with miners from a place called Telluride. And they had gotten their radicalization probably from the tradition of Ludlow and the great

Paula: miners' struggle there in years past. There's lots of militancy hidden back in those hills still: the Mother Jones country, you might say. Later on this man moved to San Francisco and we would see him occasionally. He became active in the Party. He said he just couldn't stay out in the country any longer; there was nothing to do, no future and he wanted his kids to get some schooling.

Jim: He looked you up later?

Paula: I suppose we met at meetings.

Jim: So from Colorado you went where?

Paula: I had a sister living in Utah and we spent a couple of nights with her. Then we went into the Wasatch Mountains and saw one of the great caves. From there we went south and crossed the Rockies at Monarch Pass. Eleven thousand feet. We had a lot of trouble with vapor lock with the car because the altitude was so high, until the boys found out that putting a gallon of kerosine in the gas tank would hold down the boiling of the gasoline.

We limped over Monarch Pass in a driving rainstorm and arrived at a beautiful high mountain meadow camp...well, it was a forest service park. The forest service had built a three-sided shelter, just about big enough for four sleeping bags. Ray went out and found a stump and split it and got dry kindling out of the middle...and we made a fire and dried off our things and slept with the fire in front of us. In the morning my sister's husband got up and broke the ice off the top of the bucket. (Paula speaks of climbing Mt. Etna).

Paula: And that was about the end of the fun part of the trip. The rest of it was a struggle to find anywhere where one could camp for the night. (Narrator discusses balance of trip and of her sickness in New York City).

Returning to San Francisco and Joining the Communist Party

Paula: We set up housekeeping six hundred dollars in debt--which was a fortune in those days--but Ray had a job waiting for him at the munificent salary of one hundred thirty-five dollars a month. We rented an apartment of Telegraph Hill for thirty dollars a month, with a fireplace and a backyard. Unbelievable. And that was where we really made contact with the Party.

Jim: Were there any political connections in New York that you checked out?

Paula: The Workers Dance League was the main connection.

Jim: What was that?

Paula: All the young dancers who were militant organized themselves into a league and cooperated in putting on concerts. A couple of them became very successful and well known. One of them was Anna Sokolow who went afterward to Mexico and taught dance there for many years.

I had an interview with Tamiris who told me what a terribly hard life it was to be a dancer in New York and by the time we came down with our crash I was convinced that my body just wasn't up to what it takes. Interestingly, my sister's daughter, who is a fine dancer, and did dance professionally in New York,

Paula: gave it up for the same reason. Just too hard. She has gone on to get her Ph.D. in fine arts.

Jim: How would you describe the chain of events that brought you into the Communist Party?

Paula: Well, when we returned, our close neighbors were people we had known; in fact, I think they told us about the apartment we found. They invited us to a class in Marxist economics which we attended weekly and we did quite a bit of reading at that time.

Jim: What date would this have been?

Paula: Spring of nineteen thirty-five.

Jim: Can you describe this class for me?

Paula: Well, it wasn't very exciting, I must confess. [Laughs]. Very nice man teaching it and mostly the people coming were friends or friends of friends. But they did explain the basic theory of surplus value which I still think is the reason why Capitalism will never take care of people's needs.

Jim: How would you describe that, briefly?

Paula: Any piece of raw material that the owner of a factory has increases in value only because of the work that's supplied to it by his employees. And the employees are not paid in proportion to the increase in value of the raw materials. This is what Marx called surplus value--the value that the worker adds on to the raw materials, over and above what the owner of the factory pays him as sustenance.

As the years go by, more and more surplus value accumulates because this is a system that runs on profit. If there's no

Paula: profit they collapse; they're squeezed out. But there's always this surplus value that's got to be reinvested somewhere and it becomes more and more difficult for the capitalists to find useful ways to reinvest that growing wealth. So one of the most profitable things to do is to put it into munitions because that has to be produced over and over again.

One of the motives for wars is the source of raw materials. So here's this accumulating money restless to be used and people who want to go out into the world and take any kind of territory in order to have the raw material to turn into more wealth.

This can be bananas in Central America; the United Fruit Company was immediately responsible for the overthrow of the democratic Arbenz government in Guatemala in nineteen fifty-four because the new government confiscated lands that were lying fallow to give to the peasants who had no land. And this is the same story every time a country like Cuba becomes a socialist country: those raw materials are no longer available for exploitation. So I don't see any solution.

Jim: And then what happened in the class?

Paula: Well, I guess we were asked to join the Party by the teacher and we joined. At that time Ray was working; I was not. I was pretty restless and I took a job at the Party headquarters for a while.

Jim: Do you remember the teacher or those with you in the class?

Paula: Oh, very well, yes. Some of the people that, alas, were people for whom I worked are gone now and some of them are still around. So I worked for some months as sort of ill-prepared secretary and

Paula: then it was suggested that I become active in a youth organization which has long since disappeared, but it was an anti-facist, anti-war youth organization and I worked at that.

Jim: What were you to do?

Paula: Arranging meetings, trying to get affiliations and I remember going talking to ministers asking them to support the anti-war activity. The response varied according to the size of the church.

Jim: How would you describe yourself and your affiliation to the minister?

Paula: Well, I went in the name of this youth group--American Youth Congress or something like that. Some of the ministers were already disposed to cooperate to try to build a movement against war. But others who had prosperous congregations simply said: "I know all about you people and I'm not about to risk my following by getting involved with this organization". They subtly red-baited.

Jim: So some people knew that there was the Communist connection and still would support you, and others were afraid. Is that true?

Paula: Well, they weren't only afraid, they were ministers to the rich. They weren't interested; they were against it. Now this is about the time of the war against Spain also. Some of our good friends went off to fight in the International Brigades. ##

Jim: ##Can you tell me about your involvement in the war against Spain?

Paula: Well, it made an organization against war and facism very necessary at this time. Perhaps the biggest accomplishment of that period of my work was a picnic in Marin County at Paradise Cove with

Paula: hundreds of people coming and the unions participating. We raised money for this organization--the American League Against War and Facism. We were, I suppose what were later called, premature anti-facists.

Along about that time our first child was born and my activity began to taper off. I transferred to a Marin County branch of the Party and, frankly, became so involved and tied down with baby and isolation that I wasn't able to do as much as I had previously been able to do.

Jim: Was membership in the Communist Party illegal at that time?

Paula: Not as such. I think the Criminal Syndicalism law was still on the books, but that did not specifically name the Communist Party. I think the first time that it was made illegal was about nineteen fifty-one.

Jim: With respect to your membership in the Party, were you subjected to any intimidation by the government?

Paula: Not yet, but soon. It was actually through Ray's government job that he was asked to meet with the F.B.I.

Our activities in Marin County were very largely confined to education and raising money for the Spanish cause. Because the doctors in Spain were of wealthy families it was not possible to take care of the medical needs of the International Brigade with local facilities. And a movement for medical aid to republican Spain was started by American doctors, and doctors went over there to take care of the International Brigade people.

Paula: Some of the Spanish doctors hated the International Brigade even more than they hated the republican side. We had a small but very interesting group of Party members including musicians and we had some fine money-raising concerts, picnics and activities of that sort in order to send ambulances and medical supplies over there--much as we are now doing for Nicaragua.

We organized a cooperative nursery school when our daughter turned two and there was no pre-school of any sort in Mill Valley. We modeled it after a Berkeley nursery school that had been started by faculty wives. I heard one of those women speak at the community church in Mill Valley and rushed up afterwards to ask her for information. She made a connection for us with women who were still in the nursery school field and we started our little school by parents paying a small fee and the mothers being staff; it was a new thing then.

Jim: Did this include people in or out of the Party?

Paula: Both. A few years later when the cold war was really in force and Ray was still working for the federal government, a federal employee in the State Department was sent to prison on a treason charge for being a Party member. It set us to thinking that maybe it was not the safest place to be at a time of witch-hunting

Jim: What was not a safe place to be?

Paula: In the federal employ. Actually, Ray was active in a C.I.O. union for federal employees, but about that time one of the men in Ray's office greeted him when he got to work by saying that he'd made an appointment for Ray to go and talk to the F.B.I.

Paula: They had called and said that they wanted to talk to him. Ray put it off and we talked it over with legally experienced Party people and they advised him to have nothing to do with the F.B.I. They said invariably no matter what he said to try to keep clean, they would know how to trick him into a position of either being prosecuted or naming names. So he refused to go.

The head of public roads was a good strong liberal--a New Deal man--and he backed Ray up. He said: "Don't let anybody intimidate you". So Ray didn't talk to them. But that was the first overt sign of F.B.I. taking an interest in our family. About that time one of our personal friends that was starting a construction company offered Ray a job. So Ray took it.

It was interesting because Ray's immediate superiors in the office said: "We can protect you; you don't have to leave". And he thanked them very much, but he said: "I'm afraid you can't". When he went back to visit them--maybe a year later--they said: "You were right". By that time the witch-hunt was in full swing.

Jim: What was the attitude of your parents when you joined the Party?

Paula: My dad never took an attitude; I think he certainly had no objection. He was rather apolitical. My mother still maintained that she was for the underdog but if she didn't like the looks of the people we associated with she didn't like it. I think the turning point in our relationship was when I took her to a public meeting--it was not a Party meeting but a broad, left meeting--

Paula: and she went but her Catholic sisters were very angry with her for going. It looked as though we might be able to communicate but unfortunately my mother died shortly after that. A lot of things didn't get resolved between us.

Jim: What about your sisters?

Paula: My sister Julie remained in the East and for at least some years was active in the Party. I think she dropped out and was critical before we did. I remember a discussion with her in which she said that democratic centralism was more centralism than democracy, which turned out to be quite correct. We still felt there was a possibility of broadening and democratizing the Party in this country, because of its being a democratic country. So we hung in there for quite a few more years. But I must say I was never . . . well, the only strike I ever participated in was that restaurant where we all briefly went on strike for wages. I was not a class-conscious worker; I was brought up in a shabby-genteel, semi-intellectual middle-class family.

Jim: And your other sister?

Paula: She was reactionary from the start.

Jim: What sister was that?

Paula: The one who has a ranch in southern California.

Jim: Did you make friends in the Party?

Paula: Oh, indeed. Some of our best friends are either still in or the majority of them are, like us, ex-members who still believe in socialism and try to do all we can to promote social justice and fight the nuclear threat.

Jim: Why did you leave the Party?

Paula: I think probably Hungary was the first real breach in our faith-- because the Party is as much a religion as it is a political organization. But that happened at the same time that the McCarthy witch-hunts were at their height, so this was no time to drop out of the Party. We were not going to be scared out of the Party.

At the time we had a ranch down in the hills outside of Santa Cruz and we actually were able to give the children of Party people some respite from the harassment they were experiencing in school and that their parents were going through. It was a little island of socialism as far as the children were concerned and they've never forgotten it.

But I felt at the time it would to some degree counter fanaticism-- to give these children that kind of respite and sort of broaden their feelings. It's quite natural and inevitable that any movement that's attacked tends to close ranks by becoming fanatical. I saw that as a problem for the future of any participation of the Communists in a socialist move. And I think it still is.

Jim: Were there any other events that moved you to want to leave the Party?

Paula: We were not comfortable from . . . well, I started college and I was still a member in about nineteen fifty-five, but I was not comfortable with it. As I said, I was largely staying in because of the things that were being done to people. And at that time we were under strong persecution in our own community.

Jim: How was that?

Paula: Well, we were kicked out of just about every organization we belonged to. (Laughs) Our children were persecuted in the school; our son was routinely beaten up. Our daughter's best friend left her for about a year before she had a change of heart and returned.

Jim: Was this the Santa Cruz area?

Paula: Yes. Santa Cruz at that time was very reactionary; not a bit like it is today. There was no college in Santa Cruz County of any sort. So when I started college I had to go down to Monterey, fifty miles away.

That's an interesting experience because that college was started by veterans of World War Two who had gotten their training on the G.I. Bill and they believed in democracy. The F.B.I. went to the college and talked to all of my instructors saying that I was a dangerous Communist. Yet I was treated with the utmost friendship and consideration in that college. When one instructor was called in by the president and asked whether it was true that I was a Communist, the instructor--to his eternal chagrin--said yes, I was. And the president said: "But I'm sure it must be a philosophical Communism; I'm sure that she doesn't believe in violence". (Laughs) So they backed me up and I got a good first-half of college there with my name up on a brass plaque in the student union as the top grades for one semester. It was a good experience.

Jim: How did your children react to the harassment against them?

Paula: I think it made our daughter militant and our son timid, frankly. I think both of them have a clear picture of how the world is; I'm sure that our son is just as aware as our daughter of what

Paula: the world is really like. But he's not the one who's going to go out front and get clobbered again; he had enough of that when he was a kid. Our daughter was active in college; she still supports causes like peace.

Jim: What can you say you learned from the experience of joining the Communist Party?

Paula: Well, I learned that there are people that can be bought and people that cannot be bought. And that our great democracy is dominated by big money. Many people who know this are silenced either by the jobs that they get, the grants that they are granted, or by fear.

Of course at the height of the McCarthy persecutions thousands of people had their careers smashed. There were suicides and mental breakdowns; there was great suffering. But a lot of them were resilient and resourceful and found other ways to earn a living and are still around, not so much as Party members, but as activists in defense of people's rights. I think for my part I jumped from Catholic orthodoxy into Communist orthodoxy. Now I hope I'm an inner-directed person.

Jim: You mentioned that the Party was like a religion?

Paula: Well, there was a lot of faith and hoopla and heroism. You know, it tends to dull the critical edge of one's intellect. We believed when someone said that a book was an anti-people book we wouldn't read it--which to me now seems atrocious. (laughs)
You read things and make up your own mind. It wasn't as bad as the Catholic Index; it wasn't said that you'd go to hell if you

Paula: read it, but it was not too far. And I still feel that the Communist press is very slanted. I read it, but I read it and take what makes sense and let the rest go by.

Jim: What current political actions are you involved in?

Paula: Peace. Women for Peace in the East Bay; and the Nuclear Freeze. I'm not physically able to do a great deal. We also belong to a wonderful little group called the Revolutionary Garden Party which consists of organic gardeners of various trends of socialism or Marxism and this group devotes itself to helping establish community gardens. It also takes a stand on environmental and other issues. During the summer protests at the U.C. Berkeley campus--the divestment movement--we went there once with food and shared dinner with the protestors.

And of course when election time comes around we help our excellent Congressman. We contribute money. At our age and with our physical limitations, money and occasional letters and telephone call campaigns are the most effective things.

Jim: How old are you now?

Paula: Too old. [Laughs]

Jim: How discreet. [Laughs] What are your plans for the future?

Paula: I'm seventy-two and I greatly envy some of my fellow seniors who are physically fit and can go out on these marches and pick coffee in Nicaragua and get thrown in jail in Livermore. [Laughs] But they are sound of wind and limb and, unfortunately, we're not.

Jim: Do you have future plans that you've thought about?

Paula: Well, we will not be moved! We're going to stay here and we're going to continue to do what we can and to encourage our friends and go door-to-door when it's indicated. . . to get people to do more and to try to promote disarmament and to elect good, unpurchasable people to go to Congress and Sacramento.

The phone just rang in the last few minutes; I belong to a telephone tree for the freeze and I will have five telephone calls to make when I finish this interview.

Jim: Perhaps you have something else to add?

Paula: Well, certainly no regrets. I think all of us--our children and Ray and I--gained in many ways from our time in the Communist Party. Intellectually, culturally . . . we met some wonderful people and we found we were able to define our own values and limits. I don't think we've been bought and I don't think we will be.

Jim: I'm sure of that. Thank you, Paula. ##

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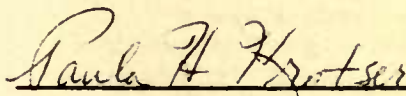
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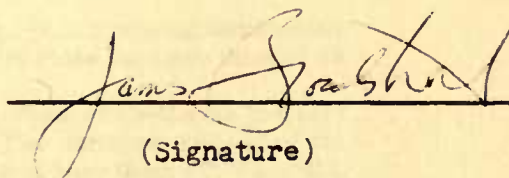
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LABOR VIOLENCE, JULY 6, 1934

San Francisco has always had a history of labor troubles, but the bloodiest conflict occurred in 1934, when a general strike started on the waterfront and paralyzed the city. The document below describes the fifty-eighth day of the strike, the day chosen to test the strikers' power to stop the flow of goods.

(Source: San Francisco Chronicle, July 6, 1934.)

BLOODY THURSDAY

July 6, 1934

Blood ran red in the streets of San Francisco yesterday.

In the darkest day this city has known since April 18, 1906, one thousand embattled police held at bay five thousand longshoremen and their sympathizers in a sweeping front from south of Market street and east of Second street.

The furies of street warfare raged for hour piled on hour.

Two were dead, one was dying, 32 others shot and more than three score sent to hospitals.

Hundreds were injured or badly gassed. Still the strikers surged up and down the sunlit streets among thousands of foolhardy spectators. Still the clouds of tear gas, the very air darkened with hurtling bricks. Still the revolver battles.

As the middle of the day wore on in indescribable turmoil the savagery of the conflict was in rising crescendo. The milling mobs fought with greater desperation, knowing the troops were coming; the police held to hard-won territory with grim resolution.

It was a Gettysburg in the miniature, with towering warehouses thrown in for good measure. It was one of those days you think of as coming to Budapest.

The purpose of it all was this: The State of California has said it would operate its waterfront railroad. The strikers had defied the State of California to do it. The police had to keep them off. They did.

Take a San Francisco map and draw a line along Second street south from Market to the bay. It passes over Rincon Hill. That is the west boundary, Market is the north of the battlefield.

Not a street in that big sector but saw its flying lead yesterday, not a street that wasn't tramped by thousands of flying feet as the tide of battle swung high and low, as police drove them back, as they drove police back in momentary victory.

And with a dumfounding nonchalance, San Franciscans, just plain citizens bent on business, in automobiles and on foot, moved to and fro in the battle area.

Don't think of this as a riot. It was a hundred riots, big and little,

first here, now there. Don't think of it as one battle, but as a dozen battles.

It started with a nice, easy swing just as great battles in war often start. The Industrial Association resumed moving goods from Pier 38 at 8 A.M. A few hundred strikers were out, but were held back at Brannan street, as they had been in Tuesday's riot, by the police.

At Bryant and Main streets were a couple of hundred strikers in an ugly mood. Police Captain Arthur de Guire decided to clear them out, and his men went at them with tear gas. The strikers ran, scrambling up Rincon Hill and hurling back rocks.

Proceed now one block away, to Harrison and Main streets. Four policemen are there, about 500 of the mob are on the hill. Those cops looked like fair game.

"Come on, boys," shouted the leaders.

They tell how the lads of the Confederacy had a war whoop that was a holy terror. These boys, a lot of them kids in their teens, came down that hill with a whoop. It sounded blood-curdling. One policeman stood behind a telephone pole to shelter him from the rocks and started firing with his revolver.

Up the hill, up Main, came de Guire's men on the run, afoot and the "mounties." A few shots started whizzing from up the hill, just a scattering few, with a high hum like a bumble bee.

Then de Guire's men, about 20 of them, unlimbered from Main and Harrison and fired at random up the hill. The down-plunging mob halted, hesitated, and started scrambling up the hill again.

Clatter, clatter, clatter come the bricks. Tinkle goes a window. This is war, boys, and this Steuart street between Howard and Mission is one of the warmest spots American industrial conflict ever saw.

The horses rear. The mounted police dodge bricks.

A police gold braid stands in the middle of the street all alone, and he blows his whistle. Up come the gas men, the shotgun men, the rifle men. The rioters don't give way.

Crack and boom! Sounds just like gas bomb, but no blue smoke this time. Back scrambles the mob and two men lie on the sidewalk. Their blood trickles in a crimson stream away from their bodies.

Over it all spreads an air of unutterable confusion. The only organization seems to lie in little squads of officers hurrying hither and yon in automobiles. Sirens keep up a continual screaming in the streets. You can hear them far away.

Now it was 2 o'clock. The street battle had gone on for half an hour. How many were shot, no one knew.

Now, it was win or die for the strikers in the next few hours. The time from 2 o'clock to 3 o'clock dragged for police, but went on the wings of the wind for the strikers. An hour's rest. They had to have that one hour.

At 3 o'clock they started again, the fighting surging once more about Steuart and Mission streets. Here was a corner the police had, and had to hold. It was the key to the waterfront, and it was in the shadow of I.L.A. headquarters.

The rocks started filling the air again. They crashed through street

cars. The cars stopped and citizens huddled inside.

Panic gripped the east end of Market street. The ferry crowds were being involved. You thought again of Budapest. The troops were coming. Soldiers. SOLDIERS IN SAN FRANCISCO! WAR IN SAN FRANCISCO!

Here the first man fell, a curious bystander. The gunfire fell away.

Up came the tear gas boys, six or eight carloads of them. They hopped out with their masks on, and the gas guns laid down a barrage on the hillside. The hillside spouted blue gas like the Valley of the Ten Thousand Smokes.

Up the hill went the moppers-up, phalanxes of policemen with drawn revolvers. The strikers backed sullenly away on Harrison street, past Fremont street. Suddenly came half a dozen carloads of men from the Bureau of Inspectors, and right behind them a truck load of shotguns and ammunition.

In double quick they cleared Rincon Hill. Ten police cars stuck their noses over the brow of the hill.

Noon came. Napoleon said an army travels on its belly. So do strikers and police, and even newspapermen.

Now it is one o'clock. Rumors of the coming of the soldiery fly across the town. The strikers are massing down at the foot of Mission and Howard streets, where a Belt Line freight train is moving through.

Police massed there, too; the tear gas squads, the rifle and shotgun men, the mounties. Not a sign of machine guns so far. But the cops have them. There's plenty of talk about the "typewriters."

There they go again into action, the gas boys! They're going up the stubby little streets from the Embarcadero to Steuart street, half blocks up Mission and Howard. Across by the Ferry Building are thousands of spectators.

Boom! go the gas guns, boom, boom, boom!

Around corners, like sheep pouring through a gate, go the rioters, but they don't go very far. They stop at some distance, say a half block away, wipe their eyes a minute, and in a moment comes a barrage of rocks.

Here's the hottest part of the battle from now on, along Steuart street from Howard to Market. No mistake about that. It centers near the I.L.A. headquarters.

See the mounties ride up toward that front of strikers. It's massed across the street, a solid front of men. Take a pair of opera glasses and look at their faces. They are challenging the oncoming mounties. The men in front are kneeling, like sprinters at the mark.

