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Zona Roberts

COUNSELOR FOR UC BERKELEY'S PHYSICALLY DISABLED STUDENTS' PROGRAM
AND THE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING, MOTHER OF ED ROBERTS

An Interview Conducted by
Susan O'Hara
in 1994-1995

Includes an Interview with
Jean Wirth

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Photo by Bill Branston.
Growing up in Oregon, Washington, and California; marriage to Verne Roberts and raising four sons; PTA work in San Mateo; polio of son Edward V. Roberts at age 15: medical care, iron lung, therapy, transition to home; Ed's continuing education: Burlingame High School, College of San Mateo; first disabled student living at Cowell Hospital, UC Berkeley; Ed's work at Center for Independent Living (CIL) and California State Department of Rehabilitation; Zona's education: College of San Mateo and UCB; work as counselor at Physically Disabled Students' Program, 1970-1979; travels in Europe; comments on independence, education, and employment for disabled persons, architectural accessibility and user-friendly equipment; reflections on John Hessler, Jean Wirth, disability community leadership; Zona's work at CIL and as family therapist. Appendend interview with JEAN WIRTH (1932-1996), Counselor at the College of San Mateo and Early Mentor of Ed Roberts.

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When I was asked to write the introduction to the Bancroft Library's oral histories on the disability rights movement in Berkeley, it reminded me of the summer of 1975, when I left New York City and headed out to Berkeley, California. For Berkeley was the place to be I told my friends, filled with hippies and free love. I would spend the summer, take courses at the university. I had been disabled just a few years and this was my first trip on my own, away from the tight circle of family and friends I had relied on in those early years.

Someone had told me that Berkeley was a center of disability activism, but I didn't tally that in my list of reasons to go there. I was a naive young woman in my twenties, and still new to disability. I 'managed' my disability by keeping its profile low, and its needs in check. I use a wheelchair, and did then, and decided I would need to call the disabled students' office at the university to get help finding an accessible apartment near the campus, but also decided this would be the only concession I would make to my disabled state. I was fine, I told myself and my family, and by that I meant I could go anywhere, I could do everything. Disability would not bog me down and it would not mark me.

While bold on the outside, I harbored the deep fear that I might fail in my ability to keep disability in its place, that it would come crashing in around me and swallow me up. I, therefore, was completely unprepared for the headlong leap I made that summer toward disability, toward the people and the territory that I had shunned. I never imagined that I would move toward disability with interest and gusto. It didn't happen all at once in that brief summer, but I call that time in Berkeley my coming out.

I had arrived in a place where disability seemed more ordinary than it was where I had come from, where accommodations were apparent, where the curbcuts on every corner made it possible for me to go to the supermarket, to the bookstore and up to campus without having to stop someone at each corner, explain to them how to tilt my wheelchair back, take it down the curb, and lift it back up on the other side. Although Berkeley may not have had significantly more disabled people than other places, it seemed to. Maybe it was because I was out on the streets more than I was in New York. I saw people acting out the daily routines of life--going to the supermarket, school or their jobs--using wheelchairs or crutches, brandishing white canes, using sign language and all of the other indicators of membership.
And life started to become easier and more flavorful, not by avoiding disability but by living with it in a different way. The lure of the other disabled people I saw was great, and I learned that it was those people, most I never got to meet, who were responsible for the curb cuts, accessible bathrooms, the independent living center where I went for help, and the disabled students office that had found an apartment for me. I had never seen any place where disabled people were in charge and it thrilled me and made me optimistic about my life in a way that no other experience could.

I learned back then that it was not some benevolent church group that carved out those curb cuts, or a member of the town council trying to get votes who mandated accessible facilities, they were due to the deliberate actions and painstaking labor of members of the disability community who fought for the changes that were made. Their work set the stage for the ongoing struggle for rights and liberties that has engaged a nation of activists. Today, while discrimination remains a constant in disabled people's lives, the right to an accessible environment, to housing, employment, and transportation is governed by laws that are increasingly exerting influence on those who discriminate. Further, the idea of integration, in education, in public accommodations and in transportation, pervades the informed discourse on disability rights and is supported, again, by legislation that mandates desegregating society.

The Bancroft Library's Regional Oral History Office project, "The Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement: The Formative Years in Berkeley, California, 1960s-1980s," exposes the brick and mortar of these victories. Present in the narratives are major players and significant events, as well as the vital auxiliary figures and contributing influences that form the connective tissue of the Berkeley portion of these movements. The histories also reveal the dilemmas and roadblocks that halted progress and interfered with the integrated and equitable society that the framers of this political agenda envisioned.

It is a critical time to look closely at the progress that has occurred, and to study the impairments and deficits that remain in our not yet fully integrated and equitable society. Researchers, activists and those who write policy need, of course, to examine the present moment, and evaluate the necessary steps to take to move forward. Yet, just as important, is an examination of what led us here. How are present problems connected to past struggles? How do ideas that we act on today, relate to those formulated in past eras?

The oral history project provides detailed answers to those research questions. The material they have assembled will be of value to researchers, artists of all kinds, activists and policy makers. This endeavor is made possible now by opportunities afforded by the present moment that were not readily available before. The early activities and ideas have had the opportunity to grow and take root. There has been
time to evaluate their impact and to see the shifts in ideas, policy, and human interactions spurred by what at first glance might seem to be a random set of activities undertaken in reaction to specific concrete problems.

In addition, there have been a number of developments over the last three decades that have created both the need and the impetus for this work. I've grouped these into four sections that outline some of the cultural, scholarly and political activity that informs this work.

The Social Construction of Disability and the Significance of Community

What I witnessed in the summer of 1975 when I came to Berkeley from New York was that disability could mean something different just by moving to a new location. I wouldn't learn the term "social construction" for another fifteen years, but I did learn through direct experience that disability is not fixed. I also learned that the disability community is a powerful and meaningful entity.

Fundamental to the Regional Oral History Office project is an understanding of the social construction of disability. The efforts begun in the sixties by the people interviewed here to reframe disability as a social designation and to conceptualize obstacles to employment, education and integrated living as a civil rights issue, rather than an individual problem of impairments and deficits, made it possible to understand disability that way. Further, an essential prerequisite for the progress of the disability rights movement was the organization of the disability community, a coalition formed by the discovery of each other and the recognition of our common social status. Although medical and educational institutions continue to categorize and divide people by impairment status, the formation and the formulation of the "disability community" has had a major impact in the social/political arena.

For all my early learning, and my ongoing study of disability, it is in reading these histories that I have begun to understand how profound and original the ideas are that drove the early activists. The voices that are heard here demonstrate the purposefulness of the activists and their comprehensive vision of an equitable society. If this research platform were to reveal nothing else, it would be invaluable as a means to contradict the stereotypes of disabled people, and of the disability rights movement as merely riding the coattails and mimicking the agendas of the civil rights and feminist movements.

Yet, not only does this collection of histories serve as an exemplar of social construction and the significance of community, it demonstrates the unique nature of the construction of disability and illustrates the struggle to define and assert rights as a minority group
in the face of powerful efforts to confine disability within the
province of medical discourse.

The Value of First-Person Narratives

A second domain that informs this project is the increased
attention to the active voice of previously marginalized peoples.
First person narratives, long discredited in academic circles, are now
accepted by a wide variety of scholars and public historians as not only
valid, but necessary research tools. ROHO's intent to bring disabled
people's perspective to the forefront is consistent with that approach,
and the nuanced and detailed data they obtained demonstrates again the
value of the methodology. Disability has traditionally been studied as
the effect of war or violence, the failures of medicine, or other
causes. In these narratives, we see that what brought disability to the
individual becomes much less important than what the presence of
disability causes to happen. Significantly, the narrators show the ways
that disability sets in motion certain social and institutional
responses. As these histories reveal, a disabled person's presence in a
school, a restaurant, a job interview, a social gathering, or other
venue often caused events to unfold in particular ways.

While scholars outside of disability studies have rarely paid
attention to disability narratives, this project provides compelling
documentation of the place of disability within the larger social arena,
and also demonstrates the ways that disability plays a role in shaping
an historic moment. I believe that the rich insights of the narrators
and their ability to reveal the complex consequences of disability
oppression will engage scholars within disability studies as well as
those outside the field. For instance, researchers might want to look
at what the histories reveal about the parallels between the place of
women in other early civil rights struggles and in the disability rights
movement. They may want to examine disabled people's perspective on
their exclusion from other social justice platforms or consider the
obstacles that the disability community itself may have erected to
coalition building with other disenfranchised groups.

Complex Representations of Disability and the Social Milieu

The oral histories provide detailed descriptions of the lives of
the narrators and others in their circles. These materials will be
useful not only to researchers and activists but to writers and artists
interested in portraying the lives of the people interviewed, or
developing fictional representations using these figures as stimuli.
For instance, writers can turn to these histories for background
information for projects that dramatize events of the sixties. The
projects might relate specifically to the events or the people described
in the oral histories, or the research might be aimed at gaining more
accurate information about secondary characters or events. A writer
might want to learn more about what the Cowell Residence really looked like, who lived there, what were the attendants like, some of whom were conscientious objectors doing alternative service during the Vietnam War, or what kinds of wheelchairs and other adaptive equipment were people using then. These histories are about disabled people and the genesis of the disability rights movement, but they are also histories of the period and will be useful in providing more accurate representations of both.

While mainstream cultural products continue to depict disabled people and disabled characters in inaccurate and narrow ways, a growing number of writers, artists, actors, and performance artists who are disabled or are insiders in the disability community are providing more realistic, interesting and complex representations of disability to a wider audience than the arts ever have before. Although the numbers are still small and the venues marginal, I expect that over the next decade, as increasing numbers of disabled people gain access to higher education and training in the arts, their ranks will grow and as they do, this material will continue to grow in value.

A Resource for Disability Studies Scholars

Finally, this project will be an invaluable resource to the growing ranks of disability studies scholars. Disability studies began to take shape as an organized area of inquiry in the early 1980s. Prior to that time, although there were isolated pockets of transformative scholarship in some liberal arts fields, the study of disability was housed almost exclusively in the specialized applied fields (rehabilitation, special education, health, et cetera). Disability studies came along and provided a place to organize and circumscribe a knowledge base that explains the social and political nature of the ascribed category, disability. The field has grown enormously, particularly since the early 1990s, as has the Society for Disability Studies, the organization that supports the work of scholars and activists interested in the development of new approaches that can be used to understand disability as a social, political and cultural phenomenon.

Certain ideas pervade disability studies. For instance, a number of authors have examined such ideas as autonomy and independence. The perspectives employed in a disability studies analysis of such phenomena afford a complex look at these hitherto rarely examined ideas. Scholars interested in the theoretical implications of these ideas will benefit from examining the ROHO histories. They will learn, as I did in a recent reading, how the early activists discovered that the surest route to gaining independence was to have access to attendant care. These young people, many just out of institutions, or living away from home for the first time in their lives, were creating a new type of community, one in which it was clearly understood that support and
services are necessary for individual autonomous functioning. They
recognized the irony that what is typically thought of as "total
dependence" was instead the ticket to the greatest freedom and autonomy
they'd ever known. Rather than wait for the nurse or orderly in their
institution to "decide" if it was time to get out of bed, have a shower,
eat dinner or watch television, with personal attendants available and
under their direction they could make these decisions on their own.
Rather than wait at home for their mother or other relative or friend to
bring them food or take them somewhere, they could lobby the university
for a lift-equipped van that would be at their disposal and provide them
with access to the kinds of leisure activities non-disabled students
take for granted. They learned by setting up their own wheelchair
repair services, and hiring qualified mechanics, they could keep their
manual chairs, and the power wheelchairs that they also had lobbied for,
in working order.

Through their lived experience they had the occasion to formulate
a new way of thinking about such accepted ideas as what constitutes
independence; what is freedom, equity, and integration; the ways that
physical dependence and psychological independence are two separate and
potentially unrelated variables. Disability studies, while dominated by
theoretical formulations, social science research methodology, and modes
of analysis employed in various areas of the humanities, will benefit
enormously from the concrete examples given here of the abstract
principles our work depends on.

The value of this project will ultimately be revealed as future
research, creative endeavors, and policy initiatives are developed that
have utilized this primary source material. Over the decades to come,
researchers in all areas of inquiry will find within these documents
numerous variables to be tested, relationships among people, events, and
trends to be examined, cultural phenomena to be studied and dramatized,
and ideas to be woven into theory or literature. The most exciting
research opportunity that this work affords is the examination of the
beliefs and behaviors of people whose demands for equity and justice
upped the ante in the fight for an inclusive society.

The Regional Oral History Office staff are to be commended for
their vision. They have brought us a vital piece of history, one that
would be lost and forgotten if it were not for them. They have captured
in these individual histories, a history. And a legacy.

Simi Linton, Ph.D., Co-Director
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New York, New York
April 1999
SERIES HISTORY--The Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement
Oral History Project, by Ann Lage and Susan O'Hara

Historical Framework

The movement by persons with disabilities for legally defined civil rights and control over their own lives took on its present framework in the 1960s and 1970s. Virtually simultaneously in several cities nationwide, small groups of people with significant disabilities joined together to change the rules of living with a disability. No longer content with limited life opportunities, nor willing to be defined solely as medical patients, they shared the willingness to challenge authority, discard received wisdom, and effect societal change that was the hallmark of the era. Not surprisingly, the disability movement paralleled other movements for equity and civil rights by and for racial minorities, women, and gay people. From our vantage at the close of the century, it is apparent that these movements, taken together, have changed the social, cultural, and legal landscape of the nation.

Berkeley, California, was one of the key cities where models for independent living were developed. A small group of young people, all wheelchair users, had one by one enrolled at the University of California in the 1960s. In an era prior to accessible dormitories or private housing, they were given living quarters in the campus's Cowell Hospital. In the midst of the campus maelstrom of free speech, civil rights, and anti-war protests, they experimented with radical changes in their daily lives, articulated a new philosophy of independence, and raised their experience to a political cause on campus and in the community.

By 1972, these students had created new institutions, run by and for people with disabilities, which soon attracted national attention. The first two of these organizations, the Physically Disabled Students' Program on the campus and the Center for Independent Living in the community, drew several hundred people with disabilities to Berkeley from across the United States. This early migration became the nucleus and the strength of the community that, for many, came to symbolize the independent living movement.

Political action kept pace with the developing awareness and institutional growth. In the early seventies, the Berkeley group successfully lobbied the city of Berkeley for curb cuts and the state legislature for attendant care funding. In 1977, scores of persons with disabilities sat in for twenty-six days at the offices of the federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in San Francisco, as part of a nationwide protest that eventually forced implementation of Section
504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, often called the Bill of Rights for Americans with Disabilities. Many participants trace their awareness of disability as a civil rights issue and their sense of membership in a disability community to the 1977 sit-in.

By the 1980s, a number of other important organizations had evolved from the Berkeley experience: the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF), the World Institute on Disability (WID), Computer Training Program (later, the Computer Technologies Program [CTP]), the Bay Area Outreach Recreation Program (BORP), and others. All of these organizations shared the original philosophy of the Berkeley movement. Their example and their leaders have had national and even international impact on the quality of life and civil rights of persons with disabilities.

Genesis of the Project

The idea for a project to document these historic events germinated for nearly fifteen years before funding was secured to make possible the current effort. In 1982, Susan O'Hara, then director of the Disabled Students' Residence Program at the University of California, Berkeley, contacted Willa Baum, director of the Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) of The Bancroft Library, suggesting that the genesis of the Berkeley movement be recorded in oral histories with participants in the campus's Cowell Hospital Residence Program. Mrs. Baum and Ms. O'Hara began planning, enlarged the project scope, gathered faculty support, and initiated the search for funding. Their efforts produced three grant applications, the final one in cooperation with Professor Raymond Lifchez of the UC College of Environmental Design, to the National Endowment for the Humanities, none successful.

ROHO then secured funding from the Prytanean Society, a Berkeley campus women's service group, to produce oral histories with Arleigh Williams and Betty Neely, both campus administrators who oversaw the establishment of the early disabled students' programs. Herb Wiseman, a former staff member of the disabled students' program, conducted these two interviews in 1984-1985. Later, the California State Archives State Government Oral History Project funded an oral history with Edward Roberts, the first student in the Cowell program and later the director of the California State Department of Rehabilitation. This initial support proved essential; all three individuals were to die before the current project was funded.

By 1995, as the historical importance of the events in Berkeley and beyond grew increasingly evident, the fragility of the historical record became ever more apparent. The archival records of key institutions that grew out of the movement and shaped nationwide events were not collected and preserved in a publicly accessible library. The
personal papers of key leaders of the movement were scattered in basements and attics. Moreover, the urgency of preserving the memories of participants through oral history interviews was underscored by the death of five pioneer disabled activists in the previous several years.

When Susan O'Hara and Mary Lou Breslin outlined the scope of the problem to The Bancroft Library, the then-curator of Bancroft Collections, Bonnie Hardwick, joined Willa Baum in support of the idea of developing a comprehensive disability collection at Bancroft. Baum, Hardwick, and Ann Lage, associate director of ROHO, worked with leaders of the disability community to design a plan for an archival collection at The Bancroft Library, to include both in-depth oral history interviews and written and photographic records of major organizations and activists. The Disabled Persons' Independence Movement collection was envisioned as "a primary historical resource of national significance, a research platform for future scholars, for persons with disabilities, and for public education." The National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research generously funded the three-year project in 1996.

Project Staff and Advisors

The collaborative nature of the project--among the disability community, academic advisors, oral historians, and archivists--has strengthened it in every respect. The advisory board included three Berkeley professors: Frederick Collignon of the Department of City and Regional Planning, who has worked on disability issues since 1970; Raymond Lifchez, Department of Architecture, who has conducted research on environmental design for independent living since 1972; and William K. Muir, Department of Political Science, who has chaired campus committees on disability issues, and is a scholar of U.S. and state government and public policy. Paul Longmore, professor of history from San Francisco State University and a specialist in disability history was crucial in defining themes and topics to explore in oral history interviews. Mary Lou Breslin, president and co-founder of the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, represented the perspective of the organizations to be documented as well as her personal experiences as an activist for disability rights.

Knowing that oral history is most often successfully carried out by persons who combine a compelling personal interest in the project with an ability to bring a historical perspective to their task, the Regional Oral History Office turned to the Bay Area disability community itself to staff the project's team of interviewers. Susan O'Hara became the historical consultant for the project and conducted a number of interviews as well as informing all of the project activities. All of the project interviewers had personal experience with disability. A majority had significant disabilities, several had participated in or
observed the historical events to be documented and knew many of the key players and organizations. Interviewers included Sharon Bonney, former director of the Disabled Students' Program at UC Berkeley and former assistant director of the World Institute on Disability; Mary Lou Breslin, who crossed over from the advisory board; Kathy Cowan, librarian for a public-interest nonprofit organization; Denise Sherer Jacobson, a writer and educator on disability issues; David Landes, a college instructor of economics and coordinator of student affairs for the Computer Technologies Program.

Joining the team to interview narrators in Washington, D.C, was Jonathan Young, a Ph.D. candidate in American history at the University of North Carolina who had conducted oral histories on the history of the Americans with Disabilities Act. When Mr. Young resigned to accept a White House appointment, Susan Brown, long familiar with disability issues and other civil rights/social movements, became the project's Washington connection. Ann Lage coordinated the interviewing team for the Regional Oral History Office, and the office's regular staff, coordinated by production manager Shannon Page, provided transcription and other clerical support.

Bancroft Library project personnel included Bonnie Hardwick, curator; Lauren Lassleben, supervising archivist; and Jane Bassett, the project archivist whose job it was to contact the disability organizations, project interviewees, and other activists and survey their records to identify historical material. Once records and personal papers were donated to the Library--more than 300 linear feet before the project's conclusion--it was Jane and her student assistant, Amber Smock, who preserved, organized, and made the papers accessible to scholars with detailed finding aids. The archival and oral history projects, though separately administered, were in close cooperation, with the interviewing team providing contacts with the disability community and leads on papers to collect and the archivists assisting interviewers in their research in the growing collection of written records.

Interviewees and Themes

An overarching question for the project was to explore and document how this social movement developed in time, place, and context: how the movement in Berkeley was built, how it became effective, how individual life experiences contributed to and were changed by the movement. Lines of inquiry included identity issues and personal life experiences; social/economic/political backgrounds of individual activists; the roles of women and minorities in the movement; development of leadership; institution building and management; development of a disability community group identity; media, mythology, public image and the political process; impact of technology; the range
of efforts to influence disability law and policy and to embed disability rights into the canon of civil rights.

Interviewees (narrators) were selected for one of several reasons: the individual was a founder or recognized leader of one of the key institutions, made a unique contribution to the movement, was a particularly keen observer and articulate reporter, or was a sustainer of the movement who provided a unique perspective. We attempted to choose narrators who had a range of disabilities and to interview nondisabled persons who contributed significantly to events or institutions.

Interviewees fell primarily into two categories: either they were involved in the residence program of Cowell Hospital on the Berkeley campus in the sixties or they participated in the building of early organizations in the 1970s.

Group One--UC Berkeley's Cowell Hospital Residence Program

A wing on the third floor of Cowell Hospital was the site of the first housing for students with significant disabilities on the Berkeley campus. This cluster became a breeding ground for the Berkeley phase of the independent living movement. About a dozen students--mostly men, mostly white, mainly in their twenties, with more and more autonomy within their grasp--spent several years in this benign but nonetheless isolated hospital residence, in the middle of a campus exploding with student protest movements. Six of these students were interviewed, including Ed Roberts, who narrated several hours of 1960s memories before he died with the oral history still in process. The former students all refer to their sense of community, intense camaraderie, the thrill of independence, an atmosphere of an-idea-a-minute, and the politics of their involvement.

Also included in this first group were certain early university and State Department of Rehabilitation officials--the hospital director, the nurse/coordinator, counselors--who might be called traditional gatekeepers but nonetheless allowed the unorthodox residence program to happen and in some cases encouraged it.

The majority of the narrators in the first group stayed involved in disability-related activities for many more years. Their recorded histories include these later activities, overlapping with the events documented in the second group of narrators.
Group Two--Builders of the Movement

The second group of interviewees are primarily founders and leaders who participated in the expansive phase which began in 1970 with the start of the Physically Disabled Students' Program (PDSP) at the university, followed by the founding of the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in 1972. These interviews reveal the grassroots politics, high energy, occasional chaos, unstinting belief in "the cause", seat-of-the-pants management, funding sources and crises, successes and failures of individuals and organizations. In the next few years a whole constellation of organizations evolved to sustain the independent living movement, including DREDF, CTP, KIDS, BORP, WID, Center for Accessible Technology (CAT), and Through the Looking Glass. This group of interviewees provide insight into the politics, leadership, and organization-building of both their own organizations and CIL.

Many key interviewees in this group are still in leadership positions and have had national and international impact on disability policy development. Also included in this second group are persons who were not in the top ranks of leadership but who were keen observers of the scene, could augment the basic history, and offer further points of view.

Oral History Process

All of the project interviewers received formal and informal training in archival oral history procedures and met monthly as a group to plan and evaluate interviews and review progress. Interviewers prepared a preliminary outline before each interview session, based on background research in relevant papers, consultation with the interviewee's colleagues, and mutual planning with the interviewee. In-depth tape-recorded interview session were from one to two hours in length; interviewees required from one to fifteen sessions to complete their oral histories, depending on the length and complexity of their involvement in the movement.

Tapes were transcribed verbatim and lightly edited for accuracy of transcription and clarity. During their review of the transcripts, interviewees were asked to clarify unclear passages and give additional information when needed. The final stage added subject headings, a table of contents, and an index. Shorter transcripts were bound with related interviews into volumes; longer transcripts constitute individual memoirs.

More than forty oral histories are included in this first phase of the Disabled Persons' Independent Movement project. Volumes can be read in the Bancroft Library and at the University of California, Los Angeles, Department of Special Collections. They are made available to
other libraries and to individuals for cost of printing and binding. Many of the oral histories are accompanied by a videotaped interview session to document visual elements of the interview and the setting in which the interviewee lives or works. Video and audiotapes are available at The Bancroft Library. If funding for a second phase of the project is secured, many of the oral history transcripts as well as a representative collection of documents and photographs will be available on the Internet as part of the Online Archive of California.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. The office is under the direction of Willa K. Baum, Division Head, and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. The catalogues of the Regional Oral History Office and many oral histories on line can be accessed at http://library.berkeley.edu/BANC/ROHO/.

Special thanks are due to donors to this effort over the years: the Prytanean Society; Raymond Lifchez and Judith Stronach; and June A. Cheit, whose generous donation in memory of her sister, Rev. Barbara Andrews, allowed the Regional Oral History Office to develop the grant project. The Bancroft Library's three-year Disabled Persons' Independence Movement Project, of which these oral histories are a part, was funded by a field-initiated research grant from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), U.S. Department of Education.

Ann Lage, Project Coordinator
Susan O'Hara, Historical Consultant

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley
September 1999
Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement Oral History Series
The Formative Years in Berkeley, California

Single-interview volumes

Mary Lou Breslin, Cofounder and Director of the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, Movement Strategist, 2000.

Joel Bryan, Founder and Director of Disabled Students' Services, UC Riverside and UC Davis, 2000.


Joan Leon, Administrator at Berkeley's Center for Independent Living and the California Department of Rehabilitation, Cofounder of the World Institute on Disability, 2000.


Zona Roberts, Counselor for UC Berkeley's Physically Disabled Students' Program and the Center for Independent Living, Mother of Ed Roberts. Appended: Jean Wirth, Counselor at the College of San Mateo and Early Mentor to Ed Roberts, 2000.

Susan Sygall, Cofounder and Director of Berkeley Outreach Recreation Program and Mobility International USA, Advocate for Women's Issues, 2000.
In Process, single-interview volumes:

Judy Heumann, Deputy director of the Center for Independent Living, cofounder of the World Institute on Disability, assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. (in process)

Arlene Mayerson, Directing attorney, Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund. (in process)

Pat Wright, Director, Governmental Affairs Office of the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, strategist for the Americans with Disabilities Act. (in process)

Multi-interview volumes:


Edward V. Roberts, The UC Berkeley Years: First Student Resident at Cowell Hospital, 1962.


Cathrine Caulfield, First Woman Student in the Cowell Program, 1968.


Peter Trier, Student at Berkeley: Transition from the Cowell Hospital Program to the Residence Halls, 1975.

Henry Bruyn, Director, Student Health Services, 1959-1972.


Gerald Belchick, Department of Rehabilitation Counselor, Liaison to the Cowell Program, 1970s.


Herbert Leibowitz, Research and Training Specialist for the Rehabilitation Services Administration, 1971-1990.

Mary Lester, Grant Writer for the Early Center for Independent Living in Berkeley, 1974-1981.

Bette McMuldren, Assistant to Judy Heumann and Grant Writer at the Center for Independent Living, 1975-1980.

Kenneth Stein, Public Information Coordinator for the Center for Independent Living and Participant/Observer of the Disability Movement.
BUILDERS AND SUSTAINERS OF THE INDEPENDENT LIVING MOVEMENT IN BERKELEY


Michael Fuss, Attendant for Cowell Residents, Assistant Director of the Physically Disabled Students' Program, 1966-1972.

Linda Perotti, An Employee Perspective on the Early Days of the Cowell Residence Program, Physically Disabled Students' Program, and the Center for Independent Living.

BUILDERS AND SUSTAINERS OF THE INDEPENDENT LIVING MOVEMENT IN BERKELEY

Eric Dibner, Advocate and Specialist in Architectural Accessibility.


BUILDERS AND SUSTAINERS OF THE INDEPENDENT LIVING MOVEMENT IN BERKELEY

Janet Brown, Student Member of the National Federation of the Blind and First Newsletter Editor for the Center for Independent Living, 1972-1976.

Phil Chavez, Peer Counselor at the Center for Independent Living, 1970s-1990s.

Frederick C. Collignon, UC Professor of City and Regional Planning: Policy Research and Funding Advocacy.

Hal Kirshbaum, Director of Peer Counseling at the Center for Independent Living.

Michael Pachovas, Berkeley Political Activist, Founder of the Disabled Prisoners' Program.

Raymond "Ray" Uzeta, Independent Living Centers in Berkeley, San Francisco, and San Diego: Perspective on Disability in Minority Communities.
BUILDERS AND SUSTAINERS OF THE INDEPENDENT LIVING MOVEMENT IN BERKELEY


Doreen Pam Steneberg, Parent Advocate for Educational Rights for Children with Disabilities.


Cynthia Jones, Mainstream Magazine Editor and Publisher.

William Stothers, Journalist and Managing Editor of Mainstream Magazine.


Arleigh Williams, Recollections of the Dean of Students.

Betty H. Neely, Recollections of the Director of Student Activities and Programs.

In Process, multi-interview volumes:

Neil Jacobson, Cofounder of the Computer Training Project and Cochair of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.

Scott Luebking, Cofounder of the Computer Training Project, Specialist in Accessible Technology. (in process)

Maureen Fitzgerald, Early Deaf Services Programs at the Center for Independent Living. (in process)

Anita Baldwin, Deputy Director of the Center for Independent Living, Early 1980s: Observations of Blind Services and Staff Strike. (in process)

Joanne Jauregui, Activist in the Deaf Community: Deaf Services at Center for Independent Living. (in process)

VIDEOTAPED INTERVIEWS:

Zona Roberts was invited to participate in the documentation project of the Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement for several reasons. As mother of movement leader Edward V. Roberts, she brings a unique perspective not only on her son's life and work but also on the development of the Berkeley segment of the disability movement. As one of the original staff members at the Physically Disabled Students' Program (PDSP) at the University of California at Berkeley (UCB) in 1970 and as a counselor at the Center for Independent Living (CIL) in the later 1970s, she provides invaluable detail on the early history of these fledgling organizations.

The ten interviews took place at both Zona's home and at the home of the interviewer, a former colleague at PDSP and longtime friend. Zona prepared for each interview by searching her own papers for details and dates; she spoke with little constraint, believing as she does, in candor and "no secrets" as a key to mental health.

Zona describes her own early life, her marriage and four sons. She tells of son Ed's childhood activities and traits, the onset of polio, his return home after a long hospitalization, and his experience at the College of San Mateo. She recounts in detail Ed's decision to attend UCB, his life at Cowell Hospital on the campus, and his work as teacher and consultant in the late sixties. Her active participation in all of these events is a common thread.

The second half of the interviews includes her move to Berkeley, life in the beloved "green house," and travels to Europe and Asia. She describes the founding of PDSP at length, its leaders and staff, activities, and her own work there. She talks about the importance of leadership by people with disabilities, the influence of other civil rights movements, and how PDSP became known and successful. She is candid in her description of conflicts within the organization and in the reasons for her resignation. The account of PDSP adds significantly to the base of available information about this new, unique, but in some ways typical "sixties" experiment destined to influence the course of a movement.

Zona speaks of her work as a family counselor at CIL and son Ed's appointment as director of the California Department of Rehabilitation. Finally, she reflects on her involvement as an integral part of Ed's life, sometimes traveling with him, speaking to audiences with him, yet striking a remarkable balance of support and respect for his autonomy.

The interviews took place over five months, from October 1994 to February 1995. Her son Ed died suddenly one month later. She spoke
eloquently at the memorial service in Harmon gymnasium on the Berkeley campus, to a crowd of 750, including 200 persons in wheelchairs. Her talk emphasized the importance of the many people who contributed to the advance of the disability movement.

The oral history was lightly edited by the interviewer and extensively by Zona. Her intention for all the interviews was to speak freely and later eliminate what seemed extraneous detail, mainly of extended family and activities unrelated to this project's purpose. She retained the full account of material directly pertaining to the disability movement.

This history also includes a forty-five minute video interview, recorded in her home, on a quiet street in Berkeley. The setting, in her dining room, is filled with an extraordinary collection of bowls, sets of dishes, and other memorabilia given to her by friends over the years. The only space left is occupied by two full-sized dollhouses which she made in her seventies. The video is available for viewing at The Bancroft Library.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. Copies of all interviews are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The office is under the direction of Willa K. Baum, Division Head, and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Susan O'Hara
Interviewer/Editor

March 2000
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name ZONA Lee Roberts

Date of birth 04/01/1920 Birthplace Portland, Oregon

Father's full name Howard E. Harney

Occupation Musician-Singer Birthplace

Mother's full name Nadia Estelle Post

Occupation Artist-Singer Birthplace State of Washington

Your spouse Verne Walter Roberts

Occupation Electrician Birthplace San Francisco, CA

Your children Edward Verne Robert Ronald Walter Roberts

Where did you grow up? Portland, San Francisco, Burlingame, CA

Present community Berkeley, CA Teaching Contacted U. Berkeley

Education P.H. Berkeley, U.C. M.A. 1974 Thesis from

T. J. Kennedy, Montana, CA. Burlingame, H.S.

Occupation(s) Mother, Foster Mother, PTA President, Contacts at UC Disabled Student Program Center for

Private Practice

Areas of expertise Counseling, disability awareness

Other interests or activities Cooking, Jewelry Making, Reading, keeping my household together with student

sisters, cigarettes, travel, grandchildren

Organizations in which you are active Sometime C.L.A. W.D.
I CHILDHOOD

[Interview 1: October 20, 1994] ##

Born April 1, 1920, Portland, Oregon

O'Hara: This is October 20, 1994, and this is tape one of Zona Roberts. Zona, do you want to start with the date of your birth and the place, and your early memories of your family and your grandparents?

Roberts: Great beginning. [laughter] It's where I began; I might as well begin the story then. Yes, I was born Zona Alene Harvey in Portland, Oregon, on April 1, 1920. The doctor who delivered me asked my mother [Nada Estelle Post] if she wanted my birth registered as March 31 rather than April 1, being the April Fool connotation even then. She said no, it was April 1, so April 1 it would be. There have been jokes through my life with an April 1 birthday.

I was born in my great-grandparents' home in Portland, Oregon. It was a home that my great-grandfather had built.

Parents

Roberts: Nada was living with my father, Howard Harvey. He had been living with his mother, Clara J. Harvey, who was ill. That family mostly died of tuberculosis. Howard was the youngest of five in his family, and his mother's favorite child. He helped support her. He was twenty, and my mother was eighteen when I was born.

1## This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.
But Nada had gone home to her mother and her grandmother, to my great-grandparents' home, to have her baby. My great-grandmother often was a midwife in the neighborhood, and helped deliver babies. Her name was Ann Elizabeth Sturm or Stern, as a maiden name, and she married John Nelson Gilbreath. John Nelson Gilbreath went by Nelson, and she went by Elizabeth. So I knew them as Grandma and Grandpa. Grandma and Grandpa were my mother's grandma and grandpa and my great-grandparents. My grandmother was Mumsie.

Nada and Howard had met through their love of music. Apparently Howard had a very good singing voice and played many instruments. His mother had been a graduate of a music conservatory and had married a blacksmith who, after five kids, deserted the family.

Clara took in washing to raise them. They were very poor. Nada had stories of living in this airtight house, where Clara was coughing out her lungs in this confined space. Nada said she would go up to her room and open the window, and chew on magnesia bars, a kind of chalklike substance, but she was determined. She said she would not get tuberculosis. She was determined not to. And she never did! [laughs]

O'Hara: This was your mother?

Roberts: That was my mother, at eighteen. Very determined lady. Nelson and Elizabeth Gilbreath had three daughters five years apart. Mumsie, who was Minnie, then Bessie. Lucy was the third of the three daughters. Nada was the first of Mumsie's two daughters. Gladys was born two years later.

But Nada was the older one and known as the talented one, while Gladys was "the beautiful one." Gladys changed her name to Glenys later--she hated the name Gladys.

But the talented one, that was a concept that Nada firmly believed in. She had talent, and she was first drawn toward art and drawing, and then singing. She said that when she was young, she was in the basement one time and started singing, and she loved the sound of her voice, and liked the feeling and the listening to the singing. Her mother, I guess, taught her piano.

Nada did some babysitting when she was sixteen, took care of kids in order to take voice lessons with one of the local teachers in Portland, Oregon. So she was quite determined.

When she met Howard, and he was--I have pictures of Howard, a tall, good-looking man, brown eyes and dark hair, kind of a
twinkle in his eye—quite the opposite of this serious, determined woman. Their marriage didn't last very long, because he was not that ambitious as far as earning a living. He was working in Portland, helping support his mother, and Nada didn't like living with his mother, and I guess his sister came in and started nursing the mother.

They moved to Carver, Oregon, just outside of Portland, where they met R. L. Peake and his wife, Eleanora. R. L. Peake owned a real estate company, and he got Howard a job in one of the mills there. They lived in a little shack. There are pictures of me as a baby in a suitcase in this kind of shack—

O'Hara: In a suitcase?

Roberts: In a suitcase, yes, a little suitcase. My mother put gauze over it and had this picture taken. It was me, this baby, in a suitcase. [laughter] And there's another story of me in my crib standing there with a big sack of flour that was down next to the crib, and apparently I'd gotten into it and had flour all over my head and face. Mother came in and started laughing at me, and I started crying, and then the tears rolled down through the flour. [laughter] That was one of the family stories.

O'Hara: Do you have a picture?

Roberts: I don't have a picture of that one, no. Only through—it's a word picture, so I do remember that. But mainly, I guess, the poverty of those times. Nada said she remembers being cold and poor and hungry. They played and sang and entertained at country dances.

Move to Great-Grandparents' House, Portland, Oregon

Roberts: But it wasn't too long before Nada was very unhappy and bored, she said, with her marriage, and wanted a divorce. So they got a divorce, which meant we moved back home, home being the great-grandparents' place in Portland. That was the family home. Quite a few people were born there, and Nelson and Elizabeth's children and grandchildren often came there. The first big family dinners I remember, Thanksgivings and Christmas and get-togethers, were there at 4319 Southeast 43rd Street, Portland, Oregon, which has since burned down.
But it was the house built by my great-grandfather, who came down from Washington to work in a Portland World's Fair that brought carpenters from all over. They had been up in Wickersham, Washington, and had homesteaded up there. My grandfather, Oliver Post, Minnie's husband, was also a carpenter. After he had met and married Minnie, they went to Portland. He found that there was a need for carpenters. So Nelson came down, too, got a job, and moved his family down and built this home that was the center of our family.

It was a place of survival. In creating this dollhouse that I've been working on now, age seventy-four, building my dollhouse, to replicate one that my great-grandfather had built for me for about my fifth Christmas. When I awakened on Christmas one morning and saw this dollhouse with the light in it, I was absolutely delighted. Lost it soon because we moved away.

After Nada and Howard separated, Nada moved back to 4319 with me. Grandma Elizabeth took care of me while Nada worked. She got herself a job at Montgomery Ward. While she was there, she met Leo, Leo Adams, who was working there. He was a single man who had a home, just on the outskirts of Portland. It was a furnished house that he owned. He started dating Nada, and then asked her to marry him.

Trouble with Mother's Second Husband

Roberts: And about that time, Elizabeth said that I was getting to be a handful. I guess I was running down the hill and wandering away, and probably going to the store to get candy, or who knows what I was doing. But it was getting a bit much for Elizabeth. So Nada said that was why she married Leo. But I found subsequently that each time she married or divorced, why, I was usually behind it somewhere or other. [laughs] According to her. So I later came to mistrust that. But as a kid, I believed it, I thought that that was why. And I think at that time, she did want her own home.

It seemed like, au contraire to her marriage to Howard, this one was built solely on stability. They both had jobs, and Leo had a home and a job and a car, and this would provide a home for Nada and for her daughter. They married, and we moved into that home.
I remember the house quite well, as being a little dark, and up a little hill. There was a woods alongside it. It was fun to go in there and look for hazelnuts and wildflowers, and on Mayday we'd get wildflowers, the kids and I would get wildflowers and put them on May baskets and hang them on doorknobs.

But inside the house, it was quite a different story. Leo was very jealous of me. They met when he lived at my great-grandmother's home for a while as a roomer. Nelson and Elizabeth often took in roomers.

But Leo was very jealous of Nada's attention to me, and I think that he thought he was getting a warm, sexy wife. That was not quite true. My mother was not a very sexy person. She may have liked to think so, but that was the history of her younger sister, who was the sexy one who had longed to be a flapper, and tried very hard with her early life to be drinking and dancing and doing the things she wanted to do. Wasn't very interested in a career or school or things, but she was sort of a comedienne, and seemingly light-hearted, where my mother was a pretty serious student, student of music and student of life.

But she was not the warm, wonderful wife that Leo thought he was getting, and didn't, I guess, come through in the way that he thought she should. So Leo started taking out on me his frustrations with his wife. I remember sitting at the table and having him reach across and pinch me as hard as he could. We were sitting at the table, and I would never wince or cry or make any sound. I wondered about that for a long time, about how that young kid could do that. But I did. Somehow, I knew it was dangerous to say anything. I remember him putting on masks and chasing me through the house.

One of the things was, I had been used to crawling in bed with my mother on mornings, like weekend mornings, when we lived at the great-grandparents' house. I did that then--I guess I could climb in bed--and she'd get up to get breakfast, and then Leo would put a pillow over my face. He did that several times and scared the bejeebers out of me. And again, I never said anything about it.

He always pretended these things were jokes. They were supposed to be funny, but there was an intent behind it that didn't escape my sensitive nature. [laughs] At that point, I knew this was not funny. I hadn't said anything about it.

The end of that marriage came when we took a trip to Idaho to visit his sister. I guess they had been having a great dispute or fight about something or other, I don't think it would
be a surprise about what it was, but we were on this bridge and he held me out over the dam down below, and threatened to drop me. That was the first that my mother knew of his dislike of me, or his taking out, really, his frustration with his marriage on me.

So many years later, I would be in a movie seeing swirling water and I'd get very dizzy, and then I remembered where that came from. That was a terrifying moment, because I knew he would have liked to have dropped me. He couldn't quite; he really wasn't a murderer, but he was enraged and he didn't know how to express it. He didn't know what to do about his frustrations. My mother would have been a difficult one to deal with.

So we did walk off the bridge, and Nada--Nada Estelle Post Adams was her name then--never asked me anything. We never talked about that again until many years later, when my kids were pretty well grown. I said something to her about it, and she looked at me just as if, how could I remember that? Did I remember that? I certainly did. She was surprised that I remembered it. It was as if it had nothing to do with me, and had to do with her, and in some ways, that was true. I was the victim in that.

But at least it got her attention.

How we got back to Oregon from there, I think we all came back together, I guess. I'm sure we did. Then they quickly split up.

Love of Music, Tension with Mother's Third Husband

Roberts: In the meantime, she'd been having me have piano lessons at a conservatory of music in Portland, where Robert L. Barron was teaching violin. He'd been a child prodigy violinist and had grown up around the Chicago area, came out here, and was teaching music. He was married and had two young daughters, but he fancied the ladies, and started making a play for Nada, who was--I think she acted as a receptionist in exchange for my piano lessons, her voice lessons. Then soon, I was, not surprisingly, started on the violin, because that's what Bob taught.

After the incident with Leo, Nada and Leo split up, and she was soon going with Bob. They got married, and that was when we came to California. So my dollhouse that had been in the house with Leo was left. Whatever happened to it, I don't know, along
with anything else. But it's funny that I am replacing that now, the memories of that.

We moved to California, where first of all, Bob taught at the College of the Pacific.

O'Hara: Do you remember when that was, when you moved to California?

Roberts: I'm not exactly sure of the year, but I think I was around eight, seven or eight, something like that. I was maybe seven. It's hard for me to remember. When my mother died, I came across some report cards and things that—I should have made notes on some of this family genealogy that's here. But I didn't.

Anyway, we first of all went to Stockton where he taught at University of Pacific, as it's now known; College of Pacific then, and so then I was sort of a faculty child. We lived in a place close to campus. Nada was quite happy. She was going on with her music and beginning language lessons and being a faculty wife, and entertaining. She loved entertaining the musicians.

But I think probably again, her marriage was not as satisfactory in the bed department as Bob would have liked, although I suspect—well, he was a child molester, as it turned out. He liked little girls, as I found out not too long later.

And I remember it was in Stockton one time that Nada had become ill. He drew a picture, sort of a picture of a naked woman, and there was something very suggestive, kind of a leering thing, the way he was showing this to me. I remember that first kind of sexual effort on his part, I guess to see how I would react to it. I think, looking back on Leo's physical abuse, and my not responding to it, the same thing happened with the growing sexual efforts on Bob's part that I didn't respond to or didn't talk about or didn't tell him no, which for a long time bothered me as I got older and wondered why I couldn't have said something about what he was doing.

But he wasn't threatening—he didn't threaten to kill me or anything. He did threaten—he said, "We don't talk about this," or something, words to that effect, that it was a secret. But my mother's secrets were, in those days—this must have been 1928—the average woman that she was associated with had not been divorced, and divorce was a big no-no, although her mother was married and divorced a few times. Not my great-grandparents, but all three of their daughters were divorced, my grandmother was three times. But for my mother, this was just not something that was to be talked about.
I remember in grammar school, that was one of my secrets. If I got to know a girlfriend, if we got to be chummy, this was one of the things I'd say: "You know, my mother's been divorced." "Oh! No!" [laughter] That sounds so strange in these days, but that was it.

From there, we went to San Mateo. Bob never stayed in one place very long. Nada seemingly didn't know why until later. We moved to San Mateo, where he had the orchestra at College of San Mateo. I liked that area. I guess I was eight, nine, around then. I liked going to school in San Mateo. We'd gone to something, a musical performance at Burlingame High School, where some of his friends were playing, and had the orchestra there. Lawrence Tibbetts' kids used to come to the house for violin lessons. Players from the San Francisco Symphony were coming in and out of the house, and it was a musical household in lots of respects, with the sound of violin lessons on Saturday mornings, and I guess Bob playing sometimes, and Nada singing.

So other than some of that--I don't remember in San Mateo any sexual things there. I do remember in Stockton, and then we moved to San Francisco from San Mateo, where he had the orchestra at Aptos Junior High School. That was where things kind of came to a head with that marriage, and with Bob in our lives. Bob had the orchestra at Aptos, and I was going to Aptos Junior High School, and playing in the orchestra there, and there was a boy in the orchestra I was beginning to like and he was beginning to like me.

This put me in a dilemma, because Bob's sexual attentions to me were not--he never raped me. He would masturbate against me, I think was the biggest thing he would do. I remember one time in The Pig and Whistle in San Francisco after a concert, he would go down next to the bathroom and he'd take me and hold me and masturbate against me. He would come into my bed sometimes in the night. Very strange things, but very secretive, and yet--again, a position almost against my mother, because this was like being a sexual partner to him, when that was my mother's place to be.

At one time, I had said something to Nada--as this was increasing and I was feeling the pressure between Bob, as my father-stepfather, and in some ways the sexual stuff from him, and then this boy in the orchestra, who was beginning to come into the practice rooms and wanting to fondle me also, of the rivalry and the intensity, and I didn't know what to do. I had said something to Nada about not liking Bob. I said, "Oh, I just hate him," or something. And she said, "Oh, what would we do without him? I'm sick, I can't earn a living. What would we
do?" I was twelve at that time, and I didn't know what to say we would do. So I didn't say any more. But that was just that increasing pressure of what the situation was.

In looking back on it, there seemed to be no place--no one to talk to, because none of my relatives were around. There weren't other teachers at school or counselors that I could talk to, because Bob was there also. My cousin had come to live with us. Shirley was her name. She was staying with us for a while. I didn't say anything to her.

The denouement of Bob Barron started in our lives, he had his music students in a recital, and I was playing a concerto. I forgot just toward the end--I would kind of go into a trance when I played, and then I suddenly kind of came to, and there I was on the stage playing, and I had forgotten where I was. So I had to go over to the piano, look at the music, and pick it up from there and finish. Which I did.

But after the concert, I was just humiliated that I had forgotten and had made a--I thought that was just a terrible thing to do. I burst into tears, and I cried and cried and cried. That was kind of like the release of all the tension that I had been going through around this growing dilemma in my life. Nada didn't know what was going on, and Bob may have, but probably he didn't know either, really. I don't think it would have occurred to him that there was tension for me.
II TEEN YEARS

Illness, a Year in the Country (Oregon)

Roberts: I took to my bed. I ran a little fever. Those were days when doctors would come to the house. The doctor came to the house and he said to my mother, "I see nothing wrong with this child. Is there any way that you could send her away? Is there anyplace she could go to be in the country for a while?" There weren't antibiotics, and in some ways when I think about it now, sometimes going away from a situation, going to the country, is a wonderful thing to do. And for me—I look back, and talk about independence, that was my beginning of independence from the family, the feeling of independence within myself. I had felt so closed in, so kind of trapped in various situations—not horrible, not—I wasn't beaten up or starved or any of those things, but it was a psychological kind of terror in some ways, a kind of unspoken horror about things that weren't to be talked about.

##

Roberts: "Send this girl away to the country." My mother remembered Eleanora Peake, who had befriended Howard and Nada when they had a young child and were living in Carver, Oregon. So Nada wrote to Eleanora and asked if I could come and live on their small farm. Eleanora responded that I could.

When I look back at why I couldn't have told Nada what was going on, and then I realized I had tried but she said, "What would we do without him?" then I thought getting sick and taking to my bed was kind of a wimpy thing to do. Why couldn't I have done something else, at age twelve and a half? I remembered then my mother's horror of tuberculosis. She always saw to it that I had tuberculin tests, which were positive for many years, and turned negative later in my life. But because that was the one thing she was fearful of, because my father eventually also died.
of tuberculosis, and his mother had died of tuberculosis, and lord knows, enough people in those days were dying of it. So it was one thing she had a great fear of, and that got her attention.

So when I started running the fever, this is one of the first indications of tubercular infection. It worked, however I did it or however it happened, it was a very effective maneuver, anyway. It worked as if it were a conscious—of course, it wasn't a conscious—. In San Mateo, I had had diphtheria and almost died of that. I had had scarlet fever in Stockton. That was kind of a mild case of scarlet fever. I was I guess about eight. But when I was about ten in San Mateo, I had diphtheria, and that was—I was very seriously ill then, I was very frightened, and was out of it for a while. I remember kind of coming to and hearing the sounds in the house. I was at home.

A friend of my mother's who was a nurse had been visiting us, and then she couldn't go back and nurse after it was diagnosed as diphtheria, because she might take it to the hospital. So she stayed and helped nurse me.

After the concert and crying and running a fever and needing to go to the country, I went up to live with Eleanora and R. L. for a year. I was there about—I'm not sure how long I was there, whether it was a week, ten days, two days, if a month, but I suddenly remember being in the living room and feeling what it was like to breathe. Something about breathing on my own, of letting the air coming in and out of my lungs, that I began to kind of expand my chest, and I think the tensions that I had been building up over the years were beginning to go away. It was a wonderful feeling.

And Eleanora was just a—I could see why Nada took to her, and why she was a friend of Nada's. She was a warm, wonderful person. She had never had any kids of her own, but R. L. had been married before and had a couple, and she took care of them, and had one of R. L. 's nieces was living at the house. Violet, the niece, was a senior in high school at that time, and I just had been in junior high.

So I stayed there for a year, and I learned some sewing, and I went to something like 4-H club, or the county—not 4-H, but it's where the farmers' wives get together, and somebody comes and they talk about canning and sewing and doing things around the house—there's a name for it. Extension programs.

At the end of that year, I was to go back to Nada and to Bob. They were still together, in San Francisco. By that time,
Bob was out of Aptos Junior High School. They had started a private music school on Washington Street in San Francisco with the Mannings, and there were vocalists and pianists and violinists--Bob was that--it was Depression times. This would have been 1933, '34, in those years. Times were pretty hard. So they were trying to get this music school off the ground.

So I went back to San Francisco, full of fear and trepidation. In the meantime, I had seen my cousin, Shirley, and told her what had happened with Bob. She told her mother. When I got back to San Francisco, Glenys wrote to Nada and said, "Maybe if you would look closely within your own household, you'd know what was the matter with your daughter."

Nada read that, and then took me in the bathroom and started questioning me about what had been going on. I told her. There was another woman in the house who was a vocal teacher and language teacher, so Nada talked to her. So that was the end of the marriage of Bob and Nada.

Following Year in Vancouver, Washington

Roberts: In the meantime, then, she sent me back up to stay with Glenys, who was married to Jack Sedgwick at that time, and with my cousin Shirl. I lived on a farm in Vancouver, Washington, for that next year, and I started high school there, and I loved it. Again, it was kind of a year of freedom for me. I played the violin in the orchestra, and I gave violin lessons and earned a little pocket money. I think I charged fifty cents for a violin lesson. [laughter] I started studying French and algebra, and I liked it very much. It was a small kind of country school, and it was great.

At one point later in the year--well, my cousin in the meantime had been wanting to run away. She and her friend By had talked about running away, and I said, "No, no, you can't run away, people get too worried about you. You can't." I think I must say that early on, I knew that my mother loved me. I knew that she was a mother who could smother, if she paid any attention. So it was kind of a combination of things, but there was kind of an abiding force. I was her child, so thereby, I had to perform. I had to have talent. I had to be special. She had a great thing about being unique and special, and this was not even talked about. This was just the way it was. She liked to be known as unusual and talented, and doing things. She had great drives in those directions.
O'Hara: You didn't have any siblings?

Roberts: None, no. She told me later that when she was with Leo, she had gotten pregnant and had an abortion, because Leo said he didn't want any kids. So I guess that was true.

But she was not a mother who could guide a growing child. There was kind of no room in her life to be supportive or interested in things that were going on at school, nor--she liked to give parties, and I always had Christmas presents and birthday parties. She could do the entertaining things. She certainly kept a nice clean house. Never taught me how to clean house. It's interesting. We had a houseboy for a while when we were in San Mateo. She didn't like to clean house very much. She didn't like cooking; she burned things a lot, but she was a good cook, and she would cook interesting kinds of dishes. She wasn't just a meat-and-potatoes person. She had formal dinners. I think every night with Bob there was a dinner in the dining room, where I would sit at the table for hours because I couldn't eat everything that Bob put on the plate for me to eat.

Well, back to the first year in the country, with Shirl and Glenys and Jack and their son Todd. Glenys said, "I think your mother's going to get married." Nada's old friend John Siefert had opened a dance studio in San Francisco. She went to see John, and asked for a job. She started teaching ballroom dancing in San Francisco. Her health improved rapidly. [laughs] I guess she was really beginning to have a pretty good time.

And she met Steve, George Stephens. I guess she said something to her sister about liking George Stephens, and thinking that it might be something serious.

In the meantime, it turned out that Bob hadn't been divorced from his wife when they got married, so the marriage had been all of those years of being not really legal. So it was easily dissolved. I, when Glenys said that Nada was going to get married, I just said, "No, that couldn't possibly be, she wouldn't do that. What, and leave--" where would that put me, with somebody that I didn't even know, with a great feeling of being adrift.

But that's indeed what happened, and there came an announcement in the mail one day of the marriage of Nada Estelle Post to George Stephens. That did it. I was--talk about feeling adrift. I was fourteen, fourteen and a half, and that my mother could go off and marry someone I didn't even know, what in the world was going to happen with me then? Because staying with
Glen and Jack was okay for the year, but it wasn't my home, and I certainly didn't know that I'd stay there forever.

**Running Away at Age Fourteen**

Roberts: But that happened, so I said to my cousin and her friend By, "Okay, let's go." So the three of us ran away.

Well, talk about independence. That was one of the best times in my life as far as independence. Even though we got a boyfriend of mine in trouble for driving us across the border between Washington--because we lived in Vancouver, Washington, which is just across the bridge from Portland, Oregon, and he drove us across the bridge below, somewhere around in Portland, and we got out and we started hitchhiking. We hitchhiked down to Salem, Oregon. We slept in a barn one night. We wound up in some kind of a rooming house in Salem where we bathed and washed our clothes, and decided that we'd better go back. I don't think we had ten dollars in our pockets.

O'Hara: And you had been gone just a few days?

Roberts: Just a few days, yes. But enough to worry people. But again, it broke--talk about family secrets. No wonder I got into doing family therapy, because I really love exposing family secrets, and the release that it brings to people. Glen, it turned out, had been having terrible abdominal pain, and I guess wasn't doing much about it. But with our running away, kind of all hell broke loose in their marriage, Jack and Glen's, and with her physical situation, so she went into the hospital and had surgery.

We came back, the three girls came back, to go home to the farm, and no one was there. Glen was in the hospital, Jack was off somewhere, and By went to her place. But in the meantime, somebody had called the police as they saw us coming in. So the police came and got us and took us, so we spent a weekend in jail in Vancouver, Washington, because there was no one really at that point to be responsible for us. Nada came up from California.

But some of the adventures of our life, of Shirl and I in getting together and talking about it later, was that weekend in jail, the various stories that happened then. Shirl had a top bunk over on the other side, and reached down to pull up a blanket one night and let out a scream, and came bounding over and jumped in with us. I had a lower bunk, and By had an upper bunk. She had reached down, and she thought the woman below her,
whom we'd heard talking to the sheriff through a doorway, or to her lawyer, something about "the murder trial will be next week" or whatever it was, so she thought this was this woman's head, and it turned out to be the fur collar of the woman's coat that she had touched. [laughter]

And one of the jailers brought in his little toy dogs to prance around for us. The preachers came on Sunday to preach to us. It was quite an experience.

But one of the things I remember vividly was our being interrogated by this sheriff, who was the bully kind, who not only treated us with disrespect but as if we didn't have any sense at all. It was one of those times in my life when my back just went up like a ramrod, and I was totally pissed at this man. He just brought out the--he was the kind of a person--I still don't like. My back can still go up when I'm around them. He was a rotten, no-good son of a gun. But it was his attitude toward us. He was so condescending.

So Nada came up and took responsibility for us. By went back to her parents, and then guess where we went? 4319 Southeast 43rd Street. Where of course my great-grandparents had died, Nelson when he was seventy-six, and Elizabeth when she was seventy-seven. My grandmother had been living in that house then, and her sister had been living downstairs, her younger sister. But that was the family home, people keep coming back to that house. There was always some member of the family living there for many years, and maybe other people, too.

Steve came up and stayed for a while. Steve was in some ways a great influence in my life. Steve was a Democrat. There hadn't been a Democrat in the family for a long time. These were Republican people who were staunch in their beliefs of independence, doing for yourself. In those days, there was no Social Security. You raised your vegetables. My great-grandparents had a cow; they got their milk from the cow. She canned, put up her vegetables and fruits. Baked bread--not all the time, because I do remember going with my great-grandfather to the store and buying bread sometimes with a stick of candy wrapped with the bread. Eating lettuce with milk and sugar on it sometimes was one of the dishes, and also lettuce with vinegar and bacon, salad sort of things. But there were always canned peaches and apricots and berries and things in the basement.

O'Hara: Home canned.

Roberts: Home canned, oh, absolutely, yes. Home canned. And there were huge berry bushes out in back. They had a little acreage
somewhere else where they raised more of their vegetables. A little later, I know, their cow wasn't there. But there were pictures of that cow when they first built that house.

So Nada and Steve then went back to California. I said I wanted to stay. Shirl and I started in high school in Portland, then. I said that I really would like--because I'd gone to so many different schools as I was growing up, and that one year being in Washington and having that wonderful academic year, it was great. Early on when I was going to school, I had skipped a couple of grades. Apparently I tested very well, but certainly not in math. I still remember being in first grade and sort of counting on my fingers, and the teacher catching me at it and making fun of me for doing that. I still count on my fingers sometimes. [laughs] That's one of my ways of adding up the numbers.

High Schools--Portland, San Francisco, Burlingame

Roberts: So in all of these adventures and being out of school with illnesses, or out of school at Eleanora's, I was usually pretty well at age grade level, or the chronological kind of--because of those early being put up in grade, skipping, as they used to call it. [tape interruption]

So I had asked if I couldn't just stay in Portland. I wanted to finish high school, at least go to one school where I could finish and stay there. Mumsie was there. Some of the good times there, when Nada and Steve had been there, Steve was full of stories about kind of radical things going on in San Francisco, and it was such a refreshing kind of conversation, conversations that we hadn't had before in our family. I liked that.

O'Hara: Politics?

Roberts: Politics, and adventures, and his kind of--he was a writer who was never terribly successful, but he was quite an independent thinker who got in some political involvement, helping to start magazines. He was kind of an idea person. He usually had sort of menial jobs, but he'd gone to Berkeley, and he had gotten involved in some radical politics, but not really--he wasn't a member of the Communist party or anything that fascinating. But he had gone to some meetings.
In fact, years later, after I was married, the FBI came to the house one day because Steve had refused to be drafted. He did not believe in war, and he was a student of philosophy in some Eastern religions. But they came inquiring about him. But he would not go to war. He wouldn't carry a gun and kill anyone. He said he just couldn't do that.

So I started at high school, one of the teachers needed somebody to live in and work in her house. This teacher wanted somebody. I went to live in that big, dark house in Portland. It was awful! Here I was, I didn't know how to do housework. I had done some on the farm, and I had done some with Eleanora, but never really been kind of responsible for doing it all. I could work under direction. But she sort of expected, if I applied for the job, that I knew how to run her washing machine and do her washing, go to school, and keep the whole house clean. This huge, dark house, and she had a kind of a weird sister, Pansy, who played the harp. It was a very strange house, very gloomy. [laughter] Extremely oppressive.

Nada came over to say goodbye to me, because she was going to California, and I burst into tears. I thought I just couldn't stand living in that house. I don't know why I couldn't have stayed with Mumsie, but somehow that wasn't working. I don't know if Mumsie went someplace else or not. But Nada then said that she thought that I could come to San Francisco, and that Steve's mother and father, who had an apartment on Post Street in San Francisco, and that there was a little room that used to be Steve's, and that she would talk to them.

So that's what happened. I came down then and lived with Louise and Clarence Stephens for a little while, and went to Galileo High School briefly. But I kind of remembered Burlingame from those early years in San Mateo and Burlingame, and I liked the area, and I thought I'd be happier there than I was in San Francisco. So I went to the counselor there and found a job with a family in Burlingame, and started going to Burlingame High School. I was in my sophomore year when I went to Burlingame and went to Burlingame High School.

There were a few of us who were working girls going to school, as it still was Depression times. I would be in classes with girls who had their own cars and were talking about the parties and their dresses and things. I had a pretty good wardrobe; Nada would sew me things sometimes. I got room and board and ten dollars a month, so I could buy some clothes, too. And then Mumsie would knit a sweater or send me something. I always seemed to have plenty of things to wear.
But I enjoyed being at Burlingame High School. I was in the orchestra. Mr. Elmer Young, who had the orchestra there, remembered Bob Barron, and remembered me as a kid. So there was a little bit of a connection there. I enjoyed the classes, and I enjoyed the students. I kept that job for a little while, and then I had another job for a little while.

Then I worked for the Goldblatts. Will Goldblatt had a shoe store in San Mateo, and he and his wife and their one son lived in San Mateo. So I then lived in San Mateo and commuted, I think by streetcar, to get back to high school in Burlingame. But I did stay at Burlingame High School until I graduated.

**Marriage to Verne Roberts, 1938, and Birth of First Son, Edward Verne, 1939**

Roberts: So that was kind of the early life up until I went to Burlingame High School, and through that. Where I met Verne when I was in my senior year, and got pregnant, and we got married. So I told Ed he graduated from Burlingame High School twice. [laughs] He was very tiny the first time, luckily.

I did see about having an abortion. People knew abortionists in San Francisco, and I went and visited one, and went into this room where they locked the door. This man put his hands on me, and my—when I talk about the determination of my mother, I think I have some of the same. My determination was absolutely total. There was no way that this man was going to put his hands on me, and whatever it was, it was mine, and that was it. How we would cope with it, I didn't know.

Verne was with me, sitting out in the waiting room, as it was a locked-door situation. I really cried very seldom in my life, but this was the second time that I did. I just burst into tears and I sobbed and sobbed and sobbed and sobbed, kind of like after the violin concert. Because it seemed like, what was I going to do now that I was pregnant?

It was a very strange feeling. I had no brothers or sisters. I had done some child care and some babysitting, but not much, and I certainly had not been around babies.

O'Hara: Right after high school?
Roberts: I think where I left off was something about Ed's birth.

Verne and I decided to get married, which we did in Fresno, by Judge Cletty on the Fourth of July. My grandfather, Oliver Post, had built a resort up at Shaver Lake for a man. He built this resort with cabins and a restaurant. It burned down, and he stayed on I think without any wages and helped rebuild it after the fire. He wanted his daughter Nada to go up, and so after I graduated, Nada and I went up to stay in one of those cabins. Verne and Steve came up on the Fourth of July when Verne and I got married.

Then we left there and came back up to Burlingame. I met his parents shortly after that, and we found a little apartment that was part of a house. It was a cute little place. And getting to know Verne's family was interesting. His mother was a very maternal person who had raised her brothers and sisters, because her mother had been ill most of her life. There were five kids in the family, and she was the second one, but the first girl. She spent most of her life nurturing her family.

Then after she was married and had two, she raised her brothers and sisters. She'd always wanted to go to college. I think she would have been a great teacher. She took care of her family and raised her kids, took in Hazel, who was a cousin, whose father had died in the flu epidemic, and besides Maydelle, her oldest daughter, and then Verne, her son.

Verne and Hazel were about the same age, so they as cousins used to romp around Third Street getting into trouble, because Grandfather Schibi, who was Catherine Roberts' father, had a tire shop on Third Street in San Francisco. Hazel and Verne would throw tacks down on the Third Street, trying to get the tires to blow out, so their grandfather would have more business. That was the story they told. Whether it was true or not, I don't know. But they would get into mischief sometimes, and it may have been true. But they also could think of things to talk about. [laughs] Talk about going along in some kind of a push cart that Verne made, and they'd go around and pick up orange peels out of the gutter and apparently eat them.

But the neighborhood on Latona Street, that was just a block above Third Street, the neighborhood was full of different nationalities.

His grandfather and grandmother lived next door, so it was quite a family enclave.
She, Catherine Roberts, was an excellent cook and always had the soup pot going. None of the vitamins and minerals were thrown out. Her father, Laurence Schibi, was from Alsace-Lorraine, and very frugal. She was a frugal good cook. They raised herbs, and vegetables, and always had either rabbits or squabs as part of their food.

She was very helpful. We got along quite well. She was an excellent seamstress, too, and would sew clothes. She had been blinded in one eye when she was about twelve, had fallen down stairs, or been pushed by one of her brothers. Nobody was sure. But she hit the back of her head, and it blinded her in one eye. She was an excellent, excellent seamstress, and often supplied money to the family by sewing clothes for money, and making clothes for her kids, too. Maydelle, her daughter, danced on the stage in San Francisco in the early days when they had stage shows between the movies. She would sew costumes for her. She enjoyed that very much. I think she got a very big thrill of seeing Maydelle on the stage in these—and looking pretty and doing things that she had never been able to do. There was something nice about that.
III RAISING THE FAMILY

First House, in Burlingame

Roberts: But after Verne and I lived in this little apartment for a while, then Verne's folks put up the money for us to buy a house on Oak Grove in Burlingame. It was $2,500. The house is still there; I passed it yesterday. It was a small house, almost just like four rooms. Living room--it had a kind of a front porch that we--an enclosed glass porch, where we extended the living room out to those glass windows, made that all one large room, and then divided like the dining room end of it to make a bedroom for us a little bit later. There was a large kitchen and a wash porch, and one bedroom, and a nice yard with an apricot tree.

But it was right across from Burlingame High School football field, which plays an important role in our lives.

We moved into that house, and had little furniture, little money. His father had worked for the Southern Pacific railroad for many years as a machinist, and Verne started working. He was on the extra board, so he would get called sometimes to go to work, and sometimes he wouldn't. But when we were in the little apartment and when we first moved into that house, this was in 1938, he got lots of odd jobs he could do. He could pour concrete, and he could build things, and there were lots of hands-on type labor things that Verne was very good at doing. We were just doing beautifully for a while. It was still of course the Depression, in 1938.

All of a sudden, no more jobs were coming in. He applied at a furniture company, and he applied at various places, delivering furniture, driving and things. We applied for relief. That was one of the low spots in both our lives, because that was just against any of our families' beliefs. They just had never done anything like that. We had to. We had had thirty-five cents to our name, and Verne had taken twenty-five cents of that, bought
some bait, and gone fishing down in the bay, where he could walk from our place down to the bay. But he didn't catch anything.

We had a can of sardines in the cupboard, and I made some kind of creamed sardine dish that was awful for dinner. We ate it, but it was not very tasty. [laughs] Shortly thereafter, after applying for relief, or as it would be called now welfare, the social worker came to the house one morning. At about seven-thirty in the morning. There was a knock on the door, and we both jumped out of bed thinking, Oh, my goodness, here we're lying in bed and the woman has come from welfare!

Well, au contraire. It was a man who was working for Penn Furniture Company, where Verne had applied for a job, coming to say that if Verne wanted to work on a truck with him, he had a job. So I threw the coffee pot on the stove, and I burned it. We were very excited. He went off to work for Penn Furniture, delivering furniture.

The woman came to the door around nine or--I have no idea what time, it was some time this morning--and I stood at the stairs and I said, "Thank you very much; we don't need your help. We have a job." It was one of the moments I shall always remember. It was just great.

O'Hara: What year was this?

Roberts: This was 1938, because this was in--we got married in July, so this was still before Ed was born. He was born January 23, 1939.

But off he went to work. That was great. Verne did that until he got called back to the railroad. He worked at Penn Furniture for maybe eight months or so after Ed was born. He liked being an electrician. He started as an apprentice and then learned to be an electrician. Later he learned diesel electricity as the engines turned to diesel.

He enjoyed his work. He liked working for the railroad. Conditions were better than when his father used to have to work seven days a week, and very long hours. Before union, it was very hard work and not much time for the family. So when Verne started working, there were days off, and there were union rules, and wages were pretty well set. We felt lucky that he had gotten that job, and that he liked it.

He would have opportunities for promotion, to be a foreman, but he always turned those down. He couldn't stand being above the men somehow. To be a foreman for the Southern Pacific was a very tough place to be. As I watched men who would do that,
being between the men and the company was hard. It took a certain type of person to do that, one who could be tough. That position put one more on the company's side than the men's side. Verne couldn't do that. He was on the side of the men, and that was just it.

Sometimes I thought that was too bad, because it was more money, it was more chance to experience things, but not for his temperament. It wouldn't do.

Ed was born in January. I had friends, of course, from high school. Some of the gals I graduated from school [with] were still around. It seemed like always in my life, I've had close women friends. I was thinking of this the other day, of how rich my life has been with women, and how many wonderful women I've known, and what kind of role models, and how much I've gotten from strength and understanding and sharing, and I don't know what the world would be without women friends. Just wonderful, wonderful kind of pay-off in my life, of help. Good qualities of women friends.

Our doctor was a good old country doctor who had come from Utah and practiced in San Mateo. He was fifty dollars for the whole—as they would say, "confinement" and delivery and aftercare. Many of the doctors then were costing $125, but we were lucky to find this man at fifty dollars. It meant a ten-day stay in the hospital instead of two-weeks' stay in the hospital. Most of my friends who were having babies were in two weeks, so that was the average time of "confinement," as they would say. But we couldn't afford that. I do somewhere among my souvenirs have the bill from the hospital at that time, of how much it was for those ten days.

But I remember the long delivery. My friend, Helene Davidson, was my close friend at high school, and she was around. She would come and visit and stay with us once in a while. She was going with Ken [Ken Lineaweaver]. They later got married and had two girls. We've been in touch through our lives, not close any more, but we still do correspond. She was around when I was expecting Ed and then shortly thereafter, too.

It was a long delivery time. I went to the hospital too early, as I realized later, but it felt like it was close to—-I was having good contractions. We didn't have a telephone. I think we had gone next door and called. Went to the hospital, and I was there all night. Helene was there, and Verne was there.
Ed was born early in the morning. He was a wizened-looking little red thing that had to work his way through the birth canal and push his way through, [laughs] making it a little easier for his brothers. But neither of us cared about that at that time. He had dark hair on his back, and hair on his face. He was a red-faced kind of wizened--I said, "Ooh, he looks like a little monkey," and one of the nurses said, "Oh, he's beautiful!" [laughs] He didn't look beautiful to me.

O'Hara: How much did he weigh?

Roberts: He was about six pounds. So he was a pretty good-sized kid. All his parts were there.

But it was a boy, and that was startling to me. Verne had written in steam on the windows, "Edward--" did he write Edward Verne? Anyway, he wrote the name Edward. He had had a very close friend, Ed, that he liked very much, so he liked that name.

Well, I knew it was going to be a girl. My mother was one of two sisters, my grandmother was one of three sisters, my great-grandmother, I don't know what her family, whether she had brothers and sisters or not. But to have a boy was quite an unusual experience. Not having had brothers or sisters, that was kind of unusual. But I knew Verne was pleased, so that was fine. Besides, there he was.

But it was such a change from the family, so there was a lot of to-do about that, of being a boy after all these kind of generations of girls.

Learning to Be a Mother: Ed's Childhood

Roberts: After ten days I came home with this little--he was not so red by the time he was--[laughs] He was mellowing out a bit. I do remember one of my--I think the doctor, being this old country doctor, at one point, I had asked him about nursing, whether I should nurse or not. He just looked at me and pointed to my breasts, and he said, "What do you think those things are for?" I said, "Oh." That was that. But some of my friends were talking about nursing, and I think some of my mother's generation, a little beyond that, the big thrust was to bottle feeding so you could measure out how much the baby had, that whole scientific generation was coming into being, with the weights and measurements. You knew how much the baby was getting.
I was nursing Ed. He would cry and cry and cry and cry. At that time, we were supposed to let the baby cry. It would just tear me apart, and I would think, Well, I have to let him cry. What did I know about birth and babies, and raising babies? So I let him cry sometimes.

Well, it turned out that my milk wasn't very good, and he wasn't really getting enough nourishment. At some point he got a bottle, and things began to improve from there on. But Ed to this day cannot stand to hear a baby cry. It just really shatters him, and I kind of know why. I can't stand it either. I had three more boys, and none of them went through that. Poor Ed did. It's like lots of things I had to learn. We still talk about learning together even now when he's fifty-five and I'm seventy-four.

But he was a healthy kid, and soon got to be a very attractive kid with dark hair and dark eyes, and looked very much as I did as a baby. He looked very much like my father, too, who had dark hair and dark eyes, and quite a handsome man. And Verne's father, who was very Welsh looking with this kind of crooked nose and red face, but his dark eyes and sly sense of humor. So Ed's resemblance was much more toward how I looked when I was a baby, and toward my father.

He was very active. He walked early, and he talked very early. He talked--I think he was eight or nine months old. I've got a baby book, I think it was eight months old when he said, "Kitty cat." The cat walked through the room. He was sitting up in his high chair and he got so excited, and he said, "Kitty cat." It was kind of startling. I didn't know if I'd really heard it, but he kept on, so I realized I had heard it.

When he walked, he would run. He just hardly walked anywhere. He ran, and he'd fall and put his upper teeth through the skin below his lower lip.

He was into everything. He had a little puppy, a present from friends, Jean and Ed Wilkes. Ed Wilkes and Verne played softball. We went to softball games together before Ed Roberts was born. We played cards together, also. One of the first dinner parties I gave before Ed was born, Jean and Ed were our guests. I sent Verne to get a chicken, and he did. I roasted it but it turned out to be a chicken that you had to boil for a long time to get it tender. [laughter] But the chicken was done, and I served it, and you couldn't cut it with a hatchet.

I had learned to cook, having worked, as we would say now, as an au pair. I had done quite a bit of cooking. I didn't do shopping and meal planning. I enjoyed making chocolate cakes and
cookies and Jello salads. Verne would often go up to his folks' house to read the funnies, so he said, shortly after we were married. He wanted to read the paper. I realized later that he wanted to go up and have something good to eat. His mother cooked these wonderful soups, stews, and spaghetti sauces with lots of seasonings. I didn't grow up with lots of seasonings. I hardly used salt and pepper. He needed to have some good, solid food. He would go home to read the funnies, but he'd also have some homemade ravioli or some good soup while he was there.

My cooking improved little by little, because I did enjoy it. It was fun, and I enjoyed entertaining.

So those were kind of companionable days. The Wilkes gave Ed a little puppy as one of his first presents. We gave him a bear in a box.

Ed loved the box. We opened the box and took the bear out, and he looked at it, and he climbed in the box and played all day in the box, and he loved it. One day, after I cleaned the house, Ed and the dog had a tug of war, and the contents of the bear were all over the room that I had just vacuumed. [laughter] So there was more work to be done.

We had to parent and to nurture. My mother didn't have a talent for nurturing. I was an extension of her, as Ed was an extension of me. I remember one time feeding Ed an egg at lunchtime, and he wouldn't eat it, and I slapped him. I was so shocked, and I heard my voice come out of my mouth, and it was my mother's voice that came out, in that same tone. I was just--well, I never slapped him again on the face like that. I'm sure I slapped his butt, but I never slapped his face. Just because he wouldn't eat an egg. When I think about it now, it was so cruel, and it was so unnecessary, but I was so frustrated. Somehow, if he didn't eat that egg, I was a bad mother. If I couldn't get the food into him, then somehow it was a reflection upon my mothering.

Well, what I was doing was a reflection upon my mothering, but thank God, I could see that and feel that and know that that was not the way to do it. So I did have a lot to learn from Ed, with Ed, and on Ed. He seemed to have survived that, and kept getting into more things to do.

He and the little boys next door, the Kleinerts lived next door, a German family. Ed grew up with Walter and Kenneth Kleinert. They were around the same age. They spoke German. Ed learned a lot of German as he was growing up. Alice and Adolph Kleinert were friends of ours, and we would visit back and forth.
Alice and I would talk about recipes and kids, and Adolph and Verne would build things together. Adolph was a carpenter. He had a big house that he put a second story on, and then he built a garage with an apartment above.

But we did a lot of things together, sometimes meals, sometimes parties. And Alice and I talking about kids and the kids playing together.

**Birth of Second Son, Ronald, 1942**

Roberts: Before Ed was two, I got pregnant again. Ed was two years when Ron was born April 2, 1942. The war had been declared in December, December 7, 1941. Ed was born in '39. I didn't go to the hospital until I was in third stage labor. I walked with a friend of mine all afternoon and part of the evening. Verne's mother took Ed while I went into the hospital. Ron was born within about an hour of my being at the hospital. They weren't going to take us in, the hospital was full. I was looking around in the hall to see where there was a good place to lie down and give birth. [laughs] I was not going anywhere else.

They took me in and within, oh, an hour or two, Ron was born. He was a pink and gold baby. Where Ed was red and black, Ron was pink and gold. He was absolutely gorgeous. He was about seven and a half pounds, just a beautiful baby. When he was about three days old, Verne came to visit and we walked down to look in through the window at the nursery. They were holding up babies for parents to see. They held up Ron, and everybody just went, "Ah!" He looked just like a Gerber baby, like the picture babies. I wasn't quite used to that, but here was this gorgeous little kid, and he was mine. That was nice. I liked that.

We came home from the hospital. Verne went to get Ed and bring him back. Ed walked into the room. He had a new teddy bear, and he kind of walked around. He looked at me, and I guess he looked at the baby, and he kind of walked away. I thought--I kind of felt like I had lost him. It was like there was some connection between the two of us that was broken there, and of course, in some ways it was. He'd been with Grandma and Grandpa for a while, and his great-grandfather.

There was not any early friction between them. There certainly was later, but not early on. And Ron's growing up was relatively uneventful. He was as placid as Ed had been active. Ed, I'd have to look for him sometimes and practically tie him
down to get him to go to sleep, to stop being active. Ron was missing one time when he was about around a year old. He didn't walk until he was about thirteen months old, he didn't talk until he was older. He was just--I thought, My God, is this kid retarded or something? No, he wasn't. He was just slower and taking his own time. Of course, he didn't have to, because here was Ed running around bringing him things, like an Easter egg hunt. Ed would go find the baskets and bring them back to Ron, and tell him things, and do things with him. He was taken care of that way.

But Ron was missing one time when he had been up walking around and doing things. I looked all over for him, and I was just getting panicked when I happened to go in the bedroom, and there he was in his crib sound asleep.

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O'Hara: You were talking about the difference between Ed and Ron.

Roberts: Ed was active with the kids in putting together games, doing things, and Ron followed the older boys around, which led to his getting hit by a car one time when the kids went across the street to the football field. There was a huge football field across the street where the kids could go and play their own games with no parent supervision there. They would play their baseball and football games and later learned about going under the stands and collecting things after the games, finding money and bottles, and things they could turn in for money. It was a way of supplementing their allowances.

Ron one time had a cold. I had called him back to blow his nose, because I had had a cold too, and I was still in my robe. He ran out to join the kids who had started across the street, and he ran in front of a car and got hit by a car. I had that car take us to the hospital. Ron had a head injury and was in x-ray when he went into shock. That was pretty scary.

But he came out of it in a few hours. He was in the hospital a few days and came home, and he was okay. It was a very scary time. When he came home, he was a very subdued kid. He looked around as if he were in a different place. I think it had an effect on all of us. It was very frightening. That was one of the first things that happened to the kids. It wasn't the last, but it was one of the first that happened.

Verne loved to go fishing and would often go. He and his father would go fishing. They enjoyed that thoroughly. We went on a little vacation one time, and my mother and Steve came and
My mother stayed at the house when I went to the hospital to have Ron. I remember her saying to me, she had always wanted to have a son, and she had a pet name for me. She would call me Jerome sometimes. When she was pregnant with me, she liked the names April and Zona. Zona was the name of the minister's wife, the minister who performed the ceremony that married my mother and father. It was another of my mother's appeal for differences. She thought if it were a son, because the last name was Harvey, that it would be Harlan, Harlan Harvey.

She really took to Ed and had a feeling of wanting to possess him. Steve didn't like kids much, so there was no danger that she was going to take him home or anything, and I think because he looked a lot like my father. I think that had a lot to do with it. But she did tell me as I went to the hospital to have Ron that she would take care of Ed, but if anything happened to me, she would raise Ed. I thought to myself, nothing was going to happen to me. [laughs] Forget that one! This was my kid, and I was coming back to raise it. She wasn't going to do that. I do remember that. That was almost as powerful a thing as having that abortionist's hand on me. That was a very powerful force to move forward.
As Ed and Ron grew up and started in school, we took in David. A fellow that Verne worked with, his daughter had had a kid, and she was working and she needed a place for David to be. David stayed with us for a while. Early on, I started taking care of other people's kids, and having them at the house. Verne was working, and he wanted me to be home, and not go out to work.

Parent Teacher Association Work

Roberts: I started doing some PTA work after the kids were in school. First I had them each in nursery school for one or two days a week. We walked there--I didn't drive then. I had been involved in drama at Burlingame High School in the drama club, Mummer's club, and taking drama and glee club and orchestra. I liked biology very much. French I had enjoyed in that year in the Union High School outside of Vancouver, but continuing with French with Miss Orosco at Burlingame High School was difficult, because I was behind at that point. It was a struggle, but I did finish my requirement in French.

She's still alive and lives in a retirement home in Burlingame, and she turned out to be Ed's at-home teacher after he had polio. She came and was his Spanish teacher, because she had a French-Spanish background. We've been in touch with her for a long time in our lives.

Getting involved in PTA work started with a Founder's Day presentation and getting involved in putting on this little play. Then of course, that led to being at meetings, and being into the school. Ed's first year, he was quite young when he first went into kindergarten and first grade. He was four something when he went in. That first year, he had about four different teachers due to the war. Verne was a block warden during the war, and we'd have blackouts, and he would have to go out and walk around and see that all of the lights were out, and that nobody's lights shone through the blackout. That was after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in '41.

So being involved in the schools. Ed was not a very good student. He much preferred doing things rather than sitting there and trying to learn these letters and numbers and colors. He found that, I think, a little distasteful. But the kids were there. He learned to read in the fifth grade when he had a wonderful teacher, Mrs. Smith, who just somehow got to him in some way that really encouraged him to put the old brain power to work in figuring out what those letters and numbers were all
about. The teacher in the fourth grade, I remember her saying to me one time, "I have never seen such a kid on the playground for getting the kids together, and for playing the games. But you bring him into the classroom, and it's like he goes away." He just was not interested in being inside.

O'Hara: He literally didn't read until he was in the fifth grade?

Roberts: Literally did not read, much, until he was in the fifth grade. I think he could recognize letters and words, but he had no fluency in reading. It just didn't seem to come together. But somehow, Mrs. Smith knew how to do that. She was a wonderful teacher. Whereas Ron, who was--and I thought Ed was so bright, and then in the meantime, I was kind of getting some of the feedback that he was not a very good student, and I had a lot of trouble with that, because he could figure out all kinds of things, but being in a classroom wasn't one of them.

And Ron, who was much older, having been born in April, and then I think he was at least five or so before he started school, and he learned to read in kindergarten. He went to afternoon kindergarten, because he was in the older group. So he was reading in kindergarten. He was a very good student, and enjoyed school, followed Ed and his friends around in the after school sports. He had some friends of his own, but not very many. Because the activities were with Ed and his friends.

He risked his neck. They'd come back and they'd tell me stories about what Ron had done. They'd play hide-and-go-seek at night over there, and climb up in the trees, and Ron would climb higher and farther than the kids to hide out. One time he fell, and he hit his shoulder, just broke the bone just below his shoulder. It was a terrible break in falling out of the tree. Playing football, he would really risk his neck in diving through the line. He attracted a lot of attention that way. They let him play.

But that break was another trip to the hospital with Ron, and getting his arm repaired. I was cutting Ron's sleeve off, and Verne was yelling at him, "Didn't I tell you not to climb the tree?" And I was trying to shut Verne up and get this sleeve off to see what it looked like. Adolph Kleinert from next door was doing the same thing, yelling at Ron about something, and I wanted them both to just go away. They were not helpful. Their concern just took a different form. I didn't like that way of handling the emergency. We got him to the hospital, where he had surgery. His arm healed beautifully.
College of San Mateo

Roberts: The school years, after they both got in school, I was wanting very much to think about a career for myself. Some of my teachers at high school had been kind of long-faced in hearing I was getting married. I don't think I told them that I was pregnant, but that I was going to get married. They really wanted me to go on to college. I was good in English class, and writing. I had Miss Harvey for English. She was very good, and I was good at creative writing. She wanted me to certainly go on to College of San Mateo and do something. Some of them knew I did housework and lived in people's homes. I don't know if all of them knew it or not.

But I was feeling that I wanted to further my education. I had certainly wanted to go to school. I started taking some courses at College of San Mateo. I went down and took the testing. I started a business course, shorthand, typing, and business arithmetic. Business arithmetic I really needed, and I had a very good teacher, Bernie Gjerdrum. He and his sister had lived across the street from me when I was a kid and living in San Mateo, and Theresa and I had been best friends. Bernie was teaching math, makeup math kind of.

He said we were all there because we had not been taught math in a way that allowed us learn. He helped us try to figure out what our problems were. He would have us add numbers together, and I found that my biggest conflict came if I would see eight and five. I couldn't seem to get eight and five together without counting it out on my fingers or doing something else, eight and five. So I spent a long time just learning eight and five, five and eight, just saying it over and over and over to myself, and getting that to stick in my head. The same way I had had to do with times tables, just saying them over and over. I just couldn't seem to get them to stick.

But once I got some of those combinations down, now I find it much easier to do. But Bernie presented it in a way that I could accept that. I thought, Well, I guess I wasn't so stupid after all. That it was something I could learn. I think it was that making it handle-able that was good.

O'Hara: That was a course you took after the boys were in school?

Roberts: Right. So I took business arithmetic, shorthand, and typing. Typing, I was so bad at typing. I don't know what there was about my typing, but it was very difficult for me to do. Shorthand was fun and I enjoyed it. Marge Katen was a friend of
mine, and her cousin Ellen was living with her. Ellen was an excellent stenographer, and she would help me with my shorthand homework. We had a good time.

And I had taken some ceramics courses, and I had taken some other courses at the college that were fun kind of things to do. But Verne really did not like my getting involved and doing homework and going to college. He found this very threatening. He had dropped out of high school in his senior year because his father was in the hospital, and there was no income. In those days, if you were in the hospital, that was it. You didn't earn a living, you didn't get paid, at the railroad. I think he had a stroke, or an injury. Verne's mother had taken in some sewing, and Maydelle, Verne's sister, was in her last year at Berkeley, and was working on her teaching credential. In those years, I think in four years you could do your B.A. and the teaching credential at the same time.

Verne got a job at the sugar mill, at Spreckels Sugar, where his uncle was an electrician and helped get him on. He dropped out of his senior year of high school, because he did not like school. It was not fun for him to sit in school either. He didn't really enjoy that. Very mechanically minded. He got a job at the sugar mill in San Francisco. His mother did not like him dropping out of school.

But he brought in enough money to support the family, and Maydelle could stay in school. The family was very grateful for that. When Ron went to Berkeley years later, Maydelle, who had two sons at Berkeley at the same time I did, helped Ron, gave him fifty dollars a month, as kind of a payback for what Verne had done for her when she was going to school. It was a very touching--Maydelle has been a great source of support for me in many ways, she and her husband Jim. I've been so pleased to have known her and to--she's a very generous, gracious kind of person who was always the same. You can count on Maydelle to be there, to be giving and understanding and--she's kind of a paragon of the virtues that I like. Very nice, very dependable in some nice way. Very human.

Verne was having trouble with my doing homework and taking classes, and being in college somehow was a great threat for him. There was a nine-year period between Ron's birth and Mark's birth. I had had a miscarriage at four months that was traumatic. I was having appendicitis every once in a while. At this time, my appendix and my miscarriage were playing off on each other. I was toxic for a while, and we didn't know if I'd have a ruptured appendix or a miscarriage or what was going to
happen. I had a high fever, and it was a time I really thought I might die.

I was in bed, waiting to see what would happen, when the miscarriage began. I had this high fever and was hallucinating a bit. Verne had called the doctor, and they called an ambulance. Verne and the dog were pacing back and forth in the living room, and I could hear them. Then the ambulance came. This was still wartime. The ambulance driver and his assistant, the man who was helping him, was a wartime recruit who had not seen a miscarriage or anything, so he had a little trouble with it. I was kind of in the ambulance trying to cheer him up a little bit on the way to the hospital. He looked so pale. I said, "Have you ever seen anything like that before?" and he hadn't. Saw this little fetus that was delivered, a little four-month fetus. It was, I guess, not much to see, but it was more than he wanted to see.

But I had a high fever, and got to the hospital. We started penicillin, and that was the first time I had ever had penicillin. It was a new drug on the market, but Mills Hospital, their doctor had access to that. It was a complete miscarriage and there was no need for any further surgery. Then the penicillin did that.

I had to wait a few months, not very long, I think until my next period, and then scheduled the appendectomy very soon, because that was going to keep happening until I had that appendix out. So that happened a few months later, and that was very good to have that over with, because that was not fun to have it flare up every once in a while.

So I dropped the college plans. We did some painting and some redoing to the house. Verne and Ed and Ron put a new roof on the house. They did it themselves. Those two boys were helping their dad up there. I'm not sure that Verne had ever done a roofing job ever before in his life. Adolph Kleinert helped. He knew how to do things like that. So Verne figured it out, and they put a new roof on. It was great.

But Verne loved to tear down walls and to get things started, but he wasn't so good at putting them back together. [laughter] I know my next-door neighbor would often say to me, "How can you stand to live like that, with the wall half done? Why don't you just call somebody and have it done?" She said that to me a couple of times, and I thought, My dear, if I could afford to, I would do it in a minute. [laughs] But until Verne does it, or he and his kids or friends or somebody, that's the way it's going to stay. I wasn't interested in learning how to hammer and carpenter.
Although I met a woman in the PTA who did, and she was taking a course at College of San Mateo on how to build her kitchen cabinets. I went over to see her little apartment, and she and her husband had bought a lot, and were building their own home, and she was doing the kitchen cabinets. She was doing it in her own apartment. I was just so impressed, I thought that was wonderful.

In the meantime, I was meeting wonderful women and people at school and doing things, and working in mental health.

O'Hara: You were working in mental health?

Roberts: The Mental Health Association, Helen Foley was one of the mothers in the PTA at McKinley School. She was very involved in putting in mental health programs and very involved with the Mental Health Association in San Mateo County. We started a program on sex education in the schools, and brought in an author of a book and a film on sex education, but we had to have it presented to the parents first, before it could be presented to the kids. We had a big auditorium all full of parents coming to see, to listen to the author and to watch the film on what would be presented to the kids--with their approval. It was a first around there.

Co-op Nursery School Work

Roberts: Oh, after Mark was born and when he was two, he started in the cooperative nursery school. The College of San Mateo had a cooperative nursery school run by Gertrude Tipton, later Gertrude Tipton Archibald. She was a wonderful, wonderful person who directed this co-op nursery school. To be involved in that, I had to learn to drive, because I had to drive a car pool, and I had to teach one day a week in the co-op school.

I had five straight years of co-op nursery school, as Mark started when he was two. Randy was born when Mark was two and a half, and by the time Mark was going into school, Randy was just going into nursery school. I think they overlapped a little while, but those years were wonderful. The women and men who were involved in that nursery school, they were just fabulous. I learned so much about myself, about parenting, and about my kids, because there's nothing like being in a situation with other parents and other kids, and your kids are biting, scratching, pulling somebody's hair, defying you, defying somebody else, beating up on somebody or sitting in the corner--whatever they're doing, it's in full view of everybody, and there the other
parents are either ready to kill you, because your kid is awfully good, or terrible, or whatever it is, there's that feedback.

It's trying to get that separation of letting the kid be a kid, and you be yourself, and help the kid to grow and maintain themselves while you can do the same thing, grow and maintain yourself, without interfering with the other's growth and development. It's a very tricky thing to do. But with a lot of help, I mostly learned how--[laughs] I got a good start on learning how to do that.

O'Hara: And being in the--did you say nursery school?

Roberts: Yes.

O'Hara: That led you to say something, seeing other people's kids.

Roberts: Yes. Seeing other people's kids, and what their growth and development was, seeing my kid with other kids, seeing--at one time, Mark was scratching as a defense, was scratching kids, and that was just--I was ready to drop out of school. I didn't know what to do. Parents were mad. I mean, if your kid scratched others, that's not fun to see.

So Gertrude asked me about it one time. She said, "What do you think about that?" I said, "Well, I'm thinking about dropping out." She said, "Well, you can do that. But think about what a good defense maneuver that is. It's quick, and it's kind of deadly, and it's--but he can learn how to do other defenses too. That's not the only one that's available to him. We can help him learn other defenses. But you can quit if you want to."

Well, I didn't want to quit. But it was very helpful. Gertrude was very smart that way, and she really could help parents do things.

In the meantime, we put together different programs. I put together a program called, "Your Child is Creative," that we took out to elementary schools, and introduced nursery school techniques on having art materials around for kids of different ages. We showed parents how to set up finger painting or easel painting at home, introduced them to the nursery school--the co-op concept. It was a wonderful program. We got a lot of kudos for that program. It was great.

I met some fantastic people, just great. A lot of them were involved in the Mental Health Association, in Democratic
politics, and in the Unitarian church. I think I was introduced to a lot of those things partly through that.

**Helen Gahagan Douglas Campaign**

O'Hara: Were you doing political work at that point?

Roberts: I worked on the Helen Gahagan Douglas campaign during that time, when Nixon was running against her. I did have Ed—Ed talks about that being his introduction to politics, and I had them go deliver pamphlets from door to door. I was precinct captain in my neighborhood, and had a big meeting at one time for all of the Democratic candidates in the local elections come to the house and talk, and invited the whole list of Democrats to come for coffee one evening. A friend of mine, who was a Republican, helped me put it on. We baked things, and we borrowed chairs and set it up.

And not one Democrat in the precinct came. But the candidates came. I was so embarrassed. Roy Archibald was running for mayor of San Mateo at that time. He and Gertrude got married later, and that was when Gertrude was Tipton Archibald. But Roy came, and Roy was one of the first—other candidates were kind of saying, "Oh, well that's too bad," and Roy came and he said, "What did you do? How did you set this up?" We looked at what I did and what I could have done, and what might have worked.

One of the things that I didn't do was ask people to be a participant in it in some way, to either bring something or have something to do so they were a part of it. I just asked them to come. Well, when you're invited to come as a guest, if you're not quite sure about it, you can not go. But if there's something you're supposed to do about it, then usually that will bring people.

So I appreciated Roy's input, and I liked the idea of that, that it wasn't a powerless position at all.
Anger and the Importance of Fighting

Roberts: Well, Susan, I was talking about the growth and development of Ed and Ron and Zona at that time, and Verne too had to be included in this. Mark and Randy had arrived along in there, too.

But I wanted to mention the fighting. That having been an only child, the only fighting I had ever done, and I had to be reminded of it at one time, was with my cousin, my mother's sister's daughter, Shirl, who lived with me. When our mothers would have divorces, they would live one with the other kind of until they found a new husband or went off someplace else. So periodically, we would be together. So it's the closest thing to a sister, was with my cousin, who later changed her name to Ratza when she moved to Mexico. But in the meantime, she was Shirley, or Shirl.

This one time, she stayed with us, and it was shortly after Nada and Bob Barron had gotten married. Her mother was off someplace or other, and my mother was up taking a nap, and had put us down for a nap. We were on this couch, feet to feet, with a blanket that didn't quite stretch from one chin to the other. So we started pulling the blanket up one way and then the other, kicking with the feet, pinching with the feet, pinching with the hands, and finally just of went into a full-fledged knockabout.

I guess we were noisy about it, because my mother came charging downstairs and she was livid. The fact that we were fighting was just too much for her. Now, she had talked about when she and her sister would share a bed, and they would run an imaginary line down the middle, and whose toes would creep over and who would pinch whom with their toes. So I knew that they fought some, but how much, whether it was as physical--but Ratza, Shirl, and I really got into this tugging and pinching. I guess pinching and scratching and biting, all of the things that I didn't like my kids to do, but there we were at it.

So oh, she was just livid, and she separated us. I remember sitting out on the front porch, and I guess cooling off, and thinking--but feeling somehow exhilarated. There was something kind of delightful about that wonderful fight, that I could do it. [laughs]

O'Hara: That was your one fight?

Roberts: I think that was the one and only. I think that was about the only physical fight I ever had. There were some verbal ones I
remember with kids at school, but really not many. I didn't really learn how to do that.

My mother, Nada, had a thing about anger. She had told me at one time that "Ladies didn't get angry." That if she felt anger--I know that sometimes she would take to her bed, and I think when she felt anger, she felt that she would get sick, that that was the way she felt about it. But ladies didn't feel anger, and were not supposed to. Somehow, that was kind of imbued in me, because I never saw anger and fights resolved. So when you see somebody, and a fight begins, and you see it develop, and then you see some kind of resolution, or how somebody works through it, it's like the political thing, where Roy could come in and say, "Well, what did you do and how did you do it?" I had to learn to negotiate, to learn something that was missing in my whole growth and development.

So when Ed and Ron started fighting, and it would be over the dishes, like when they would be seven and nine, or eight and ten, whether it was to do dishes or a chore or whatever, and would get very physical about it, because they were used to being out on the playground, and that's where the kids--they punched each other, and they--.

Well, I thought I was the worst mother that God ever put on two feet, that something was terribly wrong in the household, where my boys could fight like that, and hate each other so much. I really felt that I was at my wit's end. At one time, they were going at it in the kitchen, and I walked in, and I looked at them, and I gave them--when I think about this now it makes me sick at my stomach, but this is what I did--I gave them each a knife, and I left the house. I said, "If you're going to kill each other, you might as well do it." I left the house.

I went around the corner, and I visited my friend Marge. I held my breath sort of. Of course, it shocked them so much that they stopped fighting. But, it was a very dangerous thing to do, and it isn't one that I would recommend to anyone to do. But that's how desperate I felt. I felt that this was really--they were going to kill each other, and that this was just going to go on and on and on until they did each other in somewhere.

I didn't think--of course, here I was myself, I didn't think I could stand it, and I didn't think they should do it. But I did learn more about it. I remember writing a paper about this. I took a psychology class at College of San Mateo, and I remember writing a paper about this, about fighting and how awful it was, and that if I ever got in a situation that demanded fighting,
often I would quit. I would give in. I wouldn't fight it through.

I remember the professor's comments on the side of the paper. I think at one point he said, "Didn't you ever fight as a kid?" I had to think and think, and I remembered that time that my cousin and I had fought, and there it was. I could luckily remember the exhilaration I felt about that. That was such a high moment in my life, because I thought, God, there's something good about that, too, of really punching it out with somebody. You can get hurt, and a lot of things can happen, but there's a vitality about it. This expression of anger.

Because as the years went by, and my mother, who claimed not to be angry, and I realized inside of that woman was a seething cauldron of some hatred and bigotry that would come out in different ways at different times, but she would mask it over in different ways. She was very good on surfaces and the surface-y things. Her house always looked very neat. She always looked well put together and well made. Her language was good. She could give tea parties. There would never quite be enough food, but there would be--there was something about this cover-up business that sent me into learning family therapy later. I learned to do that, because it's uncovering secrets, and uncovering the mysteries that have always been very important to me. I like that ability to get underneath the secrets as much as is possible.

So back to the kids fighting: turn it off for a minute, because I'm not sure where I'm going to go from here. [tape interruption]

O'Hara: Okay. Your boys are all in grade school, I think.

Roberts: Well, only Ed and Ron, at McKinley. I started doing PTA work, I guess that I'd mentioned before, and after the Founder's Day party, and then of course, they're always looking for people to take office, and finally I--the first office I had was secretary. I thought, listening to the minutes at the meetings, it was always so boring. So I started rhyming the minutes and making it as interesting as I could. And of course, it made it interesting for me, too.

Then I was vice president, and was program chairman in getting things together. Then president of the PTA, which certainly involves lots of meetings, and learning how to organize. I've never been very good about delegating responsibility, so more often than not, I would do more of the work myself than delegate it. But in being president, you have
to learn to delegate, and being program chairman, you have to learn to delegate, too. So those were important things for me, and having board meetings, and learning how to assign jobs, and get people to do things.

It was part of a really fine education for me. I still have a little bit of trouble in delegating responsibilities. I know when I have somebody clean house for me, and to ask them to do something more or something else, I have to think about it for a moment, or just go ahead and do it. I can often feel that I shouldn't do that, that I should do that myself, and that's part of that very early training.

At Washington School, then, when Mark and Randy were at Washington School, I also did PTA work there, but that was after Ed had polio, so I think we'll--. But those PTA experiences were wonderful for me. Again, I met a lot of wonderful women. I was part of the school, and it was very important for me to be close to the teachers and the students at school, and know what my kids were doing in school, and that I could have a part of it. I liked doing things around--oh, Halloween parties and help set up the carnivals.

But I liked having the programs for the parents of incoming students into kindergarten, that often parents are very uneasy about their kids starting school, and they'll tell them, "You can't wet the bed any more, you can't suck your thumb any more, you can't do all of these things because you're a big kid now and you're going to be going to kindergarten." I thought it was kind of important to have pre-school meetings for parents to discuss some of those kinds of things, and how to help kids make the transition from home to school, and learn themselves how to be comfortable in the school setting, because I met so many parents who really had not been good students themselves, and who were really kind of dumping on their kids this feeling that school was a very hard place to be. I didn't like school to be such a hard place to be. I liked it to be as friendly a place as could be possible for parents and students, and teachers too. Teachers often have a very hard time.

Birth of Mark, 1949, and Randy, 1952

[Interview 3: November 21, 1994] ##

Roberts: So that was before my pregnancy with Mark. But I think by this time, I was pretty well established in the community, having done
PTA presidency jobs. I was involved with Helen Foley, who was a wonderful leader-type woman in the community, worked very hard with mental health work. Maybe I mentioned her in the sex education classes that we had done at McKinley PTA, and put on quite a far-reaching program of sex education for the kids, and got Dr. Beck down from University of Oregon, who just put out a book and film of sex education for kids.

O'Hara: Got who down?

Roberts: Beck.

O'Hara: And you did this as a parent, an interested parent?

Roberts: Yes. I was active in the PTA at McKinley School, where the two older boys went, and in the Mental Health Association.

O'Hara: This is in the forties?

Roberts: Yes. Forties and--

O'Hara: Just as an aside, what was sex education like in those days?

Roberts: Practically nil. There was very little sex education.

O'Hara: What did you put into this training?

Roberts: In the training? What we did was we got Beck's film, and showed it to the parents of the community. That was the first time it was shown in the community. We invited people, particularly of our school, because we wanted to show it to the children, as it was a growth and development film. We wanted to show it to the students at school, but we wanted the parents' permission. Parents often need guidance to know and to explain sex education. It's a controversial topic.

I remember Ed asking me something about having heard about intercourse, and he asked me something about, "Ooh, Walter says they do that. Is that true?" I said, "Well, yes," and I was just as green a parent--I had never explained this to anyone, and so I got a book, and I read it to him in his bed. He turned his face to the wall, and he had me read the book to him. Of course, I told him much more than he wanted to know. [laughs] That was the first way I did it. We had had animals, though; they had seen dogs and cats and things around. Which is very helpful.

O'Hara: Was the sex education training controversial, or was it--?
Roberts: Oh, yes, it was. It was quite controversial, even in spite of it's being—now it would be considered mild, but then it was just—it was because it was new, it was different, and some parents objected. We had big meetings, and the community turned out. Helen Foley was a doer in that she would call, "Zona, I was wondering if—" and then she'd always have a big job for you to do. But somehow, she could assign people jobs that would push them a bit to do things. At her memorial service we were talking about this, how she had gotten all of us involved in things that we wouldn't have done on our own, but somehow Helen could push us. She had a great vision of getting things done in our community.

O'Hara: I think I interrupted you. You were on your way to Mark's birth.

Roberts: Mark's birth, yes. So the pregnancy, at this point, I think Helen Foley and Gertrude Archibald and Carol Hardgrove and people connected with the co-op nursery school, I was getting acquainted with them through—they were all with the Unitarian fellowship of San Mateo. And they were the people who were doing things in the community that I liked.

My pregnancy was just a delight. I really thoroughly enjoyed—here I had my appendix out, so I didn't have to worry about that. That was quite a relief. I was a little older, and it was just wonderful to have this kind of great pregnancy. I had another doctor then, Norton Benner M.D., younger doctor, who got to be our family physician. It went all very well. I was very happy. And it turns out, my blood pressure would rise a bit when I was pregnant. It may even have given me a sense of well-being that was very nice, and I enjoyed that.

So it was a great pregnancy, and the fact that it was a boy was immediately kind of a disappointment, because I thought—I'd always wanted a girl. I thought Ed was going to be a girl, and he wasn't, he was a boy. And then Ron was supposed to be a girl, and that was a boy. I kept wondering, what did I do wrong? Families are supposed to have a boy and then a girl.

Verne had worked at Penn Furniture that I mentioned, he got the job that took us away from charity. There was a Turkish man working there who predicted the sex of unborn children by looking at the eyes of the parents. He came to the house and he filled out a form. I knew when I was carrying Ed that it was going to be a girl. He filled out a form, and he said, in this form, which I still have, that it was going to be a boy. In fact, I would have four—I think he said three more boys before I had a girl.
I just thought that was hilarious. In the first place, in my family, the ones who had one child, that was quite good, and if you had two, that was on the verge of being a peasant. So the fact that I would have four kids, much less four boys, was I thought hilarious. I think that's why I saved the paper. But the fact that he was entirely true in his predictions—in some ways, not the girl though.

So Mark's birth was delightful. But then I thought, with a nine-year gap between two boys, how wonderful it would be to have a girl, and maybe two girls, that would be a wonderful family. And I think my husband missed having a daughter. He would have loved to have had a little girl kind of hanging around and looking up at him. That would have been so neat for him.

Our son, Mark Leslie, born on Thanksgiving day, November 24, 1949, came home. Marge Katen, who lived around the corner, she came over and helped me. Jackie Kaul lived next door. We've been in each other's lives now for all these years. Just a great supporting team of the kind of—three days later, you come home from the hospital, and I was thinking, oh God. I had to get up and get myself breakfast. I wasn't sure I could. And Marge came in the door and went out and got my breakfast, brought it to me, and the tears were rolling down my cheeks. It was wonderful. And she was very fond of Mark, and still is.

In fact, when the census was being taken, we were both wanting to earn some money. I found out we had to take a test in order to do the census. It was a federal test. We went up to do it, and it turned out she, as a Canadian citizen, couldn't take the test. I took the test, and I said, "Well, if I get the job, then I'll split the money with you if you care for Mark." She was delighted to do that, and that's what happened. So I did the census, and she took care of Mark while I did that and we split the money.

Mark's growth and development brought kids to the house. The girls who were Ed and Ron's age would hang around, because we lived across the street from a football field. The kids gathered there and would go over to the field, and the girls then would come around. Of course, the girls were fascinated with babies and would come around to see the kids. Then two years and three months later—well, two and a half years, or a little more—Randy was born, and the girls were there again, were around helping with Randy and--

O'Hara: What year is this now?
Roberts: Randy was born in '52. Mark was born in '49, and Randy was born in '52. Mark was born on the Thanksgiving Day, so that was the day that my mother-in-law cooked the turkey and I delivered one. [laughs] We called him a turkey for just a few minutes. Not very long. But we still celebrate—in fact, this year, 1994, is Thanksgiving again on the 24th.

But Randy's birth was the 27th of June, and he was known as "the day after payday Roberts." Because payday for Southern Pacific was twice a month, the 10th and the 26th. With the kids being born on—Ed was born on the 23rd of January, 1939; Ron was born on April 2nd, the day after my twenty-first birthday, in 1941; and then Mark in 1949, was the 24th of November and Randy in 1952 on the 27th of June. But the birthday parties would often not be on the day, or they often wouldn't get their present that they desired right on their birthday, because it was just before payday. So the first thing about Randy's birth was [laughing] that he was "the day after payday Roberts."

Verne's pay would be—he would get his check at Southern Pacific, and he would walk across the street on paydays to the Seven Mile House, where the men gathered to have a drink and cash their checks, because the Seven Mile House acted as sort of a paymaster. They would cash the checks and take out for the drinks the guys had. He came home with a little buzz on just about every payday.

But he came home then with this stack of cash. And the kids in the neighborhood—in fact, the women and men still remind me of coming to the house and being very jealous of this, because they could see this money that Verne would bring in. This happened every second week. So the kids, whether they were there much or not, if they were there during that time, they saw the turnover of the household money. I paid all the bills and did all that kind of thing, so Verne just turned it over to me. But they still talk about that. It was fun just recently to be reminded of these things that make an impression on all of us. But it was an interesting family matter of the way we did.

Verne took not very much interest in how things were. He would every once in a while say, "I don't know how you manage on this," and other times he would wonder why we didn't have more, as I would too. Because he loved to do household things around, take out a wall, but he was very slow about putting it back. [laughs]
IV ED CONTRACTS POLIO, FEBRUARY, 1953

[Interview 4: December 11, 1994] ##

Onset, Hospital, Paralysis, Iron Lung

Roberts: In February of 1953, Ed got polio. Ed and his friend Roger Huf, who is now a child neurologist in Los Angeles and a really neat guy. Roger and Ed were classmates and buddies and had attended a Sunday afternoon March of Dimes baseball game, both being baseball fans.

Ed didn't feel good that evening. He didn't look very good, and he wanted to go to a church group with Roger, and I wouldn't let him do that. He was kind of pissed at me because I wouldn't let him do that, but he looked like he needed to stay home. It was the next morning that he was pretty stiff. He got up and walked to the bathroom in a very stiff way, and I called the doctor, and I knew he was sick.

Just kind of beyond what had happened the week before, when he had been ill one day, Ron was ill for a couple of days, I was for one day, I just didn't feel good. All of us had something going on. Mark didn't feel good for a day. Maybe one day after another this seemed to happen. All but Verne; Verne went to work—or if he didn't feel good, he didn't say anything about it.

And then one night, Randy stayed awake all night. He was about eight months old, and he just kind of puttered in his crib all night. I listened to that, but that was after Ed's polio was diagnosed.

So Ed was the one who came down again. We suspect that we all had had some kind of introduction of a polio virus that was taking hold, but with Ed, Ed was just—he was fourteen, and he was just beginning to get quite tall. He'd grown several inches that year, so perhaps his resistance was lower. I have no idea what and how. The only other person we knew who'd had polio in
the whole Burlingame community was Francis Barren, who had died of polio several months before, and we hadn't been around him or his family at all after the funeral, so it didn't seem that there could be a connection there. Who knows. It's still a mystery.

Ed became ill. I called my doctor's office, and Norton Benner was just on his way out of town, going to Mexico for a vacation. Bill Martin came over. Bill Martin, M.D., who was in practice with Norton Benner. Those were the days of house calls, and he came about five-thirty that evening, or six o'clock. Ed had been stretched out on his bed all day and would kind of shake his foot. But he kept his body in a very straight kind of line, and he had a headache, and all the usual signs of polio, but of all the things, I did not think of polio during that time. It didn't even occur to me that that's what it could be. Just as well, I guess. [laughs] Because the week before or so, they had all had fevers, and everybody had gotten well.

Anyway, Bill Martin went into the bathroom and washed his hands, and then came to the kitchen and said, "We need to get him to the county hospital," because that's where San Mateo County Hospital, where the isolation ward was, and it looked like a virus. It could be one of three things.

So we took the trip to--I don't even remember what we did with the other kids--oh, I guess Ron stayed home, because Ron and Mark and Randy then would be at home, so Ron must have been--he was old enough, he was twelve, probably stayed with the kids while we went to the hospital.

We took Ed to the hospital. He sat up in the car, and he walked into the hospital. Then they put him in a wheelchair and wheeled him down to isolation. We were outside the window of his room of isolation, and Bill Martin came in and did a spinal tap. There's something about standing outside that window, and Bill Martin doing this spinal tap--. And then he brought the spinal fluid to the window and kind of shook it and said, "Well, it looks clear. It's probably an old--" what did he say? Some other kind of a virus. Flu virus, I guess he said.

But in seeing that, and I started to faint, but in my ladylike way, instead of fainting and passing out daintily on a fainting couch, I started to vomit. [laughs] It just kind of hits my stomach more than anything. So Verne kind of grabbed me. But I didn't pass out, it was just that reaction to the--seeing the severity of what was going on, I guess, or the feeling that this was not--I didn't like it.
We stayed for a while, and went home. Ed got up and walked to the bathroom. This was, I think, a Monday night. Tuesday he walked to the bathroom. Wednesday morning, he was rushed into a respirator, because gradually on Tuesday, some paralysis began to set in on his left side. His left side still is totally paralyzed, but not his neck and head, but his body. Then the right side began to be affected, it was the lungs, breathing difficulty. And it must have been just absolutely terrifying for him.

They rushed him into an iron lung, and Friday was the crisis when the fever spikes, and this whole kind of insidious thing that goes on, and the fever keeps going up, and it's real high. So Friday night we spent--stayed down until the wee early hours of the morning.

Verne and I were sitting out in the waiting room, and every once in a while, I could hear Ed's voice. At one point he said--and his voice carries. It still does. He has a very powerful voice for somebody with breathing difficulties. It's very resonant; it carries. I heard him say to one of the nurses, "What are my folks still doing here?" Now, here he was supposed to be out of his mind with fever and not knowing what was going on, and he certainly seemed to be cognizant of the fact that we were there, and that was unusual.

Of course, what I was waiting for was that tracheotomy tray to go in, because to me, that would be the final thing. I had heard about from Rose Barron, Francis' mother, about their doing a trach on him, a tracheostomy, cutting a hole into the throat to aid breathing, that later they began to do in a more routine manner. At that point, it was strictly an emergency, life-threatening emergency saving kind of thing that they would do, so I was waiting for that to happen.

It didn't happen. Somehow the paralysis traveled that far, and stopped. It didn't affect his throat. Of course, by this time, his body was pretty well paralyzed, and he was in I guess quite a bit of pain.

We went home in the wee hours of the morning. Bill Martin came through at one time to check on Ed and to see how things were going. I said something to him about how his evening was going, and early morning, and he said that it was rough, but probably not as rough as we were having it. The next morning, when I called to find out how Ed was, and I got hold of Bill Martin at some point, I guess through his office, but by calling the hospital, I found out Ed was still alive. Then when I talked
to Bill Martin, I said I was glad that Ed lived, because this was through the acute stage.

He just kind of snapped at me and said, "Well, how would you like it if you had to spend the rest of your life in an iron lung? That's no fun. I tried it once, and it was a terrible experience." But he was really very snappish.

There is a kind of a trance-like state that happens in a shocking kind of a thing like this, and it's interesting what clearly we remember and what we don't remember during those times. Some of these conversations, they could have happened yesterday, and others, details that I couldn't remember at all unless someone reminded me and I could go back. But there's some of these statements that, they just cut through kind of a glazed front that happens, that we put up, I guess, in self-protection.

But Ed lived. We knew he would. Then was the beginning of therapies and things that were intended to make life better for him. I was concerned about Bill Martin's treatment of Ed. In talking with other patients, he seemed to be kind of a downer in some ways. One of our friends, Ann Ito's husband, had gone in. Ann was a nursery school teacher also at the co-op. Bill Martin would say things like, "Well, there seems to be a lump there, maybe it's cancer." He had a blunt manner. He had trouble with his bedside manner.

So I knew this about him, which was very helpful to know that this was his--a very brusque manner. But what I was concerned about was, would he translate this to Ed? Would he lay this on Ed? Would his disappointment in having this medical failure convey itself to Ed, and I hoped that that would not be the case.

But he came through. He was one of the first ones to say, "We need to get some kind of a clock for Ed so he can know what time it is," and then pretty soon he wanted Ed to have a television so he would have something to watch. He was really paying attention to what Ed needed to make his life a little easier.

The public health people, of course, came to the house, and advised us not to go to the grocery store during prime times. Ron had to stay home from school for a few days, I think a week, and I didn't send Mark to nursery school during that time. And for us not to go to the grocery store during prime times, to avoid being around other people in the crowded time.
O'Hara: To spread the disease, or pick up something because you were vulnerable?

Roberts: No, so we wouldn't spread it. Because we felt like we were contagious. And I don't remember if there was a sign on the house, but I think there was. I think there was some kind of a sign on the house.

Roger Huf's mother, Esther, came a few days later with this coat box full of pastries that she had made. I will never forget that, that generous--because I think we were feeling like the neighborhood pariahs who were going to infect everyone. And it didn't mean that my friends weren't calling; they were calling, and people were, but it was a terrible feeling of vulnerability, that I remember lying in bed and thinking that, now that this had happened, the most terrible thing I could think happening to--other than death, but pretty awful thing--to my oldest, first kid. That somehow, the kids had been born, and they were healthy, and everything had gone along, but somehow now we were vulnerable. This protective shield that had been--very primitive thinking, but that some kind of a protective shield that had been around our family was cracked, and now what was going to happen? It was like anything was possible now, like every move--I just didn't move too fast, like something else could happen. Although the rest of us seemed to be doing fine, as far as our health was concerned.

O'Hara: But you had pastries. She brought pastries.

Roberts: She sure did. She brought this box of pastries. She's a wonderful friend and still is. She was scared to death about Roger. Roger, who had been with Ed all this time during the time that wherever Ed picked up polio, Roger was probably with him. Roger could have been the next one down. But he wasn't, and didn't, and their family didn't seem to have anything like that. Of course, Ed was with other kids too. So the families were frightened. The whole town of Burlingame was affected. It was a terrible thing to happen. And as had been happening in many other communities across the United States, but here it was, right there.

So Ed lived, and then began his--I guess friends and relatives were all quite concerned. Verne's mother was supportive as she usually was. She's a good old kind of country woman who would bring jars of soup and help wash diapers when I had kids, and would come in and--my mother would come in and kind of "Tsk, tsk," and take some Lysol to the telephone, and just was not helpful in the way that Verne's mother was. There was something very supportive about her. I felt her presence. I
just knew that if I needed help or needed her to come and take care of the kids or take the kids up to her place, why, that could happen.

Those were hard days. Visiting Ed at the community hospital, I had the Red Cross, somebody called them for me, and they came and picked me up in the afternoon, and I would go down and visit Ed with their driving. I just wasn't driving myself for a while. And then I did start driving down there later, but I think for a couple of weeks, they did that, provided that service, and that was very nice.

Ed was beginning to have therapy. There were other people there, Bob Penn was there, who turned out to be a great friend, and his wife—they had kids in the co-op nursery school, so I knew about Bob. He has since died; he lived in San Mateo. Wonderful man, he wasn't a nuclear physicist, but he was something in that department, and he went back to work for a while on kind of a part-time basis, but he had a terrible time getting clearance for his attendants to get through security. That was one of the difficulties he had.

O'Hara: He had a disability?

Roberts: He had polio. He was one of the polios around that we became acquainted with. I'm just trying to recall some of the others. Fred Facciano, who we run into every once in a while. Karen Hubacker was there. She has since died. But we gradually were meeting these other families of people who were there, and seeing families that had split up or were splitting up, and some who were very supportive. Karen's folks brought her dinner every night. I thought it was too bad. It seemed like it didn't allow Karen to be part of what was going on there. I felt it was an isolating sort of thing.

But Ed quickly sort of made friends around there, and he certainly got to know the staff. At one point, they had mumps around, and--[laughs] Oh, I know. We had scheduled a visit with Mark and Randy to see Ed for the first time after he was in the hospital. This must have been about a month later. And of course, what happened but Mark came down with mumps I think the next day or something, and I was just devastated. I thought, Lord, now I've got to call the hospital and tell them that this had happened.

But Ed said that one of the janitors had had mumps, and so they'd inoculated everyone around there, given them the mumps vaccine. I felt like I was saved. They have such stringent rules about little kids coming into hospitals, or little kids
visiting, and they had kind of wheeled Ed down on a gurney so he could visit the kids, but I thought, Well, that takes care of that. We won't be allowed to do that again. But luckily, I found out that was taken care of.

Financial Issues

Roberts: Verne had taken an insurance policy against polio for fifty cents, a rider on a health policy he had through the Southern Pacific. We had to wait—the spinal fluid was sent to the lab, and we had to wait for about ten days for the cultures to be developed, to grow, and find out for sure whether it was polio. That was when he was first in the hospital. I remember waiting for the results of this, and the waiting for the results of this meant whether Ed would be a private patient and supported by the March of Dimes, if it was named polio, or if it was another virus, with the same kind of dreadful effects, at which point he would be a public or charity, county patient. I felt the unfairness of this, and I still do. I can be incensed that such a description means the kind of treatment somebody could get, and how unfair that was.

O'Hara: Was that based on Verne's insurance?

Roberts: Yes, because we did have this policy that seemed like it was a $5,000 top policy, which in those days--

O'Hara: Only if he had polio.

Roberts: But only if you had polio. But beyond that was the March of Dimes, which would pick up the bills for polio, but they wouldn't for meningitis or some of the other things that this could have been. And that's what seemed so unfair, is that one kid could have a treatment that would be better than another kid with the same effects but just a different name on this virus.

So it was polio, the policy kicked in, and it paid for his hospitalization for two months. Now, I think $5,000 would probably be a day and a half, something like that. [laughs] As terrible as that sounds, it's true. But it did allow a time of the insurance company kicking in and paying those bills for that first two months, it gave us more freedom, not that I moved him anywhere or would have thought of it at that point. I did later, because he was needing to be moved after about nine months, eight to nine months that he'd been there.
He was not eating. The effects on him at first, just the fact that he lived, and with all the pain and the things that were happening to him, the therapies that were given--I suppose that you know about some of the pain of being stretched.

Treatment

O'Hara: I remember it well.

Roberts: Oh. Horrible. The hot packs and the things they were doing to try to keep the paralysis from being permanent, to allow the edema to settle, and then to see which nerves would make connections again and which nerves had been killed. If you can keep that muscle tone going, then if the nerves weren't killed, the connections could be made and the muscles could be activated. And of course, I understand why that's important.

But Ed being in the iron lung, and they would pull it out, and there was a dome on the front of it that encased his head. I think he was a little claustrophobic, and to pull that tank out so they could work on his body was fine, but to enclose his head in this and then have air pressure going in and out of the front of the tank was--

O'Hara: The iron lung?

Roberts: Yes.

O'Hara: Like a bubble, almost.

Roberts: It was indeed a bubble on the front of the tank, and it was effective, but it was scary to have his head in that. Almost having already the feeling that lots of times he couldn't breathe, or couldn't breathe well, then to be enclosed in this, it was almost like being cut off from the air. So there were some things like that. And plus, when that happened, that meant that he was going to be in a lot of pain as they moved his body.

But he had, I thought, reasonably good care. There wasn't too much that I could complain over there. He had visitors. Verne would go in the evening, and I would go in the afternoon. People stepped--

O'Hara: Every day?
Roberts: I think so. Most days, anyway. Later Verne went down and helped bathe him at night. That's when they took him out of the lung. I'm trying to remember how many months he was in the lung. Then they weaned him out of the lung, because that was the big push, to get somebody out of the iron lung so they were not dependent upon the lung. That was the big thing, and the fight that went on for Ed about trying to be out, which was terrifying. They used a rocking bed for a while, which was not terribly effective, because he didn't weigh enough to have his gut push up against his lungs to make that operate.

O'Hara: Can you describe what a rocking bed is?

Roberts: Yes. A rocking bed, the bed goes up and down, like a rocking chair, only it's a bed. The idea of it is that as the bottom of the bed goes up, and it forces the gut and just the pressure of everything against the diaphragm would push air out, and then reversing it, where the legs would go down and the head would go up, would allow the gut to go down, the pressure against the diaphragm would drop, and then air would be pulled in. So it's a good policy, and it worked for quite a few people. Ed used it for a while, but it was not effective.

O'Hara: He was too light.

Roberts: He didn't weigh enough. Then eventually, it was not the thing that--he just wasn't getting enough air, and we found that out later. But at that time, it was this big push, and every step that he made toward getting out, and I think the pain was beginning to subside, he felt like progress. We always hoped that some way, more muscle return would happen, and that he would certainly be able to use his arms or hands or legs or something. But that didn't happen either.

He had a little motion on his left toes, and a little motion on his left finger that he still has, and that allows him to drive his motorized chair. He can pull back his middle left finger, and he can raise that part of his--from the elbow up, he can raise that part of his hand up, and then he can pull back, so they reversed the direction of his chair by pulling back makes his chair go forward, and he still uses that. When he was having the home-to-school hookup, he could use that left foot and depress it against the bar when he wanted to speak to the class. So those two things really were valuable for him to have.

##

Roberts: While Ed was at Community Hospital, we'd been there about two months, he'd gone in in February, around Valentine's day, Verne
and I were very tired and needed a vacation. We had vacationed with Ken and Helen Lineaweaver--Helen was my chum at high school, and she and Ken had married and had a couple of daughters. His folks had a place at Russian River. We would go up with them for a week while Verne's mother would take care of the kids, or my mother sometimes.

We'd done that a couple of times before, and I decided that we needed to do that again very much. So I prepared Ed for our leaving to go on this week's vacation. There wasn't a telephone at Ken and Helen's place, but we arranged through the sheriff's department that a message could be brought to us if they needed to get in touch with us. I had visitors arranged to see Ed, and I knew that he could handle things, because I saw the way he talked to the nurses, the way he related to the people in the same ward.

Many years later, Ed told me that that was one of the single best things that we had done for him, that he was so overcome with feeling that his life was in total chaos, but that ours was too, and for him to have felt that we were going to give up our lives to take care of him was just more than he could take in. And when we took this vacation, it meant to him that we were going to take care of ourselves. He said the relief of that was tremendous.

I was very glad to hear that later, because I knew it was tremendous for us to get away, and to have the confidence that Ed could handle things. I think that was part of the thing I was feeling when Karen's folks brought dinner to her, it was as if their intervention was preventing Karen from making the contacts that she needed to do that I felt Ed needed to do for himself, that he was competent to do those things, because he certainly was.

#


Roberts: Our vacation was good for me and good for Verne. I got to sit on the beach with my friend Helen who was my chum in high school, and talked, and the men went fishing, and it was a great week. There wasn't a telephone there, but through the sheriff's office we left a phone number, so in case they needed us at the hospital, we could get back.

But we had a good week, and Ed did too. He could get along fine.
Ed began--his depression set in, I think there probably had been some of it under there, but things had gone on enough that he was coming to terms with the fact that he was paralyzed neck down. As that began to set in, along with his inability to eat, he was having great trouble digesting his food, I went to a conference that was being given for doctors on polio at that time. He was talking about polio robbing the stomach of hydrochloric acid, that of course aids in the digestion of food, and that was one of the things they were learning, how to add some of that to enable people to eat and digest food after having polio.

But Ed was not hungry. They were giving him big milkshakes, which he hated. I would have liked that, but he [laughing] just thought that was terrible. Oh, coconut milk I think, they were putting in coconut milk and he hated that. He never liked coconut, and still doesn't.

But he was having trouble. I think they gave him a transfusion because he was getting very thin and not doing very well. I was getting a little alarmed at his condition, and his depression. I realized that if he stayed where he was, there was nothing going on there for him. There was no future for him, other than thinking about coming home, and at that point, thinking about coming home just seemed impossible for any kind of life.

Transfer to Children's Hospital, San Francisco

Roberts: I realized that we had to get him out of there. Now, the fact that he was a March of Dimes patient and that he was again a private patient, I could search around. I had heard about Children's Hospital in San Francisco and it having many, many polio patients. That was kind of the polio headquarters for northern California. There was a large--there was Rancho Los Amigos in southern California, but up here, in San Francisco, it was Children's Hospital, the center of where things were happening in polio.

So I contacted one of the doctors there, and they agreed to take Ed. So we moved him to Children's Hospital. That move was very much like taking a dog to the pound, as far as Ed was concerned. We put him in the back of the station wagon and we drove him up there. If he could have been kicking and screaming, he would have been. His idea of kicking and screaming was to lie there and close his lips, and he wasn't going to talk. He was
pissed. He was very angry. He was scared, of course, I realized.

He had made his way at San Mateo County Hospital, he knew the people, he knew which people would respond in the night, who wouldn't, how you got them to get there in a hurry if you needed him, or to try to anyway. They put private duty nurses on him for a while because he wasn't eating, so he had them for a while around the clock, and then he had just one in the daytime. She was a wonderful woman, and she was very concerned about him, and she became his mother in the hospital, to the point that his eating was her challenge, and the more she wanted him to eat, the less he wanted to eat. That was one of the ways he could have a rebellion.

Now, a friend of mine at the nursery school, the mother, Anita Gordon, was in our carpool and her husband Gene was a psychiatrist. Anita was a lawyer who stayed home to raise her kids. Her husband was finishing a residency out here. So I got in touch with him, Gene Gordon, and asked him if he would come and see Ed, and he did. So he went in the daytime, and he met the daytime nurse, and suggested maybe it would better if she wouldn't be a full-time daytime nurse, if she would take some other cases. He thought it might be better for her to move on and for Ed to have the freedom to eat or not eat, and have it just be his business and no one else's.

Well, that worked quite well. His intervention was a very good thing at that point. But there still was no future there, so when he was accepted at Children's Hospital, we moved him up there in the back of the station wagon. I do remember the ride, because it was [laughs] pretty awful. But I knew it was the only way he was going to be--if anything was going to happen that was good in his life, and if he would take his life back, it would have new territory. Almost anything different at that time would kind of break that protective overtone of his life.

So we got him up there, and I think he didn't talk for maybe a day and a half. He lasted a little while with his silence. [laughs] He was really pissed. He was going to be angry at everyone, and he was not going to cool off. And as I say, it lasted maybe a day and a half or two. Then he gradually met other kids, and there was so much going on there, there were so many people with so many different kinds of polio. Some people just had their left side involved, some just their right side. One, one leg and an arm on the other side of the body. You just got to see all the different--a few of the different aspects of what polio could do and what it meant to have the nerves knocked
out in different parts of your body, and which ones came back and which ones wouldn't.

The job they undertook then was to get him off of--he was out of the iron lung. He had been on a rocking bed for a while at Community Hospital. They had put him on a rocking bed for a while, and then on a chest cuirasse. That's what he came home with, eight or nine months later, from Children's Hospital.

He had many interesting experiences there. One night on the rocking bed when he was sliding off. Another time when they had an old maternity nurse taking the night shift, and Ed had to use a urinal in the night. Apparently, she had not dealt with men for many years, and she was not about to give him the urinal. So she kept telling him he didn't have to use the urinal, and he kept saying that he did have to. So finally--why he didn't pee in the bed beats me, but he didn't. She finally gave him the urinal.

But some of the things I'd hear about later, because at Children's, visiting wasn't every day, and I didn't go up there every day. My terror, when I was having to drive to San Francisco, because trying to take public transportation to Children's Hospital would have been quite a feat. Depositing the other kids, Mark and Randy, in various places, having to take the playpen and things I needed, and having somebody pick up Mark after school, or be at the house, of course, was best. But if I had to take them to my mother-in-law's, I had to drive to do that.

I remember the night before I went to Children's, and plotting my way in my mind about which streets to take and which way I'd turn--

O'Hara: Because you were a new driver.

Roberts: Because I was relatively a new driver. By this time, I had been driving a little more, but not in San Francisco. This was big-city driving. So I did it.

I think visiting was Thursday and Sunday, if I remember correctly.

O'Hara: Only two days?

Roberts: I think it was only two days a week. Maybe it was three, but planning for that was about what I could accomplish, anyway.
But it meant Verne lost--Verne had been going down every evening and helping bathe Ed while he was at County Hospital. He would go down after dinner, because he worked early hours, worked from seven to four. He was home by four-thirty, and we'd have dinner certainly by five. He would go down to the hospital and help bathe Ed. He got to know the nurses, and talked to people. There was kind of a steady helpful thing that he could do. He had a big part in it. He, of course, could only go on Sundays to Children's.

So during that time, they were trying to get Ed on some kind of ventilation system that would work for him. There was some schooling there also, and I think there had been some home teaching at County Hospital also. But Children's had more of that, and just more things going. Kids from all over the state.
V ED'S HOMECOMING

Preparation

Roberts: And then the preparation for his homecoming began. This was where I had--oh, this was where I got my absolute terror and fright. I was pleased that they were planning for him to come home, and glad that he would be able to, but I didn't see how in the world I could manage.

O'Hara: And this was about a year and a half after the onset?

Roberts: Yes, a year and a half. The more I thought about it, the more terror I felt of--I didn't see how I could be a wife and a mother and run my household, teach the kids in co-op nursery school, keep that thing going. By this time, Mark was in elementary school but Randy was still in the co-op. I needed to get out. I just needed to visit my friends, be able to do things sometimes, just to go shopping, get away. And to feel that I had to replace the hospital and all of the things that they had provided for Ed was almost--it was more than I could even think of doing. I would say to Verne, "I just don't see how we're going to manage it." He'd say, "There, there, dear, go to sleep, it's okay, we'll manage."

And I would, in my sullen, sarcastic way, say to myself, "Yeah, that's okay. You're going to get up and you're going to go to work, and you're going to come home and you're going to eat your dinner, and then you're going to help with Ed, and then you're going to go to sleep, and you're going to sleep all night, and I'll be awake trying to think of what to do and how to do it."

So one day when I went up to visit, and this little young social worker was sitting next to Ed's desk. She greeted me as I walked in, and she said, "Oh, Mrs. Roberts, how are you? I bet you're just delighted that your son is coming home."
I was confronted with a dilemma. I was raised in a family where family secrets were, you just didn't talk about what went on in the family. You didn't ask for help and you didn't talk about what went on in the family. With sometimes very good reason, but it didn't add much to my life at that time.

Here was Ed, fifteen and a half, thinking about coming home, must be delighted to be getting out of the hospital, but must also be scared about leaving all of that help behind him, into this kind of untrained family, or semi-trained family at that point. I found my voice and I said, "No, as a matter of fact, I'm scared to death."

She looked very startled. And I thought--and here was Ed. I still have the picture in my head of the look on her face and Ed just lying there, and my thinking, Have I just killed him? If he's scared, what's he going to be now, thinking that his mother, who is supposed to be in charge of things, feels she can't do it? I mean, this was just--I felt like I had betrayed him. But I was going to save me, and felt like I might have to pay a high price.

She looked very startled. She said, "Has no one talked to you?" I said, "No." No one had discussed anything about homecoming other than that they were setting a date to have it done. So she said, "Come with me."

We walked outside and she said, "Have you not been contacted by the Polio Foundation?" I said, "No." She said, "They have--" because I said, "We can't afford to hire people, I can't hire people to come in and stay with him or do things." She said, "The Polio Foundation has a home care program, they'll provide probably four hours a day five days a week--" now, whether she said all this or she just led me to--what was the name?--Sherman Horm something or other, who was in charge of the foundation in San Francisco. She said, "I'll get in touch with her and have her get in touch with you. There is help available."

I said, "Oh! Well, okay, let's hear about it." So then I could visit with Ed, and go back thinking, Oh.

So this woman came to the house sometime in the following week, and set up a plan, and they did indeed pay for four hours a day of household help, and somebody that I could hire five days a week. It meant that I could go shopping, I could participate in the co-op nursery school, and that was what we needed. That's what kept our family together and made all the difference between this being a collapse of our family, or not.
But in the meantime, I had suffered with this extensively. I was really terrified. And here I had been active in Mental Health Association, but the fact that I needed to talk to somebody, that I was terrified, was becoming more and more clear. But I talked with—maybe Helen Foley, who said, "Well, call the Mental Health Association. That's what they do. They provide counseling on a sliding scale basis."

I called them, made an appointment. I was sweating so much, when I picked up the phone, it was all I could do to hang onto the receiver just to make this call to make an appointment for myself to have counseling. One of the things that I kept asking myself was, What in the world was I so frightened of? And one of the things that flashed through my mind was, maybe I'll find something is wrong with my mother. This I just kind of put on hold. I was thirty-two when Ed had polio, so by this time I was thirty-four, about thirty-four. And I hadn't really come to terms—-I knew she was different, and I knew there were all kinds of things, but it's nothing that I'd ever discussed with anyone, other than my immediate friends.

I made an appointment, and I went to the San Mateo County Family Service Agency. Met this wonderful woman, Julie Coleman, and we talked, and I told her what I was afraid of, and we started talking. I had a few visits. She wanted Verne to come. He did once, under the greatest of struggles—terrible. He just wasn't going to do anything like that ever.

One day, I had gotten a letter from my mother, and I took it and showed it to this woman whose name I'll remember in a few moments—Julia Coleman. She was great. I showed her the letter, and she looked at it, and she looked at me, and she said, "This letter could be, and maybe has been, in a case study of schizophrenia. It's absolutely classic." So things I'd been telling her of various little things about my life and some about my mother began to fit into place. So there was a diagnosis on my mother, the thing that I'd feared most happened, and I didn't die. My mother was still alive; she didn't die. Didn't change anything in her life. And it gave me more understanding.

But it was interesting, being confronted with the thing you're afraid of, and how it opens doors. Instead of being a downer, it was an upper.

I was getting counseling, and did for a while. And how long exactly, I don't remember, but long enough to get me through that crisis.
We couldn't have Ed coming home until we moved. The house that we had was like--it started out as like sort of a four-room house. We had added a little bit on. Verne had added a patio kind of place where Ed and Ron were sleeping when Mark and Randy took over the bedroom as they arrived. But there was no place for Ed--there was no accessibility in the house. There were stairs up the front and up the back. So it meant shopping around for another house to move into, which we found on--I think it was 916 Oak Grove over to Bloomfield Road. Which was a little farther from the high school, but not too far, certainly walking distance for Ron to go to high school, and close enough for the kids--then the younger ones started in at Washington School. We were out of the McKinley School area.

But this house was bigger. It had a wonderful big back yard. Again an apricot tree like we had on Oak Grove. We had room--the dining room then was Ed's bedroom because it was in the center of the house. When Ed came home and was in the dining room, we had a living room, you had to walk through the living room, and either to the dining room or through our bedroom, to get to a little central hall, or if you came through the dining room, you could walk through the dining room to a little breakfast room to the kitchen, and to a back porch and outside, or through the front door, part of the living room, through our bedroom, into a little hall, to the bathroom, and then a couple of steps up to another bedroom upstairs.

So again, essentially it was a two-bedroom house, but it was--it just dawned on me, that house was never ramped.

O'Hara: How did he get in to the house?

Roberts: He was carried in and out. He weighed about eighty-something pounds. I couldn't carry him by myself; it always took two people: one arm under his neck, one arm under his back holding his arms, another person's arm under his butt, and another arm under his knees. It always took two people.

O'Hara: You mean arms.

Roberts: Two people. So there would be neck, back-arms, butt, and knees, the four arms going. So it would support his joints.

Carrying him in and out. He had a collapsible wheelchair, just a little thing that we could lift in and out of the station wagon, so that worked. So there wasn't any need for a ramp.

O'Hara: Could you do that by yourself?
Roberts: Yes.

O'Hara: Get him up and down the steps?

Roberts: Well, no, I had to have help in carrying him out.

**High School Classes**

Roberts: When Ed went to Burlingame High School--well, at first he went home-to-school--then after he was home for a little while, the Soroptomists, a women's group, put up some money to wire some classrooms at Burlingame High School, where Ron was attending, to our house. So Ed could lie on his bed and, with the pressure that he could put on his left foot, the telephone company mounted this box down on his bed and a bar. He could hear the class when the machine was on. The little box was sort of like a telephone with an open receiver all the time. And then if he wanted to talk, he could press the bar, and then they could hear him.

So that's how he did most of his high school. He also had home teachers who came to the house, one for science and another for Spanish. By the time he was a senior in high school, I decided that he needed to get out. Verne would take him sometimes, put him in the car, and take him to watch some football games. He had written an article for--he'd write sports columns for the high school paper, because he kept up with sports all the time. That was something he talked with the men and boys, his dad and his brothers, and friends would come by.

Each class that he was a member of would come to the house one time during the semester, and see him, because a lot of the students knew him, but a lot of them from other schools in Burlingame hadn't known him, and he'd been away from school for about two years at that point. So they would come by to see him, and he got to know them that way.

But he was very tentative about appearing in public. He did not like the way he looked, he didn't like being in the wheelchair, and he didn't like being skinny and tall and not being able to use his arms and do things.

O'Hara: He didn't attend sports events?

Roberts: Verne would take him to the end of the football field sometimes, and he'd sit in the car and watch some of the games that way.
But he wouldn't go sit in his wheelchair on the side. I don't know if he ever did that.

O'Hara: Can you go back for a minute? When he was going in and out of the house, and someone picked him up, two people picked him out of the chair, and took him down the stairs, and then placed him in his chair at the bottom?

Roberts: No. In the car.

O'Hara: He went down the stairs in his chair?

Roberts: No, he would go from his bed, we would carry him out. Mr. Downey, who lived next door, I would call him often when Ed was at College of San Mateo. We would carry Ed out, down the stairs, and put him on the seat of the car. I would fold up his wheelchair and put it in the car. He wouldn't be put in the chair until he got out at the college.

O'Hara: I only ask that because it is so different from what so many people do now.

Roberts: Yes. He never sat in his chair around the house. Never. The chair was folded up.

O'Hara: He was in bed?

Roberts: He was in bed. He was all the time, he was flat. Sitting up wasn't very comfortable for him, he couldn't breathe well, we didn't have any portable respiration for him at that time. So at first when he came home from Children's, it was with the cuirasse, the chest respirator.

Health Problems

Roberts: He was home about, I'll say another few months, when he began to look pretty bad and he had these blotches on his face. But it turned out later they were from lack of oxygen. I had heard about Dr. Lewis and Fairmont Hospital, and I decided that he needed a little more help. Now, Benner or Miller sometimes would come to the house to see him if there was something—if he was sick or something. But very seldom. He didn't have much wrong with him. Other than just the effects of the post polio effects. [laughs]
But he was not doing well. He would doze off a lot, and again, it was lack of oxygen. He would just be kind of not there sometimes, and I was getting very concerned about it. So I got in touch with Dr. Lewis at Fairmont Hospital, and we got Ed over there, and of course, he didn't have enough oxygen. He was there for a while, they were doing some testing on him. They did a cardiac catheterization to see what lack of oxygen—the effect that the lack of oxygen had on his heart, so one side of his heart apparently had been affected by this.

Iron Lung Again

Roberts: He then had an episode of kidney stones that were sending him to severe pain and into shock, and he almost died. They again put him back in an iron lung that for him was a crushing disappointment. He had spent two or three years of his life trying to get out of this—being weaned away from the iron lung, as they said, and all of a sudden he was put back in it.

It was the saving of his physical life and also his emotional life. Once he got over the shock of being put back, he was so much more comfortable. He could let the machine breathe. He didn't have to worry about not having enough air. So he began to improve rapidly after that.

So after that trip, because he made two or three trips to Fairmont during that period, and shortly after that, they sent an iron lung to the house. Randy came home from nursery school and saw this big machine—he had seen Ed in an iron lung at Fairmont, but he saw this big machine in the dining room, and he freaked. He had to go up for his nap, and he made me promise I wouldn't turn it on, because he was sure that that iron lung was going to come up to the bedroom and get him. It was so big, and looked like a train or something.

But Randy had a great sensitivity to noise, and for someone who later turned out to be a jazz drummer, he—[laughs]. But that kind of noise was something he didn't want. Besides, seeing an iron lung in the hospital, which he had certainly done, and seeing one in the dining room of his home was quite a different set-up, and the presence loomed much larger.

O'Hara: They are big things.

Roberts: Yes.
**Settling into a Family Routine**

Roberts: So after he was in the lung, his health improved dramatically, and from then on, he would be in the lung, or he would be on his bed. The family centered around the dining room. Verne came home from work. I would have dinner ready. Ron would be home from high school. The younger kids would be there, and we gathered around Ed's--because that's where the television was. We'd watch television, eat dinner, the cat would be up on the bed next to Ed, trying to grab some food if it could before it got into Ed's mouth, if it was something the cat wanted. And our family life was pretty well centered around Ed's schedule and around what he was doing.

Verne went to work, and I did the things I needed to do. Mrs. Hibnet came in four days a week, a wonderful old country woman, and who could be there. I could go off to nursery school, I could go shopping, during those four hours, that was just great. And then in the evenings, I would often go and visit my friends and drink coffee after Verne was home, and my friends and I would talk and do craft things or whatever we were doing, and that was great. So life kind of settled down.

Another neat thing was Verne could awaken in the night if Ed was calling. He'd hear Ed, Verne would get up and go and fix whatever it was. At first with that cuirasse, it was adjusting the pads on it, and Verne could go back, get in bed, and be instantly asleep. Where for me, to be awakened in the night meant I had to go through kind of a whole routine. I just don't drop off to sleep. I always read, even now, even if it's three minutes, I have to do some kind of intermediary thing to let go and drop off to sleep.

So that worked very well, because Verne could get up in the night, and then he still got his sleep. Ed very often slept pretty well through the night too. It had to be something that was really bothering him to awaken him. So that made our lives a lot more tolerable.

So after we ate our dinner and the kids did homework or whatever they needed to do, or went out to play, then Verne and I would give Ed a bath in the bathtub. That meant carrying him into the bathroom and putting him in the tub, and bathing him, and then carrying him off and putting him back in bed and drying him off. But that got to be a routine, and we just followed that routine.

O'Hara: How about the other kids? Were they helpful, the little ones?
Roberts: They all learned to help, and I think something that gets so overlooked when Ed gives talks or I give talks, is the help that the family provided. The attendant help was all within our family. I've often thought if somebody, if a member of a family has to have polio or to have something like this happen, it better be the eldest one, because the younger ones as they come along can grow up and help. And that's what happened with each one of them. They took a turn helping.

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O'Hara: This is Zona Roberts re-speaking the second side of tape 4, because of a defective tape. But this is, however, tape 6.

And how long was it between the onset of polio and the delivery of the iron lung at your house? Two or three years?

Roberts: Yes.

Longer than a year and a half. He was nine months at Children's, nine months at San Mateo County, and then home for a while before I noticed those lumps on his face that were due to lack of oxygen—he just was kind of drifting off and not—just kind of not there. He came home from Children's Hospital in a chest cuirasse—a chest respirator.

That's when I heard about Leon Lewis and Fairmont Hospital as being the rehab place of note, and getting over there and meeting Leon Lewis was just wonderful. He was very helpful.

He was the first one who kind of included the family in things. He had me come to conferences when he met with other doctors, when things were being decided as to what to do, and it was a very good feeling. He was quite a humanitarian; he was a man who was revered, as he should have been. It was on one of Ed's visits to Fairmont Hospital that Ed went into shock from kidney stones and was put back into an iron lung.

Ron of course was going on through high school, was having to make his own friends, that he had counted on earlier in his life for Ed to do, and he was developing his own friendships and playing sports, and studying, and developing his friendship with Louie Haas, who is still his very good friend. Louie is now a lawyer in San Francisco. But they went through high school and went to Berkeley together. Then in fact, Ron was thinking about joining a Jewish fraternity with Louie for a while. Then Louie went on to Stanford Law School when Ron went into the Navy Air Corps.
I was doing some PTA work and visiting with my friends, and Verne was working at Southern Pacific round house in San Francisco, South City. The effect of polio on the men at his work, Verne would turn to them to try to help develop things that Ed needed, whether it was how you'd make a book rack stand up, and how the mouth wand--I guess they talked about page turners, and they'd talk about things that he would need. Verne kind of liked that. It gave him a very sympathetic in with the men, because the men were very sympathetic to the fact of what had happened to Ed. Verne liked that; they were very kind to him, and considerate.

Ron was playing sports. He was playing tennis and basketball. He wasn't so crazy about baseball, but they were playing baseball. One day, I got a call from a local sporting goods store on Burlingame Avenue, and they had picked up Ron for trying to steal a baseball mitt. I was shocked. I didn't think that he would do that. But he did. He tried it, and he got caught, thank goodness. [laughs] But it was very shocking, and I was startled.

When Verne came home from work--as I say, I don't remember whether I went up to the sporting goods store to get Ron and to talk to the--I don't think they held Ron. I'm not sure. But anyway, I went up to talk to the people, and they were pissed, naturally, that this happened. So I wanted to know from Ron why this had happened. Part of it was that he felt that he wasn't getting the attention in the family that he needed to be having, and also, he didn't like to play baseball much, but he did like to have the mitt, and he didn't really want to save his money and pay for it. So it was--[laughing] It was sort of mixed up, but he thought that would be a good way to do it.

Well, it turned out to be it was a very bad [way] to do it, and we had to deal with that and talk to him, and see that maybe he got a little more attention than he'd been having. [tape interruption]

Randy was the youngest, and he was going to nursery school. Mark had started at Washington School around the corner from our house on Bloomfield. Mark loved the attention and the publicity, because kids from high school would come over.
Roberts: Ed was going to Burlingame High School at this time, on the home-to-school hookup. During his senior year, I thought that it would be a very good idea for him to visit one class each week. With great reluctance, he agreed to do it. He was terrified of being seen by the students as someone sitting in his wheelchair, this tall, skinny guy who had been an athlete, and it was a whole different way for him to go out.

The classes had come to visit, each class would come once during their semester, each class that he had on the home-to-school hookup would come and visit him. They dedicated the yearbook to him one year, and they raised money to get him—not a tape recorder, a record player, I think. But they would take him on as a project in some of the classes. But the coming to visit, so they could see where this voice was coming from, because some had been his friends and some hadn't, because Burlingame High School pulled in from all of the elementary schools in Burlingame.

But his health was a little better by that time. He was in the lung, and he had a little more strength and energy, and he could stay awake. So I would take him over to high school once a week. I remember those first trips going to school, where--this was during his senior year, and Ron's senior year. By this time, they were in the same class, because of Ed's delay in his schooling. He was very nervous. I'd get him in his corset and get him dressed, and get the neighbor next door to help get him in the car, and we'd go over there, and I'd set up the wheelchair. Sometimes kids would help and get him to the classes, and then he'd spend an hour in the classes. His nose would run, because it turned out later he had polyps in his nose that we didn't know anything about, but he also had sort of allergies.

It was very hard for him, because he didn't want to ask anybody to wipe his face off or wipe his nose. But the kids were good, and kind of gathered around, those who remembered him, and those who liked Ron, and those who liked Ed and remembered him. He began to make new friends there. He was kind of an attraction in some ways, and as he said, then he gradually got used to being stared at, and that it wasn't so bad. He could either take it as something evil or something good, and he decided that it could work all right.

Little by little, he lost some of his feeling of strangeness and going back in a different way to be with his brother's peer
group. Verne had taken him to the football field sometimes, and he would sit and watch the players play football, and then he would write for the school newspaper, write a sports column.

Mark liked the publicity, he liked the friends coming and the kids coming, and that seemed to be fun for him. And then of course, with his school, I had been active in the co-op nursery school, and also then was doing some things at Washington School. With Mrs. Hibner coming the four hours a day, five days a week, I could get out and shop and could go do the co-op nursery school still with Randy, and do things with Mark. And I also was doing some things at Burlingame High School.

And I had a chance in the evening to visit my friends, because Verne came home from work quite early. He went to work early and came home by four-thirty. So we had dinner early; we always had dinner about five. Then very often, about eight or nine I would go and visit some of my women friends, and we'd smoke and drink coffee and talk and gossip and just have a--if we weren't doing projects of some kind or other, we were visiting.

We still get together, but it's about once a month, and we don't--well, I don't drink coffee, and none of us smoke any more, but we still do gossip.

O'Hara: Still once a month?

Roberts: Yes.

O'Hara: Oh, excellent.

Roberts: Yes, that Burlingame group, we're still in touch with each other.

O'Hara: That's great.

Roberts: Yes, it is nice. Because we were friends over so many years now that there's so much we don't need to explain.

**Effect of Ed's Polio on Zona's Mother**

Roberts: But the effect on the family, the effect on my mother of having had this polio in the family, to her it was a great disaster. She was caught in her compassion and in her fright, and with her own sort of disability, to feel that this was exposing--somehow, some sort of defect in the family was exposed, that everyone could see. About several months after Ed had polio, she came to
the house and asked me how I could stand it, to have been such a bad mother, that this happened to Ed.

She didn't believe in viruses, nor in diseases, other than things that are self-caused. Her statement to me was shocking. I couldn't respond to it, but it hung as a question in my mind for a long time. Not that I believed I had caused it, but that how she could ask the question and really expect an answer.

Later, one answer came to me that I thought, Oh, I wish I had been able to think fast enough to say to her, "Well, I guess I felt the same way about this having happened to Ed as you must have felt when I had diphtheria and almost died." But that, as I say, came later. But it helped me to have an answer. And then many years later, I was talking about this to someone, and they said, "Well, one other answer was, 'That really hurt a lot when you said that.'" Both of those things are good responses that are in my repertoire now. I hope never to use them again, but they are. But it's helpful to have an answer to things. She felt she caused the illnesses by having bad thoughts.

I was very glad that she didn't have much money for several reasons. One is she would have hired probably Oral Roberts, or someone like that, who was a faith healer, to come and lay his hands on Ed. She had some kind of psychic feelings about things. She would have done that, and she tried, I think, to do that, but luckily it didn't work.

O'Hara: That's not a relation, is it [Oral Roberts]?

Roberts: No, thank goodness. But she did show up in the middle of the night one night when Ed was in the dining room, and she came in. It was one of her craziest times. She drove down--she was living in Palo Alto--Steve, her husband, was still alive--she drove down and came in the front door we didn't lock in those days--we did shortly after that, but that night, it was unlocked. She walked in and sat next to Ed.

Verne had rigged up an emesis basin right next to Ed's head, because he had so much phlegm all the time from, as it turned out, these polyps in his nose, but it was constant, so he needed to spit this out, so they arranged an emesis basin. Nada was beside Ed anointing him with the spit from his spit basin, anointing his head with that, and talking to him. I had not awakened to her visit, but Verne had. Verne went in and talked with her, and then she left.
Verne wasn't alarmed at all by her visit, and I was just totally alarmed. I did not like it. Because I realized she could have just [as] easily smothered him, all in the name of doing him a favor. She was really out of it for a while. In fact, it was an impending visit from her mother that really ticked her off for a while. Steve was very good for her during those times. He would take her out to one of the parks someplace near, and she would paint. So she recovered from that episode. But there was always this underlying schizy-business going on with her. Cause and effect for her were entirely different than they are for me. Luckily for me, but not for her. So it must have been hard.

**Fighting for Ed's Graduation from High School**

Roberts: Where was I when I went off on that? Oh, Ed's high school graduation, and his going once a week to high school. He was gradually feeling a little more confident about himself in public, and being pushed around in this kind of high-backed push chair, that I kind of learned how to hide behind. I could be behind him pushing, and you could hardly see me, maybe the top of my head. So I'd front him.

It came time for graduation, and I went to see one of his counselors about going through the record to see that he had completed all his graduation requirements. By this time, he was twenty, and Ron was eighteen. This was Ron's graduating class.

The counselor decided, because Ed had not had P.E. nor driver education, that he should stay another year. Well, I still am sort of in awe as I say this. That it really could happen that somebody would say that, for a guy who had been an athlete and who would have taken P.E. and driver education over anything else in school at one point, but who had to gradually come to realize he had a mind. Although he didn't learn to read until he was in the fifth grade, he was very bright. Mrs. Smith showed Ed how to read and how to put reading in a place where he was comfortable and not just struggling through the material.

So here he was, having completed Spanish and math and science and the things he needed, and this counselor said he should spend another year. Well, I didn't think so, and I went to the principal, Richard Williams, and said, "This is what the counselor said."
He said, "Well, I think she's right." He was the supportive principal to his counselor, and said, "I think that's a good idea, that he spend another year." I said I didn't think so.

So I went to the superintendent's office, and they sent over an assistant superintendent to the house who stood beside Ed's bed and said, "Yes, I think that's a good idea. They know what they're doing. Another year is not going to be so bad for you. And in fact, Ed, you wouldn't like to have a cheap diploma, would you?"

At which point I felt my ire rising right--my spine got very straight. I thought this man was one of the prominent fools of the world. Not only was he mistaken, but he was dumb. And to be able to stand there and say that to Ed was, I just thought, absolutely outrageous. I felt my ire rising and I said, "No, I will take him and prop him up behind the wheel of a car. Would that satisfy the requirements?" It was so outrageous that they could even think of such a thing.

So then I called my friend Mimi Haas, who was Louie Haas' mother. We had become friends because our kids became friends, and she was on the school board at that time. We had gotten together, our kids would play poker sometimes after schools and on Saturday, and they had a little gambling group of friends, and we thought this was going a little bit too far, and needed to be challenged and curbed. So we got together and composed a wonderful letter. We sent it to the boys, about how they should curb the gambling, that it was not the worst thing in the world to be doing, but they better proceed with caution, if at all.

O'Hara: Which of the boys was involved?

Roberts: This was Ron, and Louie. So Mimi and I--I was very fond of Mimi. She's kind of like a sister feeling. Some people you just meet and you're attracted to, as Ron was to Louie, I was to his mother.

So I called Mimi and I said, "This is what they're saying. Please get your book out and let's go through the requirements and see if Ed indeed has met the requirements other than P.E. and driver education."

Mimi said, "Indeed, he's met all the requirements except those two things, and this sounds really strange to me that they would even talk that way."

So then I went to see Tom Reynolds, who was the superintendent of schools for San Mateo County. Tom Reynolds'
wife had had their daughter Margie at the same time as I had Ed. We shared a hospital ward at Mills Memorial Hospital in 1939. They lived down the street from us. I told Tom what had been going on, and he said, "You know, some people can't see past the end of their nose. I think that this really isn't a problem." And to Tom, it was just simple. That was no problem. He knew Ed, he knew the family, he knew--we weren't close friends, but we just knew of each other, and certainly nodding acquaintanceships. His wife also worked in PTA. We got to know people that way.

The school board meeting--in the meantime I had talked to teachers at school who had had Ed for classes and said, "This is what's going on, I would like to have your support. If you feel like going to the board meeting with me, I would appreciate that." So the night of the board meeting, I got all geared up to go and have this fight, which I was not very good at--I could do public speaking, and I could do some of those things, but I wasn't good at public fighting. That was very hard for me.

O'Hara: You had only had one fight in your life.

Roberts: Right! Really, in that way. I'm sure Verne and I had had some, but not that kind of confrontational thing that's a public sort of thing, where you take a stand and have opposition that you have to contend with, and think on your feet. That was difficult.

So I went to the board meeting, and at the door of the school district office stood the man who had come to the house, the assistant superintendent, who greeted me, put out his hand, "Mrs. Roberts, I'm so glad to see you, and we're all so very proud of your wonderful son." I thought, Someone has gotten to this fool. [laughs] He had a smile on his face, and I kind of looked at him and grunted. I was so startled to begin with; I would have expected something else. But I began to relax a little bit at that moment.

Went into the meeting, and they went through the business of the meeting, and some of the teachers had shown up in support of Ed. They got through a lot of business, and they got to the part of granting Ed a diploma even though he hadn't had driver education and P.E. They just said something about how proud they were of the work he'd done, and what a marvelous record he had, and that certainly his diploma was granted.

At that point, I stood up to say thank you very much to the board, and I burst into tears instead. My voice kind of disappeared. I didn't sob audibly, but I had to sit down rapidly, because [laughs] the fight turned out to be a non-fight.
That was one thing that Ed was privy, how I would rant and rave in front of him with my feelings about these people and their stances. He said later to an author that I was a union organizer. I was certainly pro-union. I watched my husband and his father working on the railroad, and if the unions hadn't come on, these men worked twelve, fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. When Verne went to work there, there was a union in effect. They got paid a little better, and their hours were in keeping with what was normal human working hours. But I certainly had never been a union organizer. I was beginning to learn to go to bat for various causes. I had done some at the nursery school, and some through the PTAs, but not in any really personal way.

But Ed, in seeing that kind of battle, it was the beginning for him of seeing that things could be challenged and could change.

O'Hara: Very important.

Roberts: Yes. [tape interruption]

So Ed graduated with his class--well, with Ron's class. Ron went off to Berkeley after working at the SP for the summer. Verne got him a job at the Southern Pacific, and I've forgotten what he did. Verne was very worried during the summer that Ron was going to earn money, and he wouldn't want to go on to college, after he got the feeling of earning money. Ron, au contraire, [laughs] wanted nothing more than to get out and go to college. Working in that factory and the round house wasn't something he wanted to spend his life doing.

So he had applied to Berkeley, had been accepted. He was a good student. He went over to Berkeley in the fall.

Ed went to College of San Mateo.

O'Hara: Can we back up just a minute?

Roberts: Back to the graduation, yes. For the graduation ceremony that was at the San Mateo High School auditorium, Ed was given an award by--I'm not sure what group it was, the Soroptomists or--the Soroptomists did the home-school hook up, and this was another group, gave him an award, and there was a picture in the paper with us standing there, Ron holding the award next to Ed.

As they received their diplomas, Ed was wheeled across the stage by one of the other students in the class to get his, and I was sitting in the group with tears running down my eyes. It's
kind of an emotional response, because a lot of people had followed Ed's career via newspaper and friends and talk about it, so it was an emotional moment. I had a big party at the house, and invited a lot of my friends.

I seem to remember I got drunk. I had discovered scotch, that scotch would be something that--because I don't have a very good tolerance that hard liquor, and I thought that maybe scotch wouldn't make me throw up if I had some. [laughing] But I had enough--drank some scotch and wound up throwing up. It made me dizzy, too, it was terrible. I had made all the enchiladas, and cut the fruit, and done all of this food, and made a big cake and stuff for the party, for the celebration, and then got sick. But that was a good experience for me too.

But it was a good party, all in all. My friends were there. It was kind of the end of an era.
Attending College of San Mateo

Roberts: Ed went to College of San Mateo. I would take him to classes. Phil Morse, who was also in the Unitarian church, was an administrator at the college. His wife, Connie Morse had been active in the nursery school for a while, and then in the Unitarian church. And Phil was Ed's first advisor. He helped Ed plan the courses that he should take. He went on with Spanish and English, and I think he started with two classes.

Meeting Jean Wirth

Roberts: For the second semester, Phil said to us, "I think you need to meet this new teacher, Jean Wirth. You can have her for English for this next semester. She's a new teacher here. When they had discussions about the loyalty oath, she was the only teacher who came into the office to get a copy of the whole loyalty oath, because she wanted her classes to read the whole thing, not just excerpts from it, and know what it was all about. She seems like a good person."

Well, Phil proved to be quite true, because in taking Ed to both Maureen Marsh's Spanish class and then to Jean Wirth's class, I would drive onto campus close to the building--the college was on three campuses at that point. We had a station wagon, and I'd drive Ed as close as I could, and then get out the fold-down wheelchair from the back, and then get a student to help me lift him. We soon learned not to ask the athletic types, because the football types are, "Here, there, young woman, I will help you with this crippled son of yours," and they would try to do the whole thing themselves, which was just disastrous. So we
had to pick on people who looked like they could listen to instruction and not want to be rescuers and take over. Because Ed needed to be lifted behind his head, under his back, and support his arms, and under his butt and under his knees, so it takes a four-arm kind of thing. It still does. He does have a few attendants now who can lift him all at once, and even as heavy as he is now. It's amazing. And he also uses a Hoyer lift now, and he didn't then. He was pretty thin.

O'Hara: We all were.

Roberts: Yes. [laughter] Me too.

So he would be lifted into his chair, and then pushed, and then helped up the stairs. When he took a science class at the Baldwin campus, it was up a long flight of stairs. But the kids were very good about helping pull the chair up the different steps. He would get into the classes, and then students would take notes for him, or take carbon and give him copies of their notes. He would bring home the assignments.

Zona and Jean Become Friends ##

Roberts: Ed was at College of San Mateo. I would drive him up to classes. I was meeting Jean Wirth. I invited Jean to come to the house at the end of the semester--this was the summertime--and she came. She had gone to Mills College first before she went to UC Berkeley to get her master's in literature. She wasn't sure whether to wear her white gloves and her hat or not, but that was kind of the thing she had to think about, visiting a family in Burlingame. She didn't realize our house was a little different than a lot of people's homes. [laughs]

But she and Ed--Jean is six foot five, and was six foot five from the time she was twelve years old. I learned this later. She knew what it was to be different, and had been through so many experiences herself just with her height. Jean's very bright, and she liked the fact that Ed was bright too, and could grasp ideas and concepts.

I would write papers for Ed. He would dictate, and I would write whatever the assignment was. She said she liked my handwriting, because it was not totally uniform. It was different, and she thought I would be an interesting person to get to know. [laughs] And I heard about that later.
Jean showed up at the house as I was fixing lunch to be eaten out in the back yard. I had Ed on a chaise out in the yard. I had two or three other young kids there. Harriet Zimmerman had had to go into the hospital and I took care of her kids that day. Jean arrived and there were bicycles in the living room, and we went through the house out into the back yard. I had made blintzes and fixed a good lunch.

It was quite different than she expected, and we became very fast friends. She got to know Verne. She would go out in the boat fishing with Verne sometimes. Verne would put his aluminum boat on top of the station wagon and go off to the bay after work. Sometimes with a friend, and with some beer, in hopes of getting a striped bass for dinner. He didn't like to eat fish, but he sure liked bringing them home. In those days, you could eat fish that came out of the bay.

And I understand from somebody that that's beginning to happen again, that the bay is less polluted than it was for many years.

O'Hara: Great.

Roberts: So Jean kind of became a member of our extended family. She would play bridge with us in the evenings sometimes. That was something that Verne and I did with friends. I played bridge sometimes with other women friends, but the two of us liked to play bridge together. And it was a good thing to do, because we could be at home, being aware of the kids and what was happening, but still have a little recreation to ourselves.

Jean Advises Ed to Attend UC Berkeley

Roberts: She was the advisor to the honor society, and just gradually took on more duties at College of San Mateo. Ed was ready to graduate from College of San Mateo and we were sitting in Jean's office as she was his advisor. We were sitting in her office, and she asked Ed where he was planning on going when he was through with College of San Mateo. I was sitting there thinking, Going? He's had two years; he did the two years in three years. He's getting his AA degree, and gosh, I think that's great. What else?

Ed said right away, "I'm thinking about going to UCLA."

Jean said, "Why UCLA?"
He said, "Because they had a program for veterans there, and they have made an accessible campus. Parts of the campus are accessible for people in wheelchairs."

She said, "Oh. Well, that's great, but you're a fine political science major, and Berkeley is the place you need to be. It's a better degree, they have a very good political science department. UCB is not a commuter campus the way UCLA is. University of California at Berkeley is situated right in the center of town, and there are stores and streets all around, and there are theaters and stores--" Now, she didn't say all of that, but she just said, "It's not a commuter campus."

**Ed Is Denied Services by Department of Rehabilitation**

Roberts: That proved to be one of the reasons why our beginning PSDP, as it was known in those days, the Physically Disabled Students' Program, was so successful, because the students coming in could go to stores, go to theaters, and do things for themselves, or with an attendant, things that they had never been able to do before, and it was marvelous. [tape interruption]

So I was sitting then listening to this conversation going on about Ed's future, and it just amazed me. I was completely taken by surprise. The few times I would give Ed articles about other colleges, about other people with disabilities and what they were doing, he would say, "I don't want to read that; I've seen enough of those people. I'm not going to be with other crips." I don't even know if he used the word "crips" in those years. He said, "I've seen enough of them in the hospitals. I want to do other things."

Here he was talking, and he'd read about the veterans. So his college education was proceeding, even the few hours he spent away from home and at school, talking with other students and being in his classes.

His graduation then was presenting a problem, a different type of problem than the high school graduation. As I said, he went to CSM for three years and completed his work there. He applied to the Department of Rehabilitation for help in going on to school, and they had done some testing with him when he was at Fairmont years before. They denied his request for assistance because he was too disabled, and they said he was too aggressive, that there was something in the testing when he was sixteen that said he was too something and he was too aggressive. I remember
the aggressive part, because I was very surprised about that. He didn't seem too aggressive to me. In ways, he is more aggressive now than he's ever been, but then he wasn't so aggressive.

But they did some more testing, and then there was a conference at CSM when Ed had applied to Berkeley and was accepted there. It was as to how that was going to get paid for. But in those days, the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, as it was known, was for retraining people who had lost a finger or part of an arm or became blind or something, retraining people who were already in the work field. So to see someone like Ed who hadn't been in the work field and was paralyzed neck down was just really more than they could think they needed to deal with. He wasn't their average client.

They did some more testing with him, and then Jean and Phil Morse met with one of the division directors of Rehab. I was not in that meeting, nor was Ed, but Jean and Phil had in front of them Ed's record at CSM, and they [doctor personnel] said that he was not college material. Jean and Phil thought otherwise, and his record proved otherwise.

He was again not the usual student that they had helped, and they didn't see how they could justify spending money on his college education.

Out of that came some kind of--they didn't close the case, but they were going to deny him further help. He had been accepted at Berkeley, and in filling out his application, I laughed and said, "You know, there's nothing on this form about your disability. They'll only think--" and I think he was eighty-five or ninety pounds or something at that point--"they'll only think that you forgot the one in front of whatever this poundage was. So we'll see." So he was accepted at Berkeley.

Then we went over to see where he was going to live. We also had a party for his College of San Mateo graduation. That was a nice event.

Meeting with Arleigh Williams, Dean of Men, UCB

Roberts: Jean Wirth, Phil Morse, and I, and Ed, went to Berkeley to see where he was going to live, and where he would be on the campus. We went into the administration building, and they were quite surprised to see us, had no idea anything about Ed's disability, and said this wouldn't work because the campus was too hilly and
buildings were too far apart, and that this would not be a good place for him to be.

They sent us to see—who was the dean of men?

O'Hara: Arleigh Williams.

Roberts: Arleigh Williams, yes. Arleigh said this was not a good campus for him to be on.

O'Hara: Did you all go together into Sproul Hall?

Roberts: Yes.

O'Hara: Including Ed? It was accessible at that time?

Roberts: Yes, Ed was there. He was still in a push chair, and we had come over to Berkeley to look around.

O'Hara: Was he taken up the steps, or was the back entrance accessible at that time?

Roberts: Susan, I don't remember. I don't remember how we got in there. I remember pushing up the hill--

O'Hara: He doesn't remember either, which is interesting.

Roberts: I think it was more about—I had been on campus, because I'd come over to visit Ron. Ron was in Sigma Chi fraternity for a while, and I would come over and visit him. I went to a game over here, and I had done a few things like that, so I had been on campus, but I'm not sure I'd been in the administration building. I remember pushing up the hill, because after Arleigh Williams—in fact, Arleigh sent us to see Henry Bruyn at Cowell Hospital, saying that he would explain why this would not be a good place for Ed to be.

Oh, first we went to a dorm, that was it. They sent us to look at the dorms. They told us that iron lungs would not fit in the dorm rooms, and those were shared rooms then.

Then Phil said, "Oh, International House! That's where I lived." Phil Morse's parents had been missionaries in China, and when he came here, he lived at I-House. We went to I-House and bumped upstairs right up the front. But don't forget, Ed weighed about eighty-five or ninety pounds, and he was in this very lightweight push chair, and you just had to be sure you didn't lift it by the arms, because the arms came out. [laughter]

Roberts: Right. [laughter] There it goes again. So accepting help, and learning how to guide it--those are all learning experiences, all right.

So we went into I-House and met with a woman who managed it, and she kind of backed up behind her desk, because here we were, Phil and I kind of normal sized and looking sort of average, Jean Wirth at six foot five, and Ed in his push chair, and I guess we were sort of a sight. But this poor woman, the look on her face was, "God, this can't be happening to me! Not while I'm on duty!" And she explained why he couldn't live there.

Jean and I knew what was going on with a lot of these reactions, and Phil--it was like it came as a surprise to Phil. Phil didn't expect this kind of--because he knew Jean, and he knew Ed, and he didn't expect this kind of reaction to out-of-the-normal sorts of experiences. So he was kind of surprised by some of these things.

Meeting with Henry Bruyn, Medical Director, Cowell Hospital

Roberts: Then we went over to Cowell Hospital, and we went up to the third floor. That's where Henry's office was, on the third floor. There were elevators. We must have pushed up there. Anyway, there was Henry Bruyn, sitting at his desk, and we flanked the desk: Jean, Ed, Phil, and I. We talked to Henry.

Henry had dealt with post-polios, and dealt with polio during the epidemic. He'd been a doctor in some of the hospitals. In fact, they may have met during Ed's time at Fairmont or something like that. But Henry said to the effect, "You people who were in the polio epidemic are getting to be of college age now, and you haven't had a chance to go to college, and you really should have that chance. It's getting to be time to do that. This is a student-supported health center, so it can't cost the students any money for you to go to school here, or to live in Cowell. So we'd have to figure out a way for this to be paid for, but I think you could live in Cowell Hospital."

Well! Just those few words from Henry Bruyn opened up a whole door for us that had been seemingly closed. How we were going to do this, or how we were going to get there, I didn't
know. But with those words from Henry Bruyn, things began to happen.

**Ed and Zona Move into Cowell Hospital**

Roberts: We went back to our various abodes and began the plan for how Ed was going to be in Cal, how it was going to be paid for. Rehab had some visits here and there. Contacted people in New York. When Ed finally got over and was moving in, I stayed a week that first September when we moved over there, and I stayed in his room with him, because the nurses were terrified. Henry Bruyn had been showing them how to operate an iron lung by pulling the lever on the back that makes the bellows go in and out, in case the power would go out. They had an operating room hookup in case the power went out, but they didn't have a generator for the rooms. Mr. Ross, I've forgotten his first name, called us.

O'Hara: Carl.

Roberts: Carl Ross, yes. Thank you. He wanted the room that Ed was going to live in to be hooked up to a generator. He said that would be the thing that would make it possible or impossible for Ed to be there. We had said that Ed can breathe on his own; he'd learned what they call glossopharyngal breathing or frog breathing, by gulping air. He could do that. Because at this point, he was in the respirator at night, but only at night, and he didn't have any auxiliary respirators. He would go to class and be out of the respirator. When he went all through College of San Mateo, he was out of the respirator. When he was going to Cal, he started that way too, but would spend the nights in the iron lung.

The nurses were apprehensive of Ed's moving in. We did overcome that. Oh, I told Carl Ross that Ed had been home all this time, we didn't have a generator at home, and there had been a few power outages, but not for very long, and that it had really never been a problem. So somehow, that was overcome, and I'm not exactly sure why.

But during that first week I was there, Miss Butcher, Catherine Butcher, came in. She was the Rehab counselor. She greeted us and asked, "What can I do for you? What do you need?" And again, it was kind of like Henry Bruyn's remark, "This should happen, you're getting to be of the age to go to college." And here's Catherine Butcher saying, "What can I do for you, what do you need, how can I help?" That was providing assistance in, of
course, room and board and tuition and books, and also some secretarial help, because Ed would be over here, and I was over there in Burlingame.

Ron was on campus and came in once in a while to help, but after that first week of my staying in the room. I wasn't a nurse, and they felt that if I could do things that helped Ed get—-to feed him, and bathe him, and dress him, and get him up in the wheelchair with a little help from one of the orderlies, that they certainly could do that too. Didn't seem to be any great panic about doing this kind of thing.

At the end of the week, I went home. Henry Bruyn had a young black man he was helping through school, and he got him a job as one of Ed's attendants. This was an ill-chosen man to be an attendant. Attendant work wasn't really the thing that he liked doing, so it was not a very satisfactory thing. About the time of one of Ed's first exams, the guy quit, or even before that. Ed said something about, "Oh, boy," about something or other, and the guy thought he was calling him a boy, and it was just unfortunate. It was too bad. He was not the right attendant. But Henry was trying to do a good thing and get this guy a job. It could have worked, but it didn't.

Ed was interviewing other people, getting attendants, and he did that before I left, so he had some people lined up before I left.

O'Hara: How did he find people? Do you remember?

Roberts: The word went out, and through student placement, and through I think some of the orderlies on the floor, and through the nurses, and through Henry calling people and talking to people. I don't know if Ron asked people about it or not. I'm not sure that he did. But Ron would come by and fill in when he could, and sometimes he would be the one to take Ed to class if he needed to, or feed him, or come up and have food himself. Ed began to order large amounts of food, and Ron got a lot of his food that way, off of Ed's tray, and an extra tray. [laughs] That got to be sort of a common practice.

But it was very helpful having Ron there. It was great. That was just kind of a little safety valve for knowing that Ed was going to be taken care of.

So when I went home, those things were in place, and it was sink or swim, this was going to work. I thought it would work. I didn't seem to have any doubts about it. But when I came back a month later to visit—we'd talk on the phone and stuff, we got a phone hookup and things for him--but when I came back a month
later, the first thing I was greeted with were some of the nurses who just thought that Ed was the most wonderful thing, and they just greeted me with this kind of warmth and they were relaxed. They had gotten to know him, and things were going well.

So in some ways, it was kind of the right person at the right time. Ed has a great personality for getting to know people and making them feel at ease. He did as a little kid. As a little kid, he was the one who would take the hands of the kids who were crying, the younger kids, and walk them to the store, or take them over to the football field, or be some kind of—he was very compassionate with younger kids, and with other people.

O'Hara: Isn't that interesting.

Roberts: Yes. He could kind of reach out. It was kind of an emotional thing he could reach out and do; it's wonderful. And he had done this with the nurses, and he was friendly and interested in them, and open to what they'd say and how they would help. That was great. One of the young women nurses was a Chinese woman who said, "Are you related to Alice and Edith Roberts?"

Ed said, "Yes, those are my aunties." They were his grandfather's sisters.

She said, "Well, I'm here in the States because of them, and they taught at my college, and they helped me come over here." They were Seventh-Day Adventists, and Alice and Edith Roberts were Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries in China. When they came back, they were in Mountain View, and they helped several young people come over here and continue their education. This young woman was one of them, and so she felt kind of related to Ed. So that was another nice connection. Helpful. It was great.

Zona Returns Home after a Week

O'Hara: How did you feel, going back home after—and not having Ed there? What was your life like? Or were you still so involved that you didn't have time to—?

Roberts: No, it was quite different. The dining room was empty. Of course, we left the bed and the iron lung there, and there was another iron lung over here for Ed in Berkeley. But our life did change. I think we still ate in that room, because we'd gotten so used to it. So both Ed and Ron were gone at this point. It did change our life considerably.
VII ZONA: FROM BURLINGAME TO BERKELEY

Death of Husband Verne, February, 1964

Roberts: Verne was not very happy with this. Verne died in '64. I've often thought about that as being--I know he had not been feeling well for several months. Even during that summer, he was not feeling well. But as Thanksgiving approached, he was diagnosed with pleurisy. He kept on working. At Christmastime, he was told to stay home. "Man, you're still working? You're supposed to stay home and rest. It takes a long time to get rid of pleurisy."

And on New Year's Eve, I knew that he was more ill than anybody else thought. He was a sick man. He had our friend Eunice drive him to the hospital one day without even telling me, had her drive up to the Southern Pacific hospital, sort of checked himself in, which was totally unlike him. He didn't like to go to the hospital or to doctors. He was going to stay home and get well.

He had Eunice take him up to the hospital, didn't tell me about it. I found out later where he was. They started checking and found--by symptoms, they knew he had cancer, but there were no definite tests at that point. So they kept him there, and I went up to see him. He was very uneasy about my being there. He was to be at the hospital getting well, and that meant he was gone from the house. I had to be home with the kids. So every time I visited him, it was like part of him was glad to see me, and the other part said, "You have to be home. I can't be; you have to be there. You can't abandon the boys." It was a very strange thing. That, and the fact that he did not want to talk about having cancer.

They did a little lung biopsy, and that's when they got the first lung cancer tissue. I met one of the young doctors who said to me, "It's time to get your house in order," on one of my
visits up. That startled me, because that said, "This is not going to be something that we can do much about." They had ordered a P-39, I think they called it, radioactive fluid that they were going to bathe the outside of his lungs in that would make the cancer retreat for a while. It wouldn't cure him, but it would give him more comfort for a while.

By the time that came, his lungs had adhered to his pleural cavity, and they couldn't use it. He died shortly thereafter. He died on February 15 in '64, and Ed had had polio in February. For a long time, Valentine's Day to me had heavy implications. Not a good time.

O'Hara: Did he stay in the hospital?

Roberts: He stayed in the hospital. He never asked--I met with Dr. Patterson, who was in charge of that ward, and I said, "He's got to be told what he has." Dr. Patterson convinced me that he had a perfect right not to be told. He said, "Look around this room at all these people here. They come in and out, and you never use the word cancer, and they never ask about what's going to happen. They have a right to not be told. We have everyone set up to tell Verne. All he has to say is either, 'What do I have?', 'Is it cancer?', or 'What's happening?' and we'll tell him exactly. But if he doesn't ask those questions, he has a right not to have this put upon him."

So that made it very hard, and particularly when they said they were going to use this P-38 or P-39, or whatever it was, and that when they did that, if they bathed his lungs in that, the symptoms would retreat for a while. His appetite would pick up, he would come home for maybe a month or two, and then when the cancer came back, it would be hard and fast.

Well, I had such a horror of his being at home with Mark and Randy and the neighbors all knowing that he had cancer and was dying, and his pretending not to know--part of him had to know. When he came out from under the anesthetic when they'd done the biopsy, he had a different look on his face. It was like he had heard something under the anesthetic. It was like he knew something, but he wasn't going to talk about it, because he still had this theory that his job was to be there and get well; my job was to be at home with the kids.

Jean Wirth went up with me one day to visit him, and I took Mark with me. Randy had a terrible time going into the hospital. He and his father were quite close. I don't know if Randy was there or not. I remember Mark was there at the end of the bed. Verne looked up, opened his eyes, and saw Mark at the end of the
bed with tears coming down his face, and said to me, "What did you hit him for?" It was just--again, there had to be another reason for Mark to have tears. He just couldn't let that in, that this was for him.

So he died. He was sitting up, it was a Saturday, and he was sitting up, they were feeding him his lunch, and he just dropped dead. Apparently, the cancer came up his throat and hit the brain. It just knocked him out like that, which was just a blessing. It was shocking. The cancer they found in many parts of his body when he died.

I called Ron and he came over. They called me from the hospital, and then I called Ron, and then went up to the hospital, because I wanted to see Verne's body. There it was.

Ed was just going to take an LSAT. In fact, he took an LSAT I guess the next week, and did very badly on it. He was thinking about going into law, using his political science and going for a law degree. He said that affected him. Because Verne and Ed had gotten to be quite close through all of the hours they'd spent together, with Verne going to the hospital and helping with the bathing, and at home, too.

But Verne had kind of a family life revolving around Ed's being in the dining room, and the family all together. He knew where I was, he knew where the kids were--he just knew about what was going to happen, he got a routine. And with Ed and Ron gone, things changed around the house. I wanted to do more things, I wanted to go to school or get a job, and I did. I talked about getting a job at the Unitarian church, and I did get a job.

[Interview 5: December 13, 1994] ##

O'Hara: This is December 13, 1994, Zona Roberts, tape seven. Zona, we ended with Verne's death in 1964, and you were looking toward the future.

Roberts: Yes. I was playing the "Moonlight Sonata" a lot during that time. [laughs] Mark and Elizabeth have just been getting a divorce in Oregon, and Mark said something to me the other day about the "Moonlight Sonata." It was ingrained on their memories, because they would come home from school, Mark and Randy, and this was just before Verne's death when he was so ill. I would go to the hospital, and I would come back and sit down at the piano, and I'd get into the "Moonlight Sonata" and play it. It was my kind of transitional time from one life to another.
The kids would come into the house and hear the "Moonlight Sonata" a lot. One time they said they never wanted to hear it again. [laughs] It was a great form of solace to me. I still love it. Every time I hear it, I get little shivers up and down my spine.

**Reflections on Family Life with Verne**

Roberts: I had been very jealous of two things: college and travel, things that I felt I would probably never be able to do. We had taken camping trips with the boys in the summer, because Verne loved to fish, and we would take trips. The first camping trip that we took Ed on, he hated it. He got the closest to asthma that he'd ever had during the night. He had a terrible breathing problem. He'd never had that before, and didn't have it again until he got polio. But he just wheezed, and he was frightened, and he couldn't breathe, and he had to sit up, and I guess he was afraid of the big outdoors. Somehow, it was beyond his ken, and the scope of what he could do, and knew anything about. And exactly what he was terrified of, I really don't know, but it was just the whole thing somehow was too much.

Ron slept through the night, and loved to go fishing with his dad. Ed in the daytime did things and went fishing. He didn't mind too much when he went in the hospital if we would go camping. That was all right with him, we could leave, just as long as we promised not to take him. [laughs] It was like the first time after he had polio, and somebody was going to take him--"Oh, I'd love to get you out on my boat." And Ed said, "My teeth will be so firmly clamped to the edge of the dock, you won't be able to get me on a boat! I wouldn't think of it."

And since then, he's had a couple of trips on boats, several of them that he's enjoyed thoroughly. One of them that we took out on the bay on a friend's boat, and they tied him down in his chair. We got out in the--what do they call that rough patch of water, the Cabbage Patch out there, and the boat was heeling over. I was just--I was terrified, not for me but for him. It just seemed like a scary thing. He was firmly tied down, but it was fascinating.

Women in the PTA and nursery school would talk about their college educations, the friends they made, the things they did, and the travels that they were going to take. That was when I felt my twinge of jealousy and envy. And I never thought I could do it--take trips nor go to college. Verne's salary at the
railroad was enough to keep us fed and clothed. Watching the budget all the time, we could make it, but just barely. Getting car insurance was always a trial—and getting the taxes paid, and other extras.

O'Hara: I don't think I ever asked you what Verne did at the railroad.

Roberts: Oh, he started out as an apprentice. His father had been a machinist, but Verne was interested in things electrical. So he wound up being an electrician, but he worked his way up to it. He first was a journeyman, an apprentice, and then into electrical. When the railroad converted to diesel, he had to study diesel electricity, which he did at home. Then he was a diesel electric man.

He enjoyed it. He liked the friends, he liked the work. He did not want to be a boss in any way. They offered him jobs of foreman several times. He always refused them. He did it once or twice when somebody was on vacation, but he hated it, because it pitted management against the men, and the foreman was right in the middle, a very abrasive role on both sides. You couldn't be friends with the men and friends of management at the same time.

Why this was so difficult, I'm not sure. I think the penuriousness of the company had something to do with it. But somehow, there was this huge division between the men and management, and the foreman was stuck in the middle of that. Verne just refused to do that.

Later I realized—because at first I thought, Well, it's more money, it would be a little more job with responsibility, and a learning opportunity. It took me a few years to realize that he was very smart in not doing that. It would have been more than he—he just didn't want it. It was not a way he wanted to be. So this way, he could come home from work and be there. He wouldn't have to think about what else was going to happen and be in meetings.

Verne didn't like me to work. He didn't want me to get a paying job. He felt if I had a paying job, it meant that he was not a success as a provider, and it was somehow very threatening to his position. I had started at one time going back to college, and dropped that, because that was something he didn't approve of very much either. I was learning shorthand and typing, and I was a terrible typist. [laughs] I never will be a good typist! But shorthand was lots of fun, and Ellen Seamster helped me with shorthand. She was an expert at that. She was Marge Katen's sister and lived around the corner, and she helped
me with my homework. I did that for a while until I became pregnant with Mark, and then I dropped out of school. That settled the family down into another kind of family.

But before Verne died, I had taken in foster kids, because during a time in my life when I had had what I would call now a deep depression, and pulled out of school and was in bed thinking I was having a fever, and that my mother thought maybe I was having tuberculosis or something, but got her attention, and they sent me away. The doctor came to the house, said, "There's nothing wrong with this child, and is there someplace in the country where she could go?" Sent me to Eleanora's house.

And because of the freedom of being with Eleanora and that feeling of being--I was twelve, I guess close to being thirteen--I have a feeling it saved my life. It certainly saved my emotional life, and added to--opened doors for me of kind of feelings of independence and togetherness with myself that were extremely important to me. I felt that I had to give that back in some ways, that if--I had the mistaken belief that if you provided a setting of the kind I'd had with Eleanora, if you provided that to kids in trouble, that that would make their lives complete.

Well, I had a lot to learn. But I did convince Verne that we could take in a boy from Youth Authority, because they were greatly in need of foster homes. We had taken in a few kids along the way, but usually friends' little kids. So we took in our first, Ron Price. Ron came out of Youth Authority. He was a sweet kid in some ways, and had, as most of them do, come from really terrible family situations. Mostly the kids out of Youth Authority can tolerate--they're trying so hard to be good, and not get into trouble, so for about six weeks they can toe the mark.

We only took kids who could go to high school, who were high school material, who had some interest in studies, and got them into Burlingame High School. At about the six-week mark, I learned you could almost count on something blowing up somewhere or other. It would usually be stealing a car or doing some kind of thing like that, because they had felt they'd held that external force together, keeping themselves under control long enough, and they were bursting through that.

And of course, what I didn't realize was, to put a boy who'd had a very hard growing up and gotten into a lot of trouble, and then in some ways, their feeling of being cast out from their families, and put them in with a family with a mother and father
and four sons who were being cared for, was almost like rubbing salt in the wounds for somebody who hadn't had that thing.

But at that time, I thought that was the right thing to do. So Ron went along with us for a while, and then I think he stole a car. I got him out of that one, and at one point he took off with somebody and drove down to L.A., and I flew down there and got him out, and with the help— we had a very good probation officer. He was wonderful, and supported a lot of this. Ron had never been rescued before, so it was a big thing in his life, and it was great.

Something happened in high school, too, in machine shop. He pushed somebody, who got his finger caught in a saw. And exactly whether it was his fault or wasn't, there was an altercation, but that caused a little trouble, and they sued our insurance company.

I remember one Christmas how neat he looked. He was all dressed up, and he was sitting there, and the family was all around. I just looked at him, and I just smiled. I just thought, Oh, boy, this is great. This is what I hoped would happen.

So they were in such dire need of other foster homes that the probation officer asked us to take another one, which we did. We went up to a cabin up in the Sierras, up at Echo Summit, owned by the Aldriches, who loaned it to us for a week. Jean Wirth then picked up Ron Reichert from Youth Authority, because she was coming up with us, to be on her vacation together.

Jean's father was a radiologist and surgeon. He had worked in Los Alamos, and Jean had spent her high school years there. Her father then had devoted his first years of his practice to the government, and then had just started in his private practice, and was just going to earn some money to support his family in a better way, when Jean, who had taken a psychology class, was sitting down next to him and noticed that, in touching his foot, that the nervous reaction wasn't as it should have been.

He had a brain tumor, and died a couple of years after that. Verne would go up to their house to help the mother raise the bed and do things for them, so they got to know him. And when Jean Wirth went up with me to visit Verne in the hospital— He hadn't been able to talk for quite a long time. Jean was describing to her mother Verne's condition, of his looking up and seeing Mark crying and saying, "What did you hit him for," and what he was going through a little bit.
The father spoke and said, "I wish he wouldn't have the pain." Jean and her mother were just kind of stunned into silence, because this man hadn't spoken for a long time. But somehow, in her describing Verne's condition and symptoms to this man, his medical experience came to the front, and it just touched on things that he would have dealt with. That was kind of a touching experience.

When Jean brought Ron Reichert, he was a horse of a different color. He was a kid in deeper trouble. He didn't have the sweetness that Ron Price had. He was just a much tougher kind of kid. The first night that he was there, he convinced Ron that they should steal our station wagon and go off down the hill, and of course, they went over the side of the road, crashed the car, and we had no insurance. I hadn't been able to pay for the insurance. The kids were gone, and then we had to call the local authorities, that these two Youth Authority kids were out roaming the countryside. It was very hard.

But at one point during the early morning hours, Ron Price came back with his face with cuts on it, and he'd broken a tooth out. They had left the car. They were both okay physically—Ron P. had these scrapes and a tooth missing and everything—but he came in and he said, "My mother couldn't take care of me because she has cancer and she's dying." It had been on his mind as to why he didn't have the kind of home life that he should have had as a human being. Then he left the house again. He split.

He got picked up, and the other guy got picked up. Then he had to go back to Youth Authority over that one. Ron Reichert then stayed for a while with us, and he got into it—we had some difficulties with him later. But he stayed around for a while. He was there when Verne died, was at the house.

So Ron Price was sent to Youth Authority then, and I visited him at one time. At one time, he was—they had set off a tear gas bomb, because some kids got into a scuffle, and they set this off, and it exploded in his face and caused some damage to his eyes. That was a very hard time, hard to hear about.

He later came back, and he was at the house for a while. He started glue-sniffing. He did some real brain damage to himself. He used to contact me, every once in a while. One time the kids and I came back to the house, this was after Verne died, and somebody ran out of the house. Ed's gun collection was still in the dining room in this locked cabinet. It turned out he was the one who'd done it. He'd broke in and stole these guns, and gave them to some other people. Some other people I guess had wanted guns, and he said he knew where there were some, and came back.
So that was a hard one. I couldn't believe that he'd done it, but he had. They got him later.

He was just so misguided in so many ways. He was easily influenced, and both the car thing and this gun thing, it just depended on where he was and who he was around. He just couldn't have the kind of strength of character and fortitude to stand up to and say no to people very often. [tape interruption]

I wonder what Mark and Randy thought about having these kids in the house. Ed and Ron were both at Berkeley during this time. Verne was gone. Randy and Verne had been very close. Mark and Verne never had been very close. Mark and I were very close. Mark and I liked to pun together, and there were just so many things he did. He was interested in cooking, and I remember buying him a little cook set, and Verne just had a fit one Christmas, that I was getting his son a cooking set. He couldn't believe that I would do that, and he was sure that he would have a gay son. No, he has a son who's a very good cook, as a matter of fact, now. [laughs] Mark has always loved cooking.

O'Hara: Did you have other foster kids, or just the two?

Roberts: I took in one more after Reichert left, we took in one more--or I did--for just a few months until he stole Uncle Larry's car, and he split. No, Verne was still alive then. Yes. So I think I had three altogether at different times. Ron Price we had the longest. I think we had Ron Price for about a year, or close to it. But Reichert was the one who, Mark and Randy were coming down from their bedroom one day on the stairwell, and they told me about it later. Reichert had challenged them, and it was like they always felt they were just on the verge of being beaten up. I suspect that they were right about that.

I wasn't really cognizant of that at the time. I think I kept my ears open, but they didn't seem to have too much in common. They didn't interact too much with each other, but they did remember this incident on the stairs. I think now sometimes it's a wonder they ever talk to me as they grow up, having done this to them. In some ways, it wasn't fair. It was my dream and my idea of what I was supposed to do, and I think it wasn't fair to them. But that's what I did, and that was part of the family.

But I had to learn that foster kids--now I feel that the group home situation is a wonderful thing, but to put one foster kid or two in a family where everything is with a mother and father and other kids are being taken care of, isn't fair. It's rubbing salt in a wound, and I think it's the wrong way to go. And now I hear about group homes where they have group parents,
and then all the kids are in the same boat. I just think that that's so much smarter. Nobody has a burden to carry, that they're all there under the same auspices. How they do it, how they arrange their lives, is something else.

So as I say to myself once in a while when I mess up, "Zona, are you educable?" And I come back, "Yes," and I really believe I'm educable. Sometimes it takes me longer than other times, but I really feel that I am.

Attending College of San Mateo

Roberts: I started going to College of San Mateo. I went to see Jean Wirth, who was an advisor, and teaching still at College of San Mateo when Verne died. I said something about what I'm going to do, and she said, "Well, you're going to college." I said, "Oh." She said, "I think you're going to start right now." Within one month of Verne's death, the new courses had just started. I started--she chose very carefully the professors she would let me have classes from. I started a course in Western Civilization. It was a night class, and I thought it was important that the kids didn't lose a mother and father at the same time, so I wanted to be home in the daytime.

Here I was forty-four years old, and I did have qualms about starting to college at age forty-four. As a friend of mine so succinctly put it, "Zona, in four years how old will you be anyway?" I said, "Oh, yes." Whether I go to school or not, I will be four years older. I thought of taking a job. What would I do? I did have a railroad social security kind of income as long as I had two kids under eighteen, there was money coming in. It wasn't very much, but our house payments weren't very much, $52 per month, and somehow we managed.

So I decided that I would go to college. I started the Western Civ class, and I went the first night, and I sat in class, and they gave me a form to fill out. It was name and address, I did fine with that; social security number, I did fine with that; and it got another little column that was right there, and it said, "Married or single?" There were two choices, and I didn't know what to put.

Now, if they'd had a widowed category, I think I could have checked that one probably right away, but it took me the whole length of the class to figure out what to do. I finally said to myself, "Zona, could you get married again right away?" I
thought, Yeah, because I am single, right? But I didn't feel single, after twenty-seven years of being married, it was like I wasn't single. But I was legally single. Now I know that any time I check a form now, there is a place for widowed or separated or divorced. They have all kinds of categories now. But at that time, that was the biggest part of that whole first class, was this stunning revelation that I was single.

The class was interesting. I worked very hard, and did that class. Summer came, and I took the second half of the Western Civ. Then in the fall I took I think two classes, two or three classes. I started toward getting my A.A. degree. I finished the classes--I didn't get the A.A. degree, because as Jean said, "The only thing you have left to do the degree is kind of a health course, and you don't need that, and why spend time doing that when you need to be going on to Berkeley?" I didn't take that.

I made friends at College of San Mateo with some of the students who would come to the house. We had gatherings and played games. It was lots of fun. We'd play charades and sometimes other people would come over and study. Sally Smith was a black student, I got to know Sally and her mother. Her mother had worked for Louie Haas' family for quite a long time, and there were all these interconnections that were just wonderful.

Jean Wirth then was advisor to the honor society, was continuing that, and she realized that on the campus of College of San Mateo, there were not very many black faces. She would see some, and then she wouldn't see them any more. And there were not too many Latinos. At that time, there was East Palo Alto, San Mateo, South City, Burlingame--when Mark went to high school, there was one black student who lived in Hillsborough, and his father was an attaché in one of the embassies. The kid wore a suit and carried a briefcase, and the other kids kind of made fun of him, but he was the black face in the school.

Later, some of the black students stayed in my house. One of them was walking across some tracks one day and ran into a black man who said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "Well, I'm staying here." He said, "In Burlingame?" It just didn't happen. It was amazing. It was a very racist kind of--even below the tracks where we lived. I think part of the reason was that it was--well, it was expensive in some parts of Burlingame, but around us lived families from Ireland and from--not the Philippines so much, but there were quite a few Irish and some Portuguese families, and families from other countries who had moved in there because they could afford property around there.
But they were very threatened by the black students who stayed at my house, and would call the health department and find ways of trying to harass us. It was kind of scary sometimes.

**Working with Jean Wirth in the College Readiness Program for Minorities**

Roberts: Jean started the College Readiness Program and that was a big part of my life for a while. She checked the files and found that students would come there, but they would drop out. They wouldn't stay very long. So she started going to the high schools. She gathered some people together, she got some funding. She was quite a doer. She put together this program called the College Readiness Program. She visited various high schools and would recruit students who had not gotten particularly good grades, and whose test scores weren't particularly high, but that there would be something in their files, like a librarian would say, "This student came in and looked at some books, or asked a question."

So there would be something to indicate interest. Not students who would get basketball scholarships or any other kind of--but students who, with some help, she felt, could be college material.

She combined the honor society, she recruited tutors, and she had a one-on-one program, one tutor for each student. The first summer, we worked very hard. It started with a summer program. We started with a barbecue, inviting the parents to come up to see where their students would be during the day, and what we all looked like. There were, I think, thirty-seven students, or thirty-nine. I think there were thirty-nine at the beginning of the summer, and thirty-seven at the end, which was absolutely phenomenal.

That caught the attention of people in Washington in higher education for the disadvantaged, because these kind of statistics just usually didn't happen.

But the staff of tutors, they were quite remarkable people. They're still friends of ours today. We worked so hard together, we had so many meetings, and so much fun. A lot of hard work, but a lot of fun together too, and feeling that we were really doing something that was important in creating a climate for students, and learning things ourselves. You don't do this without learning a lot.
We had the barbecue, met the parents and the students who were assigned to classes and a tutor. If they would miss the bus in the morning, the tutor would drive out and go to their homes and get them, and bring them to school. Would sit in their classes with them, and help them learn to take notes, learn how to use the library, learn how to use the facilities that were at the campus, and how to continue to do homework, and then began to supply some of the lacking skills, some of the learning techniques that they needed in order to fill in the gap of their education.

Sally Smith was one of the black students who worked on the program. Robert Johnson was another black student there. He'd had private education, spoke French, and after San Mateo College he went to Stanford, graduated, and is now a schizophrenic living on the street. It's one of the saddest things that you see. But Robert was also a tutor, as were Arnie Goldfinger and Geoff Wells and Bob Surrail and Susan and just lots of people. It was a great group.

We had lots of parties and dinners. Jean and I would talk on the phone every night for about an hour, hour and a half, talking about the day and what we needed to do, and which tutors and which students, and what they needed, and how to keep this going. So the summer was quite eventful, and at the end of the summer, there were still thirty-seven students.

I was supervisor of tutors, and we had a room that was the hang-out for the students. I could be in that room, and these students would be talking, and I couldn't tell you two-thirds of what they had said. Because when they got together, the dialect and their way of communicating was their own. They could have been speaking a foreign language; the cadence and the inflections were just remarkably theirs. Sometimes I couldn't understand at all, and I loved it. It was kind of wonderful in other ways; I felt very excluded, and I thought, Yeah, well, guess what? Guess who feels excluded? It was quite an experience.

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Roberts: After Verne died, Ed got pneumonia at one time. He had been at college for a while, but I guess it was the month--yes, it was the month after Verne died, because we had this friend, she had a son about Randy's age, and we'd been in Cubs together and in PTA. She came by after Verne died and asked about the cat. The cat was limping. I said the cat had come to the door that same day I came back from the hospital, and the cat had been bitten right in the crook of its front paw and had a paralyzed paw.
A month later, Ed had come home on Easter vacation and had a very high fever and had pneumonia. It was pretty scary. Mark and Randy would bring their friends in to have them watch television, and they would--because Ed was talking about the television programs that were on, only the television wasn't on, and they just thought that was hilarious. They'd bring their friends in to see. [laughs] So Ed was a little delirious once in a while, didn't last very long. They got quite a kick out of that.

This friend came by, and she had gone around to stores and to friends collecting money for this poor widow with her crippled son and her husband who had died. She just loved doing things like that. She would go visit people who had cancer, and they'd lock the door, and then she would climb in the window. She was quite a character, literally. Because she was going to help. She knew about these things; she loved disease and disability.

She came by the house to deliver this package of fruit that had been donated and this package of money. Well, it was wonderful in some ways, it was really sweet, and other ways, it was so funny. She said, "Zona, how's the cat?" I said, "Well, he's still got his paw." She said, "Oh, probably just a touch of cancer, hm?"

Well, I went in--I didn't let her know that Ed was sick. I just had the door to the dining room closed. I went in the other room and I just broke up. I laughed so hard, because here Verne had just died of cancer, and of all the things you don't go around and say, "Well, just a touch of cancer." And it was one of those things that made me laugh. I still laugh about this story.

At Verne's funeral, we were waiting in St. Catherine's Church in Burlingame for the hearse to arrive. Verne had been raised Catholic, and we had not been married in the church. Verne only went to church--I think he went with his mother once to church, but it didn't seem to bother him much not to go.

But while he was in the hospital and we found out how seriously ill he was, his mother called and asked if I would mind if she sent the priest to visit him, and I said no, that that was fine. So it turned out that in Holy Cross Cemetery, there was some space in the Roberts-Schibi, which was her family name, plots. There was room for him to be buried. I thought cremation was fine, but I realized that that would be very hard for her to take, having her son cremated. This was her baby. She had an older daughter, but this was--this son of hers was still her baby, even though he was forty-eight years old.
So she had sent the priest, and then we had to wait for the priest to see whether he'd gotten there in time to do the last rites for him to be buried in this cemetery. Some plans were on hold until we found out whether he'd gotten there. Well, he had, and then I realized part of it was that it kind of meant his renouncing his marriage in order to do this, to become a good Catholic boy again, which I found a little hard to take.

But that happened, and he was buried then in the Holy Cross Cemetery. We had a very simple kind of funeral, and a very plain casket. We were waiting in the foyer of St. Catherine's for them to come from the funeral home, and we waited and waited, and bells tolled, and the superintendent of schools was there, and we were waiting and waiting.

The hearse had broken down, the one carrying the casket had broken down, and they had to pull into a parking lot, get another hearse, and transfer the casket. Verne's mother was in a car behind that, and I was waiting at the church. Both of us were amused by it, because we knew Verne, we could have just seen the way he would laugh to have this described.

And then another of my friends, Rick Colby, came to the church in her high heels. She stepped out of her car, and as she was stepping up to the curb, she was trying to get something off the heel of her shoe, and it turned out to be a condom that had been in the gutter. So she was standing outside the church scraping her heel against the curb, trying to get this condom off.

These are the kind of stories that I just love. It seems like that interjection of other, of life and humanity and some of these funny things that happen--"Just a touch of cancer, hm?" [laughs] They just help me get through so many sort of hairy times. [tape interruption]

I would meet Emily in the grocery store sometimes, and she'd say, "Zona, how's Eddie?" A few people called him Eddie.

"Oh, just fine." Of course, I would never tell her if anything went wrong. "Oh, just fine."

"Ohhh." And the disappointment in her voice. So again, that's a family joke too: "How's Eddie?" "Just fine." "Ohhh, what a shame." [laughter] [tape interruption]

I was accepted at Berkeley and at S.F. State and decided that I was going to leave the neighborhood. The Downeys next door: the daughter of the family was a very strange young woman.
She was emotionally disturbed. She drank a lot. She would crawl around in the bushes and yell things at the kids. A couple of times when I couldn't find Randy, I was absolutely terrified, because she would take sticks and chase the kids down the street, terrorizing the little kids.

A friend of mine who lived around the corner had committed suicide, and I took care of her kids during the summer while her husband was working. This young woman next door was particularly upset with kind of noises of kids playing, or partying, or good times at my house next door. It was very upsetting to her. She could hardly stand that. I think she was pretty isolated, and a pretty sick person.

So that was scary, plus she was one of the instigators of calling the health department about the black kids living there. I never knew exactly what might be happening with her. It felt dangerous.

I think going to Berkeley in part was to get out of that situation, to move--I was absolutely delighted to be moving from there. So I started looking for a place to live in Berkeley. With Mark having just graduated from high school, and Randy just having finished his second year, it seemed like a good time for us to move. I came over to Berkeley and started looking for housing. I stayed in Virginia Franklin's house, as she let me use that as a headquarters while I got the paper and looked for places. I found a place on Ward Street.
VIII  ED IN THE SIXTIES

Ed and John Hessler at Cowell Hospital

Roberts: Ed in the meantime--John Hessler had moved in to Cowell a year after Ed was there, and they formed a very close friendship. John was a quad who had been living in a county hospital because he was very big and tall and his folks could not take care of him. They just physically couldn't handle him. He had been going to Contra Costa College in a taxi that would come to get him.

O'Hara: From the hospital?

Roberts: From the hospital. He was a good student. His social worker read in the paper, under "Helpless cripple goes to college." Some of the publicity that had surrounded Ed's living on campus and going to college had hit the local papers. The social worker read the article and thought, "Mmm-hmm. I've got a young man who needs to go to college, and wouldn't that be ideal for him?" So she came to visit Cowell and talked to Henry Bruyn, and they arranged for John Hessler to move in, and he did, a year after Ed was there.

John also was a very good student. He was a French major, went on and got his master's in French. But the two of them formed this bond. They had adjoining rooms on the second floor of Cowell. They began to hang out together, and share some attendants, and find their way around campus, and talked about problems, but mainly they learned how to be college students in the full aspect of whatever that meant including drinking beer. Ed used his shower room to store beer, not only for himself, because he's never been a very good drinker. He's got my--and his father's, too, genes for not being able to tolerate much alcohol. They would go to basketball games, and go out and have a beer.
Basketball Games

Roberts: One time, he's got a famous story about going out after a basketball game where this great basketball player gave this great leap to put the ball in the hoop, and came down and landed on Ed's foot. And as he was coming down, he looked and said, "Oh, shit," as he's landing on Ed, and Ed's saying about the same thing as this big guy lands on him. Hurt a lot.

But they were ready to go out afterward, and they went out down Telegraph Avenue. Ed was still in a push chair. They had their attendants pushing them. I don't know if Ron was in on this or not, but they started drinking beer. In those days, of course, around the campus, they got pitchers of beer in Larry Blake's or in someplace else. They were in this place drinking beer, and Ed had to urinate.

So they went outside, and Ed was going to urinate when the cops came by--oh, somebody, one of his attendants, went in the building to get a pitcher for him to urinate in. Well, the neighbors that were close to this club had been calling the cops because they were not the only ones that--oh, Ed could not get in the bathroom. That's what it was. He couldn't get in the stall to urinate. So they were going to do this outside, and then take the pitcher back in and dump it, or dump it somewhere, I don't know where they were going to do that.

So the cops came by, and they were going to arrest him for urinating in public. Ed said, "Well, take me, and you have to take my iron lung," and the cop had to call his supervisor, and that was one of their famous stories. They loved that story. So with a warning, they were not picked up, but they went back to campus. I would come over from Burlingame sometimes and go out to dinner with them, and got to know John, and met some of his family.

Many new people were in Ed's life, orderlies and attendants and the nurses, but mainly it was attendants and orderlies, who would come in at night. Chuck, who was one of the janitors at night, would come in. Chuck was great--he'd been an advertising executive in Chicago and dropped out, and came and got this job as a janitor so he could play the piano. He got himself an old kind of grand piano, and a little cottage where nobody was close to him, and he would play the piano all night long, or until the early morning hours. He turned Ed on to classical music. Ed got to be quite conversant with a lot of the classics. I was just delighted, and quite surprised, because other than having had piano lessons for a year, which he hated--I made him do that--he
had not shown any evidence of interest in classical music. And he was through Chuck's interest.

But all of these people had different interests, and it was--oh, and young women who would come into the hospital, a young woman named Linnea, who had one of those things you get from eating bad food and you have to have these injections all through your gut--I'll think of it later. She would come down and visit Ed. People who were there, they would come and visit, because Ed was quite available. That would happen at home in the bedroom. Our friends, I had friends who would come by and just talk to him, because his ear was there. He might fall asleep or--[laughs], but somehow he was available to talk to. He got used to that kind of role.

At Cowell this was no different. People would come in, students or attendants or orderlies or janitors or people. Many people in the medical profession now who know how to deal with disability because of meeting Ed and John, and later other people who came into the program. It gave them an attitude toward disability, these were not hospital patients, these were students, students with a disability, but students. That was quite a distinction there.

"Hospital" versus "Apartment"

Roberts: They kept having to fight this, because it upset the hospital staff--I don't know how many times Carl Ross was giving them a bad time. Every once in a while, Carl Ross would come down hard on them for something they were doing. They had one of their first battles around his intervention. But how many battles Henry Bruyn had to put up with from the nurses, because of the beer in the shower room, or because of the odd hours, because these attendants were coming in during the night, or leaving at ten or eleven at night, and visitors would come in and out. The hospital routine was upset. It was expanded because of John and Ed's being there, and it was something that the hospital staff had trouble with.

The supervising nurse and the nurses were not in complete charge of Ed and John, and it was hard for them to give up that kind of authority. So there were some battles around that.

O'Hara: Do you remember any of those battles? Do you remember--Carl Ross in particular, do you remember that incident?
Roberts: I just remember that Carl Ross I think had too much to drink, and he came in and really laid it onto Ed, and I don't remember what the precipitating factors of the incident were. I could certainly find out; I'm sure Ed remembers.

O'Hara: Before we get too far away from John, what was your impression of John when you first met him? Do you have any memories of John, your conversations, or your impressions?

Roberts: Oh, sure. John--Big John; he sat so tall in his chair--was so glad to be there. As with Ed, for the two of them, it was a whole new life. It was something opening up for them, and they were learning how to feel important, where both of them had begun to feel kind of on the outside of things, John living in the county hospital. And yes, he was brighter than a lot of people around him, but he still lived in the county hospital, and some of the surroundings were kind of dismal. And what kind of a future was he going to have?

Good Friends

Roberts: Ed at home, what kind of future was he going to have? My vision of what he could do and where he'd be was limited. I had had no experience with people with disabilities and what could happen. And here they were beginning to be out in another world, out as part of something that was very exciting. John studied hard, and he was good at what he did. He made friends somewhat. John wasn't quite as easy around people as Ed was, but he was in his own way such a--they were a good team together, and I think part of their friendship was kind of one supplying one part of how to do things, and the other kind of coming in, and their commenting. Their learning to drink together, their learning how to--kind of expanding their--their doing things that high school kids usually did, and they were finally beginning to be able to do these things.

John had broken his neck in a dive right after he graduated from high school. He hit the top of the water with force, and it snapped the vertebrae in his neck. So he was a quad as a result of this dive.

O'Hara: As far as you know, was John Ed's first friend with a disability?

Roberts: No, because at Community Hospital, there had been Bob Penn and Karen Hubacker and some of the other people. Now, Bob Penn was a married man and was older, and we weren't with him a lot, but as
far as pal-ing with somebody—well, Fred Facciano at Community Hospital, and then Ed had met other people at Fairmont. But to be around somebody, because this was their living situation where he and John had adjoining rooms and differing kind of needs for attendant care, because of John's disability. Ed as a post-polio has feeling throughout his body, and sensation on his skin, where John doesn't in the usual way. John was the first one who taught me this: he had to learn that if he had to have a bowel movement, the hairs on his arms would stand up. He learned to recognize other symptoms, because he wouldn't feel the usual urges that people would get when they have bowel movements.

And I think their beginning to experiment sexually that came along, with some kind of meeting some of the women students, some of the drinking, some of the things that other students would go through in their high school or earlier college experience, they were just beginning to do this together. So they got to be pals.

I think they were big influences on each other. What one couldn't think of to do, the other could. But they also got into battles around getting the library, the new Moffitt Library was being built—oh, Zellerbach Hall was being built, and in making those things, being sure that accessibility was in those things. They began to be active on campus, and a few years later, they formed the Rolling Quads, and were getting some of these things together.

But at that time, it was just the two of them, and the ways they found around campus, and how they found to get their studying done, and dealing with Rehab, and getting the money they needed to stay there. And just taking care of their health. John would have chills every once in a while. He had a few health problems, but nothing really horrendous. Ed had pneumonia again another time when he came home, and I had to get him back in the back of the station wagon, and Jeffrey Litke came along with me. We took him back to Cowell, where he was very ill, and had to be—the nurses were not sure for a couple of days whether he was going to make it. But he did. He had sort of an out of body experience during that one.

He has not had pneumonia in years. It's amazing. That was the thing, I thought he would die of pneumonia probably any one of those years. But those two terrible bouts of it, and the result of the kidney stones, I think those were the most serious things he's had since he had polio.
Ed and John in Carmel Valley

Roberts: John and Ed had had a feeling that they wanted to get out of Cowell. They were feeling their oats. They wanted to spend the summer away from Cowell Hospital. They wanted to get out of the hospital and have complete--some more freedom.

They rented a house in Carmel Valley. Geoff Wells and Stephanie and Bob went along as their team. Bob and Geoff were attendants for Ed, and Stephanie was Geoff's girlfriend. She was the cook, and Bob and Geoff were the attendants. The five of them lived in this wonderful house in Carmel Valley. I went down and visited them for a weekend, and that was their first time away. They felt like they'd sprung themselves from their families, and then now from the university and from the hospital, so it was a huge step for them to make, because it meant transportation, it meant all kinds of care, of learning how to have the house cleaned, and how to see that the meals were done. The team that went with them were really good in providing the care that they needed in order to accomplish this and have it work. So they were very proud of themselves for having done this.

Ed at UC Riverside

Roberts: Ed came back, and he worked on his--he had gotten his master's, and he was working on his doctorate when all he had to do was to finish his dissertation. Joel Bryan had been down at UC Riverside and had kind of a depression. Somehow, they were in touch with one another, and Joel asked Ed if he'd come down and direct the program on campus for disabled students while Joel took a year off. So Ed went to Riverside and directed that program for a year.

I remember--let's see, Mark started Merritt College, and Randy started at Berkeley High School. We found this 2223 Ward Street house. The house was on the market, and it was something, $59,000 or some such terrible fee they were asking for it. It also had a duplex behind it. I knew I couldn't afford to buy that house, but renting it on a month-to-month basis until my house in Burlingame was sold was good. They said that they would have people coming through to see the house, and I could rent it on a month-to-month, so I could look for a place to buy. That's how we moved in there. I bought the house a few months later.
It was in some ways kind of a neat house. We had to have a ramp put in the back for Ed to get in and out the back. He stayed there sometimes. He went down to Common College later and taught there. Jean Wirth had done the College Readiness Program. It continued to grow and expand. There were more and more Chicano students coming in, with more kinds of radical ideas. These students started some campus demonstrations that upset the administration at College of San Mateo. And they told Jean that she couldn't go back there any more, that they felt she was the cause of these kind of demonstrations, and that had to stop. So she was ordered back to the classroom, and the program was shut down for a while.

**Ed at Common College**

Roberts: So shortly after that, she started her own college, that she named Common College. At one point, Ed went down there and taught at Common College. They lived on an estate while the owners had gone away for a year. It was a beautiful place on Farm Hill Road. It had a swimming pool, and this wonderful, accessible place in and out. Ed was teaching, and Mark and Randy were students there. Jean had her college for quite a little while, private students coming in from different parts of the country. It never was very big, and she finally folded it after a few years, but she had quite a time getting that college together. Ed found himself isolated after a bit as it was rural and not Berkeley where he could cruise the streets, shop, and meet friends.

O'Hara: What was the philosophy of that private college?

Roberts: It was where Mark learned to do hardwood floors. Jean would take students and ask what their interests were, and then see that they had apprenticeships or met with people in the community who were doing this kind of work. For a while, Mark wanted to be a teacher, and he did some student teaching at Crystal Spring school.
Common College Philosophy

[Interview 6: January 15, 1995] ##

O'Hara: Zona, the last time we were right in the middle of talking about Common College where Ed was teaching and you were describing the philosophy. Can you recap the philosophy a little bit?

Roberts: I hope so. Common College philosophy was developed by Jean Wirth and taken from, some from Antioch College and some from, things that she'd developed and put in the college readiness program at College of San Mateo. The tutors had gone to college a year or so and dropped out because it wasn't their idea to go to school but their folks had sent them away and they weren't happy with it. They wanted to be doing something else.

The folks who tended to come to Common College were of that same group. Some had a lot of money and some didn't. One of the families that helped start the college readiness program and put in some money to begin with also supported the beginning of Common College. Jean had made friends with this family. One of the first students was a Weaver daughter, Mardi. Ed, then, was asked to teach there. He taught political science. That was his field, his love. One of his professors at College of San Mateo said that Ed had been the best political science student he'd ever had in all his years of teaching.

But at Common College, the philosophy was that students would come for interviews and would talk about the things they wanted to do. And Jean would hook them up with someone in the community who was an expert in that field, whether it was somebody at Stanford, at the linear accelerator, at another business in town, other people she would know who could be mentors. So, it was developed sort of as a mentor program, that students would get their basic skills from the Common College classes in small groups that Jean developed and would lead and, oh, Peter was part of that, too. Pete Abrams, was a part of that beginning college. Bernadine Allen also.

These friendships developed over the years. These people still keep in touch with each other as I do with some of the tutors who were in the college readiness program. We formed a real peer support group regardless of ages because we worked very hard and we had a big stake in having this work. It was important to us. A lot of cooperation developed out of this and a lot of friendships.
Zona's Role at Common College

O'Hara: What was your role in Common College? Were you teaching there at all?

Roberts: I taught—the year that I was getting my teaching credential was in '70, 1970 at UC. I went down to East Palo Alto and taught an English class at Nairobi College. I got credit for that, then, as part of my college thing and it was strictly black students from East Palo Alto, some who were quite bright and some who weren't so bright. It was a fascinating experience for me.

I tried to get them to read Uncle Tom's Cabin and I had a total commitment of refusal. They would not touch it. They wouldn't. I said, "But you need to know what it's about and what this story--" Oh, absolutely not. So, they were much more into Malcom X and some of the Ellison things. So, I developed some good—some of their writing skills were very good and some needed to be worked with. But it was an interesting experience.

Ed and Mark and Randy, three of my kids were down there for a while, Ed as the teacher and Mark and Randy as students, living in an estate close to Jean Wirth's place in Woodside because Jean had Common College out of her house in Woodside. She ran classes there. Then they rented this estate in Portola Valley where the people went on a sabbatical.

So, it was this wonderful level entry, flat one story house with a swimming pool and nice grounds. Ed enjoyed part of it. I would go down and fix meals sometimes or visit everyone and see how they were doing. But Ed felt terribly isolated. He said, after a while, being away from a city and being away—he had to be driven anywhere to be off of the estate. Part of the—if the weather was nice—part of being outside, that was nice but it was too isolating for him in other ways. So, he was very glad to get back into the more urban area.
IX  LIFE IN THE GREEN HOUSE

Buying the House

O'Hara:  Back to Berkeley?

Roberts:  Back to Berkeley, yes. Moving to Berkeley was a great step in my life. It was in some ways scary but in some ways it was stepping away from a lifestyle change in my living in Burlingame and all of the events there, raising the kids and then Verne's death and my going on to college and being a student and then having more students come to the house, of all my kids' peer groups and then my own kids and their friends and Mark and his band and Randy and his sports.

Moving to Berkeley at that time with Mark having graduated from Burlingame High School and Randy just finishing his second year, finding a place and staying at Virginia Franklin's house for a little while while I searched for a place and finding this place on Ward Street that was up for sale. It had a duplex behind it and it was a big enough house to accommodate us and could be made accessible with the addition of a ramp in back. I could have it on a month to month lease while I looked for a place until my house in Burlingame sold. I was living on very limited income of railroad retirement, kind of like social security with the two kids under eighteen.

Mark was just eighteen, I guess, when we moved over here. I had pressure to find a place before Berkeley High started so Randy could start Berkeley High at the proper time and so I could start classes at Berkeley.

We found the green house, so called because of its color. I later found it was all of $59,000 for the house and the duplex behind it that had just been built. This company would buy houses with enough space in back and then my house in Burlingame sold for $24,000 or twenty-five or something.
But I started looking at other places and where I could afford a pretty good downpayment, I couldn't have afforded the monthly payments and made it. So, then, with someone's help, I figured out that the rent from the duplexes made up the difference in the monthly payments and that I could buy that. Somebody urged me to find out more about it. I thought, well, what have I got to lose. So, I did. Financially, I was better off buying that green house with the duplex behind it than I was a smaller house with just that single property, just a single house on it.

So, that's what I did and took the big step as a single woman or a widow. This was in the days where sometimes that was questionable about giving a loan to a single woman. What happened was the company I bought it from, Gordon Nicholson Associates, they're the ones who had bought the property and had the duplex built, carried the loan in their name and allowed me to make the payments directly to the bank. I was named on it but they were kind of back up support. It was some help.

It had been on the market a little while and not many people were looking at it. A few came through and that was the condition of the lease signed, that people could come through. One of the kids had put up a big poster of Lenin in the stair hall and I know one of the women, real estate women, asked if we'd please take that poster down, that some people wouldn't agree with the poster and that it might influence the sale of the house, which I resented. I think we did it but I resented it and I found myself with my back kind of being up because all of the years that I'd been married and raising the kids, I hadn't had anyone telling me what I could do inside my own house. Well, other neighbors didn't like the black students in the house.

That was also when I moved into the green house on Ward Street, 2223 Ward Street. It was a neighborhood of older families who'd lived there, a neighborhood of single family homes, mostly, or two flats. The neighborhood was just changing as some of the older folks were dying off and some were moving away. A few younger people were moving in but it was more or less an established neighborhood. But because of the racial composition and students in Berkeley, no one cared who went in and out of my house. The kids who came in or the black students who visited and some lived, for a while, with me. There was no threat to their lives. There were none of those issues. It was just like a breath of fresh air to me. It was so nice not to have to worry about what might happen. I remember that vividly.

Stephanie and Geoff [Wells], who'd been with Ed and John down in Carmel Valley, had gotten married in the summer up in
Sonoma. We went to their wedding. And Stephanie called me, because Geoff also was starting at UC Berkeley. He'd been a tutor, Geoff Wells had been a tutor in the college readiness program and was now working for John and for Ed. I think he worked more for John than he did for Ed.

But they were looking for a place to live. And when Stephanie and I talked on the phone, they had found a place on, oh, it was one block north of Ward Street and almost the same address. We just laughed because our connection was, indeed at that time, and then to find we'd both been house hunting and then each found a place a block apart from the other. They came and lived with me for a while because the people in the place they found to rent hadn't moved out yet. So, they stayed for a while and Geoff would take me to classes on his motorcycle. So, we'd ride over to campus on Geoff's motorcycle when our classes would coincide.

Jeff Litke helped us move. He helped rent a truck and drive it and help in the packing up and kind of got us going. That move was really kind of horrendous. But we did it.

O'Hara: From Burlingame.

Roberts: From Burlingame, yes. There was a lot of stuff, Randy's drums. He was playing drums by then and just loving it. So, he took over the attic as his space and set up his drums up there. We put in a pull-down stairwell.

I had to get vaccinated again, which got infected, before I started classes. I remember having the eye exam and the hearing exam and going through all those follow the lines at Cowell Hospital that they used to have for your entering health exams. I remember being in the audiology department where they give the hearing tests. They would take us in in groups and then they would sound tones to see if we heard these. I remember one young man who was in there. He said, "Do we have to tell you the, name the key that the tone is in?" I think they just wanted to know if we could hear it or not. But I thought, oh boy. [Laughter]

Randy Attends Alternative School

Roberts: So, the days at the green house started. Randy was enrolled at Berkeley High School and began his student days there. He soon grew to hate it. He had a very hard time at Berkeley High School. He developed a close friend and after a year or so—
there was a lot of violence in the halls and on the outskirts and Randy really had a hard time with that. He was not a very forceful kid. Where Mark in junior high school in Burlingame had had a kid intimidate him, he told the kid--they were way out on the playground by themselves--Mark told the kid that he knew judo so the kid better watch out. It wouldn't occur to Randy to do that kind of thing. And he found himself trying to avoid some of those experiences. And he stayed home whenever he could. It was so painful to watch him go to school.

One time, his friend Rob came by and Rob said that he was going to the alternative high school. He liked it. I said, "Since when have you liked it?" Or he said, he liked it better than something. And I said, "Well, better than what?" And he said, "Better than any school I've been to in all my life," because I was thinking absolutely not. Alternative schools don't provide a very good degree.

I listened to that and Rob having said it and I began to find out about the alternative high school in Berkeley and went to visit and then let Randy go to alternative high school which he really liked. He functioned well there. As one of his teachers said, he was the kind of prime student for that sort of--he was motivated to do the things he wanted to do and he didn't hang around campus. There was no campus you hung around on. There was just--it was in a building right off Telegraph Ave.

O'Hara: Telegraph and what?

Roberts: Telegraph and Haste or Dwight. It was torn down to make dorms for the university. Randy's senior year, he was moved back to Berkeley High where he lasted about six weeks into the semester. He tried it a couple of months and quit. I helped him quit because I just couldn't stand to see him going off every day to high school when he hated it so much. It was really too much. There were shootings and gang activities.

I knew that he would study the things he wanted to study. He was interested in, of course, in his music, in jazz. I knew he was beginning to smoke a little dope. And he was--Mark had, too. And he was interested in drafting and architecture, very interested in architecture. I thought he might go into that at some point. He would be like the Common College student or the returning student later on when it was up to him to do it, when he found the right place and the right people to be with he'd go on.

We were all growing and learning. I was a returning student and much older than most of the students in class, just
as at College of San Mateo. I made friends with some of my classmates. I had a lot going on at the house and it was kind of going to school and coming back.

Mark Attends Merritt College and Rides Motorcycle

Roberts: Oh, Mark, in the meantime was going to Merritt, the campus down on Martin Luther King. He was studying Russian and taking the other classes he needed to take. He was looking forward to going to Berkeley as his brothers had done and his mother was doing at that time.

When Mark graduated from Merritt, he did go to Berkeley for a while. His disappointment was complete. He disliked it. I suspect it was because he was a very good student, particularly in English literature and other of his classes that when he got to Berkeley there were grad students in classes and he was not the hotshot that he'd been in his classes before.

I think I've often said that when I came to Berkeley, I had two sons at Berkeley. That's not quite true. While Ed was still at Berkeley, Ronald already had gone in the navy. In fact, he'd gone into the navy before I moved here. When he left for overseas, he had a motorcycle which he sent to Mark. Mark was thrilled to pieces. I wasn't quite as thrilled for Mark to have a motorcycle. But he rode it around and loved it. He's a very careful fellow, I knew he wasn't in too much danger. He did have a few little tumbles but not much. He got very cold sometimes.

Ron also would send other packages. He would send cigarettes and he would send booze and he would send chocolate treats. And these packages would arrive for us. I remember Randy and some of his friends playing under the living room table setting up a store with some of these things that Ron had sent.

Ron Enters the Navy

O'Hara: Where was Ron? Where was he sending them from?

Roberts: Ron, when he graduated from UC was going to join the air force and learn to become a pilot because he would then have a career when he got out. He learned to drink at Berkeley. He and Louie Haas used to go out drinking. He joined Sigma Chi fraternity for
a while. And then he dropped. His cousins Gerry and Ken McManigal were there. Then he and his friend, Clark Wilde, had apartments and they kicked them out of there and he and Clark got kicked out of another place. They let friends come and crash.

When he went for his air force physical, his eyesight wasn't good enough for the air force. But the navy thought he was just fine. He joined the navy flying team and we were at San Francisco Airport as he was flying off to Pensacola.

I had already worked with the Unitarian Church. I had been director of religious education for their children's church for a while and interested in the peace movement and in the LRY, the Religious--Liberal Religious Youth Movement, that Mark and Randy had been part of with their friends in San Mateo. Well, Randy was getting to be the age of being drafted and so we found a psychiatrist who wrote a letter that kept him out of it. He would have been--it would have been horrible for Randy to be in the military. He wouldn't have made it at all.

Mark did his own thing. He did it with, I think, with his Unitarian background. He didn't go into service and he got, was exempt. And I think his number was lower, too, or something like that. Those were the days of numbers.

Back to Ron, standing in the airport with him and I said, "Do let me know if I can help and I hope you like what you're doing but at least you're getting a flight across the country." And he said, "I hate to fly." And I remember standing in San Francisco Airport with my mouth open looking at this son of mine who had just signed up to be a pilot who hated to fly. There was something about it that just kind of blew my mind. I didn't know what to say other than, "Oh?" It was quite a strange moment, vivid moment in my life.

But he went off and had a career of sitting in the classroom, going up on flight training, sitting in the classes. The admiral of the base he was on happened to be a tennis player and was delighted to have Ron there and part of his crackerjack tennis team. They would go around and play other bases. When Ron would sit in the classroom and listen to his fellow classmates up above in the air crashing into each other and falling to the ground and dreading the moment when he was going to have to go up, he decided that he could not stand that anymore and that there was no point in doing this.

O'Hara: You mean they were crashing--?

Roberts: Each other and killing each other.
O'Hara: In real life?

Roberts: Oh, absolutely. Yes. So, he would sit in the classroom and hear this happening. Flight training. He'd actually hear them in training, yes. There was some loss of life during the training. I don't know. But that's what was happening and he found himself more and more anxious about it and decided he wasn't going to do that. And the admiral at that point said, "If you quit, I will send you to--" I think it was Korea at that time.

So, Ron had quite a task to get himself out of there. He was assigned to a base in Virginia in some kind of basement office.

Then he got himself aboard an aircraft carrier. He had to take some atomic training and went aboard the U.S. United States. It was an aircraft carrier, one of the first atomic aircraft carriers. And aboard this brand new ship they had all kinds of equipment for the people aboard the ship to have basketball games and boxing matches and things. But the guy who was in charge of it wasn't doing anything with it.

So, Ron and his first tour of the Mediterranean on this ship was, I've forgotten exactly what his title was, some kind of air officer. He said at one point, he almost had to push a button that would send off a torpedo to something and it was just called off at the last moment. He was glad that was called off.

He would play tennis in various countries and they would use him sort of as kind of a naval attache in going to some diplomatic dinners. He would set up tennis dates at country clubs in places around in the Mediterranean. And he realized that he could do that job for the whole ship. He started bucking for that job and got it. For another year or two, he set up boxing matches and basketball games and started using the equipment and ordering more equipment for the ship so the guys aboard could--because there were long periods at sea where they needed to have these events. That was neat. He enjoyed that part of it.

There's always been some homosexual elements in the navy. Ron was hit upon every once in a while. When it's your commanding officer, it's a little difficult to avoid the relationship. He managed to do that, I'm glad to say.

Ron came back when I was at the green house and stayed for a little while when he got out of the service. With his new little Porsche. One of Mark's friends from Burlingame (also named Mark) had been drafted into the service and had a terrible time. He
came from a Catholic family and he felt his religion wouldn't let him have a deferment. He was put into a group of misfits after they talked him into joining so his father wouldn't get in trouble.

He ran away at one point and they caught him. Then he ran away again and he came to our house. We had him up in the attic for a while. I remember I was sitting there at my table writing a paper for class and looking out and seeing a black and white police car parked out in front of the house thinking oh, my. What's he doing here, I was thinking. Some report of missing, of someone AWOL. Of course, the guy was eating his lunch out there, filling out his own paperwork. But I sat typing my paper.

Ron and Clark had a wedding invitation printed of a wedding in Canada and they took Mark across the border into Canada where he spent the remaining war years working and keeping himself out of trouble. He had since come back to the Bay Area.

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Roberts: Ron's homecoming was taking classes at Laney. He had the G.I. Bill, then, to fall back on. He took a class in yurt building down at Laney College. That was his beginning in the carpenter business and then eventually he became a contractor in Hawaii as he is now. But it started with that yurt building class. He had applied to the Wharton School. He was an economics major at Berkeley and he hadn't been accepted.

When he came home, he found that he was interested in--oh, he did some calligraphy and some wood carving. There were some signs along Telegraph Avenue of wood carving that he had done for stores. He learned to build a yurt. When Clark moved up to northern California and bought a piece of property, Ron went up and joined him and built a yurt on part of that property and lived up in northern California for a while. There was, of course, a large hippie contingent up there, and they fit right into that, and some of their friends were growing pot.

I went up, this was when I was working at the university and driving the university station wagon, went up to visit them one time. They had had a meeting in the community of what would happen in case of fire. There was a volunteer fire department and they would have to go out and warn each other and always have buckets and picks and shovels and gloves available to just grab on the run to go off. One of the signals would be a car honking; they would get in their cars and trucks and honk going down the road and as the warning to other people to get your buckets and your pails and your shovels and get out here.
While Ron and I were walking across the field, going to visit some other neighbors, he saw some plumes of smoke rising from down in the gulch. We went back to the house and to his yurt and he picked up some of the equipment. We got in the station wagon because it was parked right out in front. Of course, it has California state license plates. I was driving the wagon. He threw the stuff in the back and we went down the road honking the horn.

One of the guys who had not attended the meeting saw this big yellow station wagon honking its horn with the state license plates and he thought that they were coming to arrest him. He pulled up all his pot plants instead of getting his shovel and bucket. I was—poor guy, but I was amused at the story because if he had attended the meeting he would have known more what was going on. [Laughter]

It turned out that a couple of kids had gone down in this gulch and had seen a rattlesnake under a log and decided they were going to set fire to it. So, they started quite a fire and there was a back swoop up the hill because Ron and Clark and some of the others were out fighting this fire. At one point, when they came back, they were exhausted and grimy. It had just swept over them at one point as the winds changed. It turned out to be quite a dangerous moment. They did get it out, but it was one of those episodes that you remember in your lifetime.

Ron went from there and moved up to Oregon for a while and lived with a friend. Then he came back down here before he went off to Hawaii. He chose Hawaii because of the weather. He still loves to play tennis. He's fifty-three now. He loved it when he got into playing over-fifties tennis because it was less crowded field and he's good. He has had some knee problems. He had a little orthoscopic surgery at one point and his knees are sore. He's able to function with them anyway.

Zona's Adventures as a UC Berkeley Student

Roberts: But back to the green house and my going to college days and finishing that. In my senior year—oh, I'd visit Ed and John up at Cowell. I remember one of the first times I walked through campus carrying my books, walked by Strawberry Creek, walking up to Cowell instead of coming in the station wagon from home or coming over to visit them. Here I was walking across campus on my way between classes and going up to visit them and smiling a broad smile that I was now a student at Berkeley, also, and very
proud of myself, and loving the campus and Strawberry Creek coming down through the middle of it. There's some beauty in that Berkeley campus.

One of the first days when I had taken Ed across through campus, he was in a push chair those days. He was quite tall and quite thin. Now, he's tall but he's fatter. We were going down into Faculty Glade and I had a hold of the back of his chair. It began to slip a little bit and I ran into a tree sort of deliberately to stop the chair, just the side of it, into this tree because I felt I was going to lose it. I don't know whether my hands were sweaty or the place was wet or what was happening. But I remember going down the Faculty Glade thing in this push chair. I think I finally learned how to do it backwards where I'd walk down the hill backwards. I had better control. But out in front of the Men's Faculty Club, that steep incline that's there.

At one point, some of the people who were living in my house made a movie and we had an Australian film maker friend of one of the women who was living there. We made a movie and part of it was made on an early Sunday morning. Oh, the University Art Museum was just being built. We did some of the filming inside the art museum before it was opened, on the different levels of the ramps. We wore these dyed sheets that were tie-dyed sheets. It was sort of a fantasy film.

Then one of our scenes was taking place on an early Sunday morning in Faculty Glade where they had some huge sculptures on exhibit. So, a couple of, there were three of us women of different ages and we were nude and inside these sculptures and against them as the filming was going on. We had to do it while the patrols weren't going around. We had to watch for where the patrol cars were. So, we were relatively quick about this. I never did see the finished film. It's kind of interesting to wonder whatever happened to it.

O'Hara: These were people living at your house?

Roberts: One of the, yes, one of the women who was involved in the film was and then these were friends of hers. So, there were adventures going on all the time around the house with all of the different people and what they were doing.
Effects of Anti-War Protests

Roberts: The year of 1969 when some student riots were happening was my senior year. Having to get to class or not was a dilemma. I remember standing with my books in the hall because I had a Virginia Woolf seminar as my senior English thesis seminar and I didn't know whether to go or not. I stood with my books in the hall and I would turn on KPFA and listen to hear what was going on and found that Tolman had just been tear gassed. I thought, well I guess—that's where my class was and I thought, that takes care of that. I won't go today. It made those last few weeks very difficult.

I had, I kept a pot of soup going in the kitchen and other students, people who lived at the house, other friends—I think Laura and Jeremy Rexford, Laura was living in the back part at that time. She was attending classes and she would come in at different—and Cory Williams whom Ron had met in southern California would come in. We'd be in the kitchen and drinking coffee or eating or having soup. I always had to have a pot of something cooking because people would come by hungry and needing to talk and be listened to because the anxiety level was very high, whatever you had to do.

Walking from Ward Street up to Telegraph and then down toward the campus, the riot squads would be out. The blue meanies would come by. We never knew if there was tear gas. The Oakland—the blue meanies were the Oakland force that would sit at the border and wait for a sign to come in to Berkeley and to terrorize that person on the streets, was the way we felt about it because their force was a little, they were a little more forceful than the campus cops or the Berkeley police. It was a tough time on campus. Going across campus and then having this whole range of officers shoulder to shoulder with their masks on and their bayonets pointed was an awesome sight.

My internal battle was if I saw somebody being beaten what I would do. Would I just walk on by and pretend it didn't happen? Do I go to their rescue and get beaten also? There had been a few shootings and people would come in and talk about seeing someone shot. But the threat of it was always there. The danger was ever present as to what might happen. Ed was teaching some classes during some of this time and there would be tear gassing and they'd have to get out of the way.

At one point, [Ronald] Reagan was governor and they said something about the quadriplegic on the campus with an iron lung and being tear gassed. He said, "No, that's not true. There
aren't any quadriplegics on campus." And we thought that was kind of interesting but a little inaccurate. It seemed to be his style.

I had to take my application across to the graduate school for entry into the teaching credential program. I would like to teach high school English and teach people to read. Reading seemed to be one of the ways I got through some of my early childhood dilemmas and it provided such a solace and a place to be of imagination and kind of away from present troubles. Then having met a lot of people who were having difficulty reading, I thought that would be one of the greatest joys to turn people on to: literature, if they could read or help them learn to read if they couldn't. I had to take my application across campus.

Zona's Graduation Present

Roberts: In the meantime, Ed was back at the house. He'd come back from Common College and was living at the house. And how I remember his being there was, of course, the iron lung in the living room and his bed but at Christmas time or over the new year some time during that year of '69, Ron's friend Louie Haas had come back from Europe. He had gone on from Berkeley then to Stanford Law School and then gone into the JAG Corps and was stationed in Heidelberg with his wife Cathy.

He came to the house to visit and he said something to me about, "Zona, you've got to come visit us. It's just beautiful in Heidelberg." I said, "Oh, I'd love to do that sometime." I had never--this was my other thing--I had always had the envy of people who traveled and who had gone to college. Here I was going to college but travel hadn't been yet. Ed said, "Yes, she's going to because we're giving her a ticket for her graduation from college present." I was so stunned. That was my first inkling that they had talked about this.

Ed had instigated it and so the kids got together and gave me a ticket to Europe as my graduation present. This was a student round trip ticket and they said the rest of it after I got over there was up to me. How I happen to remember this was trying to fight my way across campus on that day of incidence on campus and getting over to the teacher credential program to deliver my application and also making plans for getting together to go to Europe because that's what was happening very soon. I went for three months that summer.
I was due to leave within a couple of days when I found out that something about the application having had to be in or no, an interview. I had to have this interview before I left. The application was already in. Mark had decided to go with me and had gotten, because of his Russian language, he wanted to practice in Russia. He had gone off to Washington, D.C. with Ed.

Ed Goes to Washington, D.C.

During, I think it was '69, Jean Wirth had called me one day from Washington, D.C. by this time working for higher education for the disadvantaged and found that 10 percent of the funding of this program was earmarked for people with disabilities. They did not know what to do with it. She found this out and so she called me. She said, "Zona, I think you need to come to Washington, D.C. and tell them what they need to do with this money." And I said, "Jean, I can't right now. I'm in class but why don't you give Ed a call." Ed was still up at Cowell at this point, "and see if he would like to go." She did call Ed. He said he would like to go and he took Mark along with him as an attendant.

In those days, Ed was still in a push chair. He didn't have a respirator that he traveled with. All he had was the iron lung he slept in at night. Other than that, he would do the pharynglodal breathing or so called frog breathing and just kind of swallow air. So, this was Ed's first big trip away other than having lived in Carmel Valley that one summer. But it was his first trip to go off on a mission so to speak. He got to D.C., where there was a conference for the higher education for the disadvantaged.

Jean went to the hotel where Ed's application arrived for a room and just as they were opening Ed's request for a room and for the iron lung and Jean was there to make arrangements for an iron lung to be shipped in from one of the hospitals to the hotel so they could be comfortable. The hotel management said no, he couldn't stay there and they certainly would not allow an iron lung to be in the hotel because they blow up, you know. When I think about that now, they would never be allowed to get away with that now.

In those days, Jean was so shocked that they would be so ignorant of why do you think iron lungs were in hospitals and didn't blow up but in hotels. Well, they didn't know any better and Jean didn't know that you could fight this. In those days
there wasn't really any law that said that they couldn't get away with this. So, they got away with it and Ed had to stay in another hotel that was farther away but would allow an iron lung to come in. And they found one, of course, that did. Mark took care of Ed and lifted him and did all the things and traveled with him on the plane. Ed owes a lot to his brothers and his family for really being there for him and being a lot of support during this. His brothers were just wonderful.

During that conference, Ed met some of the congressmen and some of the senators and found that he had a great ability for influencing thought and found that, of course, 10 percent of that had been earmarked because within some legislator's family, there had been some disability. This really helps a lot and here was Ed as an example of somebody who could get around and had been to college and gotten his degrees. He quit just as he was working on his doctorate. All of a sudden he felt that he had had too many classes and too much and he needed to get out of there. But he'd done all of his doctorate except his dissertation. He had a darn good education.

**Students Write Grant Proposal for Physically Disabled Students Program [PDSP], 1969**

**O'Hara:** Did you graduate in '69 then?

**Roberts:** Yes, I got my BA in '69 and then my teaching credential in '70. Ed said that he was going on to do other things but for John and some of the other students, some of the other students with disabilities at Cowell to get together and write a proposal to present this funding, that there was money there and they needed to do it. I had no part in that at all. John was the guiding force in it and John and Larry Langdon had a big part in that. Chuck had some part in it, got in it pretty soon, Chuck Grimes. Mike Fuss had a big part in that also. And who other of the students, I think Donald Lorence had some part in that.

**O'Hara:** Were Mike and Chuck orderlies?

**Roberts:** Yes.

**O'Hara:** Both of them.

**Roberts:** Yes. I think Mike was. You know, I don't know what his involvement was. I know he was around there. Many people would come up to see them whether they were writing papers or whether
they came to visit a friend in the hospital and met these guys or whether they met them in class or how they got there. But a lot of them were orderlies, a lot of them were attendants. There got to be kind of a network of people who came in and out as friends of friends.

Rolling Quads Formed

Roberts: In the meantime, of course, they had some--I imagine Ed had talked about the blow up with rehab and Lucile Withington and her declaration. She told Ed that he couldn't write his thesis on a certain subject that he had decided on and then Donald Lorence couldn't do something or other. That kind of got the group together in a way that they had formed the Rolling Quads and they helped each other in learning how to get about campus. But their cohesiveness really got together in this victory in their fight with Lucile Withington who was so autocratic that they just couldn't stand it.

There had been some internal fights, of course, in the hospital about--because here were these guys and gals living in the hospital who were not hospital patients. They did not consider themselves patients. They were students and just happened to be living in the hospital rooms. So, at first, for the staff, this was difficult having attendants come in and out at all hours of the day and night through the locked doors and having to be let in and of course, the beer in the showers and some of those things were being talked about. But that didn't seem to be as big a threat as just these people kind of wandering the halls and coming in and out and some of them were not the straight arrow crew-cut types. They were wonderful people who were willing to do attendant work.

Ed learned as much from the attendants as he did from any of the professors on campus. They really helped his education. And because of his easiness and talking with people and listening I think, has really provided a big opportunity for him to learn all kinds of things and about all kinds of people.
Off to Europe

Roberts: Mark and I went off to Europe. We had three months of all types of experiences. We had friends in four different parts of Europe. We had a limited amount of money. I wish now I could remember exactly whether I had three hundred dollars in traveler's checks or--[laughter] I tell you, it weren't much.

Mark had ordered a motorcycle in London and he was going to take that motorcycle and travel into Russia. He had gone with Ed to D.C. and while he was there, he had gone to the Russian Embassy to see about getting an entry visa into Russia. They told him that there was no way they could give him that. He would have to appear at a border and it would be strictly up to a border guard whether they'd let him in or not. This was not something that made me feel easy, to say the least.

Various things began happening after Ed had told me they were buying me this ticket and Louie had invited us to come to Heidelberg. One of the tutors, Arnie at College of San Mateo, Arnie Goldfinger as he was known then--he since had changed his name to Auram Miller. His father was a known radical in San Francisco. When Arnie became a radical in San Francisco, his father by that time was a stockbroker and did not want the Goldfinger name used in a radical fashion. Arnie's mother had married a Miller, Mr. Miller. Arnie said that Miller had been so much more a father to him than his own father had so he wanted to keep his Jewish heritage with Auram but changed his last name to Miller.

Arnie Goldfinger, then, had been invited to Rotterdam. He was working in San Francisco at Langley Porter helping develop computerized methods of working with people with mental disabilities and using computerized testing and I'm not sure what the program was all about. He had made a reputation for himself.
Here's a guy who had never graduated from high school, had been a concert pianist for a while. He was just a pure genius in many forms and just could not sit in class. He tried to go to College of San Mateo and sat in classes for a while. He was also a tutor in the program, at the college readiness program, and was at the house a lot and would leave notes about committing suicide and then we'd all kind of track him down. He'd be okay. But he taught me about blowing a whistle into the phone if you're phone is being tapped. You just get a loud whistle and blow it in. It kind of destroys some of the equipment.

But Arnie had been tapped by this doctor who was building this new cardiac hospital in Rotterdam and was looking for genius types all over the world to make the biggest, the best computerized cardiac unit that he could have. He didn't care what the degrees were but he wanted the work that was top of the line. So, Arnie was tapped to go to Rotterdam to work on this hospital.

John Hessler was having his year in Paris and he went over to go to the Sorbonne and it was not accessible so he settled for living in this little villa outside of Paris, St. Leu La Foret. Stephanie and Geoff Wells were there with him as was Eric Dibner. Louie was in Heidelberg. And Roger Huf, Ed's old school chum who was with him when Ed got polio, was in medical school in Bologna. He had been recently married. We had invitations to homes in four different parts of Europe. It made our trip so pleasant and we had a delightful time.

We landed in Amsterdam and were met by friends of Arnie--because in the meantime, Arnie had gone over there and met Ariana and they were off on their honeymoon. We had their apartment in Rotterdam. They had friends pick us up and take us there. Mark and I were in this wonderful little home in Rotterdam and we would walk down through town and we were so proud of ourselves when some Dutch people stopped and asked us directions. We just thought that was wonderful. We thought we had blended right into the landscape. It was great.

But the adventures began and it was--I was so thrilled. I couldn't believe I was standing on this other shore, looking across the Atlantic thinking about how far we'd come and what that was like and how wonderful this trip was.

We stayed there for a while and then we took the train to Paris. Geoff met us and we went to St. Leu La Foret. They--Geoff, John, Stephanie, Eric, and Vickie--had just moved out of the larger villa home into the smaller place in back as they were just about ready to come back to the U.S.
Stephy and Geoff went on to Canada as Geoff was also avoiding being drafted. His number was called and he was due to be drafted. They stayed with John that year. Stephanie spoke both Japanese and French and Geoff also spoke French and, of course, John did because that was his studied language.

We were in this guest house behind the villa. The Chicago Jazz Ensemble had just moved into the front villa. They were quite the rage in Paris. We could turn on the radio and listen to them being interviewed. Fontella Bass was the vocalist with the group and her husband was part of the group and we met all of the members. Sitting out in the grass behind the hedges and listening to them, they would have their instruments, they had many instruments—xylophones and drums and bells and cymbals—and they would practice outside. It was the most wonderful thing. I just thought I was in heaven.

It was during that time that I realized that I felt that it seemed all my life I kind of felt that if I did things in a certain way and raised the kids and did all these things the right way that there was going to be this area called a plateau of peace, that somehow, if you get to a certain place, you don't have any more troubles.

[Interview 7: January 17, 1995] ##

O'Hara: The plateau of peace.

Roberts: The plateau of peace. There was something about this setting, this adventure and the music that made me realize that wherever I was, as the statement I read later, wherever you go, there you are. And there I was and this was as close to the plateau of peace as I was ever going to get.

But it's interesting when I came back and went on with my graduate year and had a wonderful writing class with a visiting teacher. They do that every year in that teaching credential program. They have an honored English teacher they bring in to teach the writing to the writing class. She was wonderful. And I wrote some things.

One of them, I wrote a poem that described this philosophy that's helped me a lot in realizing that life and problems continue to be and that that's one of the advantages as long as you don't pull away from life, that as long as you're in it things will continue to happen and the blessing of that. The last few lines of the poem were about, "and when I die, I hope the doggies were barking and that there were the leavings of life in the kitchen sink." There would be coffee grounds and orange
peels and people gathered around and that to me was my way of coming to terms with this philosophy that I had held that somehow things would be clean and neat at some place for the rest of my life. Things are not clean and neat unless I organize and make them so and then something like the recent floods we've had. Luckily my house wasn't flooded. But this did help me.

Sitting in that garden in Paris was the beginning of the realization that I had needed to come to terms with this belief system of mine. As many years earlier, when the kids were young and I was standing in the living room and I realized that I had this great need to postpone pleasure, that somehow I wouldn't let myself enjoy something until I did something else. That I didn't deserve to be happy or to have a moment of contentment and just sit and read a book in the sun for a few minutes regardless of what, as long as somebody wasn't dying or something awful wasn't happening. But those kind of ah, ha moments that happened and then when I think about Paris, I think about that moment in the garden.

From there we went to, we visited around Paris and had lots of nice adventures.

**John Hessler in France**

O'Hara: Did you travel around here with John at all?

Roberts: A little bit.

O'Hara: How did he get around? Did he go to the Sorbonne?

Roberts: No. He didn't go to school. He just spent the year there.

O'Hara: Right, but no educational attachment.

Roberts: No. No, there was no way he could because he got to the Sorbonne and just getting him in and out the few times he was there were a series of stairs and halls and things that were absolutely impossible. He realized that--John's very good about not wanting to hurt himself. He really took good care of himself. He was not up for getting injured in any way. It was just too much to handle.

O'Hara: Well, what did he do? This place where he lives sounds isolated.
Roberts: It was--I'm trying to remember how many kilometers it was from Paris. It was a bit of a drive. In fact, one of the trips Ed and I were on a few years ago, we passed the sign that said, "That way to Saint Leu La Foret." We were going out to visit a disabled artist. It was a bit of a ride, maybe twenty, twenty-five minutes to get there from Paris. There was a little train. Good train service, from the heart of Paris.

O'Hara: But that wouldn't be accessible, was it?

Roberts: No, that wasn't accessible.

O'Hara: John must have traveled in a car.

Roberts: Oh, he had a van because Geoff and Steph had gone a little ahead, I don't know if they were a month or two weeks ahead of John. They had gone over to find a place. That was their chore to find a place. They also had a van, a Volkswagen van. That's what John had traveled in, is this VW van.

Geoff and Steph had some great adventures while they were there. I came across a letter not too long ago that they'd written me while they were there. They almost had no money and were running out of gas and were running out of food and went to visit a friend of Stephy's family. She'd invited them for food and how they got stuck in the mud and how they kind of had to walk in on this woman who fed them and I think even loaned them a little bit a money. But they were very embarrassed to talk about their dreadful situation because John was sending money over to them but it hadn't arrived. They all had a lot of adventures while they were there.

Watching John get through the village was something because the sidewalks, well, as you know, the cobblestones and these narrow passageways and these vans and bicycles that just zoom past. In fact, some of the doorways practically open into the street. So, finding this place as they did with the villa that had some room around it, some living space was excellent.

I'm trying to remember some of the things we did, going to some of the stores. Stephanie and I did some of that. Mark became acquainted with the guys in the Paris, I mean, in the Chicago Jazz Ensemble. They were just very neat people. It was fun to get to know them a little bit. Fontella had done "Rescue Me" as her big song. I guess it was a gold record. I hadn't--I'm sure I'd heard it but I wasn't too familiar with that. But she was just a neat lady.
Zona and Mark on a Motorcycle Through Europe

Roberts: Mark, at that point, went over to London to pick up his big Norton bike that he had ordered, the motorcycle. So, he brought that back and it was named Big Nort, then, because it was—in Europe, the motorcycles tend to be smaller because gas is so expensive so they don't very often buy such big—as the Norton 750. I'm not sure of that number but something like that. We spent Bastille Day in that little village with the fireworks out in the square. We had fun there. They were getting ready to go back, John to Berkeley and Steph and Geoff on to Canada and Eric to Berkeley.

We went to Heidelberg. I took the train and Mark drove his motorcycle. He had gotten a little tent. He got some wonderful Parisian camping equipment, a little stove and a little tent and a little sleeping bag and things that he could roll up and put on the bike. I took the train and he took the motorcycle. He camped in campgrounds and he was very lonesome. And I took the train and I was sort of lonesome. So, when we got to Louie and Cathy's place in Heidelberg we talked about it and it kind of grew upon us maybe we would try riding the motorcycle together.

We took a seven-day Black Forest tour of southern Germany and camped to see how it would work. We knew we were going back to Louie and Cathy's place, and their little baby then, Nathanial. Nathanial's now a man who's directing the athletic department of the Marin Jewish Community Center. But Nathanial was just a baby.

Our seven-day trip worked just fine. We had a great time. And going—it's so different going on the motorcycle than even in a car because we could go past windows. I could look in windows as we'd go by. I could be close to flower boxes. Mostly the weather was quite good which makes a big difference if you're on a motorcycle. And we sat by the Nekkar River in Heidelberg and it was the first time I'd drank this huge goblet of white wine. When it was served to me I thought I'd never be able to finish that. It was such a pleasant afternoon and I finished it. We had great adventures.

Mark had learned to make wine when he was going to Common College. He was developing some skills in wine making. Some of his first attempts were not very good. He later improved them tremendously and learned to make wonderful Chardonnays and Merlot and Zinfandel. When he got very good, he and Elizabeth were married at that time and had kids and Elizabeth was wanting him to pay more attention to the family than making wine because
wine-making can be very demanding. When the grapes come in, you have to do it.

But a lot of us formed a group and we bought into his wine futures and we would go pick grapes and then go and help bottle and take food and have these wonderful days when we'd have a potluck and we'd be bottling, labeling, and stamping.

O'Hara: That's not in Oregon?

Roberts: No, that was before. When he lived in Menlo Park we started it and then when he lived in Palo Alto we did that. He was in Palo Alto then when he stopped it. When he moved to Eugene a while ago, he had still some bottles of wine so I got some more bottles of wine that I cherish still. There's some Cabernets that I only open for very special occasions because each bottle I cry a little that there won't be anymore of that.

Heidelberg was delightful and cruising around there was neat. Then from there we went to Bologna. We went into Czechoslovakia. I had great adventures at the border. As we were sitting in this long line waiting to get in, we tried another border crossing and we couldn't get through. As we were sitting in this line, I realized we didn't have extra pictures for our visas to get in there. It required a picture. So, I realized that we had gotten student discount books that had pictures in them so I suddenly said, "Oh, boy. We've got those pictures." So, we had them when we got in.

It was a dark and stormy night, as that story begins with lightening flashing, the Russian guards, because the invasion had already happened in Czechoslovakia. The Russian guards and their dogs were going back and forth across the electrified fences and letting in a few people at a time. And it was one of the most eerie kind of frightening moments of what's going to happen. I wasn't terrified but it was a very, a moment of uneasiness, of not knowing what we were getting into by crossing this border. But we did want to go into Czechoslovakia and we wanted to go into Prague. And we did.

We got through the border and handed in our pictures and got through all right and went to a campground, one of the first ones that we saw. And Mark then went into the camp office to get us registered and was very proud to be speaking Russian. He almost got us tossed into the river besides being tossed out. That was not the language of choice in Prague at that time, was Russian. So, he came back a very chastened young man. [Laughter] We kind of toodled around Prague a bit and we had a meal that was kind of awful and the stores were so dismal looking. There was no
merchandise much in the stores. We went to one beer garden. If we'd had some friends there and known more about what was going on or were kind of included in a group, it would have been more interesting.

The day I remember in Prague was where the old part of town with that wonderful clock with the skeleton death figure on one side and when the hour strikes, why, you want to be there at noon when it's striking twelve and all these figures out of the hours come across the face of it. Then there was a little shop there that sold marvelous open-faced sandwiches that they cover with gelatin. They're so beautifully arranged.

The Jewish cemetery is close by and we went there. The Jewish cemetery was part of the ghetto and they wouldn't allow the Jews to be buried outside of the ghetto for over centuries. They started this cemetery as the number of graves increased, then they added more bricks to the wall. There's this huge brick kind of ruffley? brick wall on the outside of it that's almost like a building on the outside. Then, up above stand all of the gravestones, some kind of tottering a little bit. But they would move all the stones up and then add more graves down below so they would build up the cemetery. There's a museum as part of it.

It was one of the most peaceful days of the whole trip, was sitting in that cemetery. There's something about being a part of all the history that had gone on there. A lot of oppression but it was open now. There was kind of a mystery and magnificence about it. The great weather helped. It was marvelous to sit on this bench and see this bit of Prague.

From there, we went to, oh, we went to Vienna and found a campground. It rained a lot while we were in Vienna. The campground was sort of muddy. I think there was something Mark had to do with the bike there also. We went to the Shoenbrum Palace on our way into Vienna. Vienna has lots of circles and you can get lost in the circles going around and round and round. We were not finding our way to the campground.

We stopped to ask directions and this man came out of a building and I asked him for directions. I pointed on the map to where I wanted to go and then he started explaining to us and then he said, "Wait." He went and got his stuff, got in his car and led us directly to the campground, which was wonderful—it was such a welcoming thing to Vienna. I was talking to someone not too long ago who was from Vienna and I said, "You know, you can say the Viennese people aren't friendly but I have the most wonderful story. He just went out of his way to be friendly
toward us." Did that and visited the Shoenbrum and I had a peach melba in that little cafe that's outside the front of the Shoenbrum and just felt like I was hot stuff. It was great.

From there we went on to Bologna and visited Roger and his young wife Judy. He took us around to Ravenna. We went down to Florence. We took a two-day, three-day trip and went down to Rome on the bike and camped in one of the hilltop campgrounds and met Marcello and his wife and the wife's mother. They took us around to restaurants and took us to their, to Anna's apartment in a building where Cellini had lived and then took us on a tour of Rome at night.

We met them in a cafe as we were cruising around looking for a place to eat. We found this outdoor cafe where people were sitting around in tables outside. We sat down next to these people and it turned out to be Marcello's birthday. He was an announcer of grand events, was sort of the translation of what he did on television. It was his birthday and it was this group of people celebrating his birthday. They had the musicians come and play for him.

I was sitting next to his wife and I was eating, I had ordered scampi. It was the way I was eating it and, "No, no, no, Signora. You don't eat it that way." They were showing me how to do this and then heard that we were traveling on the bike and that we were mother and son. They were impressed with this and took us to a near, after we had our meal, took us along with the musicians to a nearby cafe where we had tripe soup that's a midnight delicacy.

They opened this place for us because Marcello had grown up in that old part of Rome, in that neighborhood. And the musicians played and Mark and I just looked at each other once in a while. We were just high on wine and excitement. Then they played "When the Saints Came Marching In" and we all marched along this big table, it was delightful. Then, after all of that, they led us back to where we went up to our campground. Then they came for us the next day and that's when we went to their apartment and had this feast and then trip around Rome at night. Then back to Roger's place where we stayed for a while in Bologna.

In Munich, too, while we were taking our tour around, when we were with Louie and Cathy, we had gone down to Munich on our seven-day Black Forest trip. We had gone to the most wonderful museum that's a technological museum and it has a working windmill and it has a history of boats from the very earliest papyrus rafts through a modern ocean liner. You go through a
series of steps of these things along with hands-on exhibits for kids of how water works. But it was the working windmill that I just loved because you go inside this windmill and see the internal wheels of which wheel sets off the other one and what makes the sails turn around.

But going into the campground in Munich, it was a very metropolitan kind of campground alongside a river. We settled into the campground. We had a little space for the tents. It was on grass alongside a river and the tents were pretty close together. I went to the bathroom and I came back and Mark was explaining to three young men who were traveling together that his friend meant his mother. The boys were explaining, two boys from Germany had met a guy from Scandinavia that they were explaining things to, and they said, "Well, that's the vernacular. That means you're traveling with your old lady." I came back. Mark was traveling with his mother.

As the evening went on and we became acquainted, why, one of the young men was saying to me that his mother would never go near a motorcycle. His mother--he was just in awe of the fact that I would ride on it. Not only ride on it but I would let Mark ride on a motorcycle. That was one of the fun--I loved that.

O'Hara: Do you have any pictures of you and Mark on a motorcycle?

Roberts: I think some place we have a picture. I think we have one that was taken in Germany as a matter of fact, that Louie took. I don't know if I could find that or not. But being in Ravenna was delightful and being by the Adriatic and looking across at what was on the other side. The last day we were there, we drove up to go to Venice. We spent a day in Venice. We set up camp on the outskirts and then went in to spend the day in Venice with Roger and Judy. Then we left them after that day and they went back to Bologna and we then traveled on from there up, going up over the Brenner Pass.

We were passing, I guess on the outskirts of Verona and some places that I'd love to go back and see, the most beautiful country, just gorgeous. The closer we got to the pass, by this time it was September and it was cold.

Coming down the autobahn going straight down into Strausberg, it was so cold, all I could do was look across this valley and on the other side, I could see little wisps of smoke coming out of these little inns on the old road that would curve around the mountain and curve around this valley. People would stop and they would go in these little inns and get warm and have
a cup of soup or something hot. But no, not on the autobahn. On the autobahn you don't stop. It's one fell swoop right down into Strausberg. A couple of times I thought, maybe if I just tip my body off, we could get off of here.

O'Hara: Oh, there's no exit.

Roberts: Oh, it was so cold. No exit. It was just on we went. Cold, cold, cold. Got down into Strausberg into kind of a muddy campground and set up our little stove inside the tent and went off into the camp store to buy a can of stew that we heated over on our--[interruption] So, eating our stew in the Strausberg tent, trying so hard to get warm. I remember our valiant efforts to get warm in this tiny little tent in the mud. But that little heater was helping and I was hoping we weren't smothering ourselves. But that was the beginning of a few adventures in Strausberg.

Then, going across Germany on our way back to London, we had a few other cold days where it was practically on the verge of snowing, Mark having to stop sometimes just to blow under his gloves to blow into his hands to try and keep them warm so he could drive the bike. Then we stopped in a funny little German inn one night, a great kind of high building. Mark had a terrible toothache that was a shame and a worrisome thing.

We stopped in wonderful restaurants by the way, Bavarian place--and they'd be so warm inside while it was snowing outside. We did have some warm clothes. It would take a while for us to get our hands and feet warm and get something warm in our bellies.

O'Hara: This is in the summer.

Roberts: Well, this was September by that time. It was getting toward the end of our three month stay. Went back to Rotterdam and stayed and met Arnie's new wife, Arianna, and stayed a few days there. Then we went across to Arwica, I believe, yes, and took the boat across, and got to London where Mark delivered big Nort into the hands of the people who were going to send her back to California. Then we had a few days in London where we just got a chance to explore around London without the bike. It was interesting how we'd gotten used to having the bike.

Oh, we did go out to the coast before he turned the bike in. We went out to the white, the chalk cliffs, the white cliffs of Dover and spent one night on that coast in a wonderful little inn overlooking the water. It was great, a beautiful view and you saw them pulling up a big boat onto the beach. This was a
typical English pub inn. People who lived around there would come into the pub and talk, drink, and order some pub food and visit like their living room. It was a nice little view of that life.

Then on the way back, we went up by the castle and made a turn and the bike tipped and broke a pedal. One of the suitcases had slipped and gotten in the controls so that Mark lost control. But it just happened to be on a slight turn so it--luckily we weren't hurt and it did tip over but it was a very slow tip. Got the pedal fixed and then got back to London where the bike was turned in.

Then we made arrangements to fly back to L.A. and had great adventures trying to get from L.A. up to San Francisco. We had very little money and kept having to walk back and forth across this big airport trying to get the next plane because there were some delays down there going through customs and trying to find when the next plane left.

But we finally got back into San Francisco at three in the morning or some such time. There was no transportation directly back to Berkeley at that time. We had to wait till earlier morning. How did we get back? I guess we took a bus getting back from the airport.

We got back to the green house. Mark had bought a dirndl, for this young woman he was in love with. She was in bed with someone else in the house. That was the beginning of our return. My dogs, whom had been very connected with me were following someone else around the house. I went back and talked to one of the tenants in back, Judy Creydale. I felt kind of out of place in my own house for a few hours. And I felt so bad for Mark, too. That was a hard thing to see his love and find out that she was in love with someone else.

Return Home and Entry to Graduate School

Roberts: Then it was the beginning of going to graduate school and working on my teaching credential. I met Phyllis Birnbaum who has continued to be a very good friend of mine. She had just come in from Japan where she'd been for two years and had been speaking Japanese most of the time. She'd studied Japanese at Columbia and had gone off as far as she could to get away from some of her family and had intended going to the university over there but
found that she couldn't afford it. She got a job working on a little magazine there.

She was speaking with this kind of Jewish Japanese inflection speaking English again and I couldn't understand one word she said. She'd kind of end her sentences in, "neh?" in this little Japanese inflection. She spoke very softly and we were standing around in this group. I was bewildered because I really didn't understand what she said.

We became friends because I had a car and she didn't and we were assigned to the same supervisor and then assigned to the same teaching situations. Our placements were at John F. Kennedy High School in Richmond where they boasted they could close down all of the entries. It looked like a big prison. It was kind of all in cell blocks. It was a very new high school.
XI THE BEGINNINGS OF PDSP, 1970

Funding Obtained and Office Established

O'Hara: Zona, we've reached the point where you were about to start working at DSP and I'd like to know how that all happened.

Roberts: I got my teaching credential then, having met Phyllis, and we did our student teaching at two different schools and became fast friends. She would come and visit at my house and comment on the different people she'd see up in town and kind of point, "Zona, who's that? What's that funny looking person doing coming downstairs?"

"Well, Phyllis, he lives here. He's bald and he's black and he's a drummer and he plays in different bands. Sometimes he's here." He's Carter C.C. Collins.

My kids were around then. Mark was down in Riverside with Ed and Randy was around in Berkeley. Then people who lived in the duplex were in and out. That was an interesting year, I was reaching the end of my teaching credential work.

I remember walking across campus one day thinking, oh, I'm about to graduate now and leave the hallowed halls. I guess I better think about getting married. And I was so struck with this thought. It was just as if I were a senior of age twenty-two or whatever that would be appropriate and embarking out on a career or a marriage. Been there, done that.

I had two wonderful letters that helped get me into the teaching credential program, one from Ed Roberts, my son, and one from Jean Wirth. They were so impressed with these letters. They were in my file and they went out with a resume for a high school teaching position. I applied to one place in Crockett, Crockett High School. I had one interview. They were so
impressed with these letters that they sent for me. I had that interview.

We found soon on that we had very different philosophies of what discipline and teaching were all about. They were looking for kind of an iron fist of somebody who would control the students. That was not my attitude towards teaching. It was towards teaching self-responsibility and encouragement of students to take responsibilities for their own actions. So, I got no further than that first interview. I don't think it would have worked but it was interesting.

The guys, and when I say the guys up at Cowell, I mean John Hessler and Larry Langdon and I think Herb Willsmore was there and Cathy Caulfield I believe was still there and Judy Taylor was around. Donald Lorence was there. I may be missing some people. When Ed came back from D.C., he went to Riverside to take over the program at UC Riverside for a year because Joel Bryan, who was directing the program, became ill and asked Ed to come and do that for him while he recuperated.

Ed had discovered in D.C. that there was money in higher education for the disadvantaged, 10 percent earmarked for disability. So, he got in touch with John and said, "Put together a proposal for funding and let's institutionalize the things that we've learned around campus of what we want to do," and how they had gotten together and helped when Moffitt Library was being built. They had helped with Zellerbach when it was built. Neither of those things turned out exactly what they wanted but at least they got some planning ideas into those buildings and other curb cuts around campus and things that Hale Zukas had also gotten very involved in. Hale lived in Berkeley and was also at UC but he was living at home in Berkeley. He never lived on campus.

So, the guys, primarily John, Larry Langdon, Mike Fuss, who was working at Cowell, partly as an attendant, put together the proposal for funding. Now, I'm sure that's not a complete list. I wasn't in on that so I am going by what I remember. The funding came through and they started looking for a place to have the office. The university wasn't opening its doors to any of the buildings on campus exactly for us to be in.

But the guys searched around and found an apartment at 2532 Durant Avenue, next door to Top Dog. There were stairs in front, but John and Larry couldn't get in that way. The students we were going to serve couldn't get in that way. They talked with the people who owned it and had this ramp built up the back.
Now, the side of the building was a driveway so it meant that every wheelchair that came in was going down the side of the building, down the driveway, up the ramp. Okay, that is one thing coming in. Coming out, it meant they went down the ramp into the driveway and there were many times they held their breath and—as far as I know, no one was ever hit there. Do you remember, Susan?

O'Hara: I don't.

Roberts: I don't think so but I know we had some narrow--

O'Hara: I don't know why not.

Roberts: And I don't know why not either, narrow escapes. But we also put in one of those convex mirrors, the kind of mirror that reflects around the corner so you could see around--

O'Hara: For the cars.

Roberts: For the cars, well, and for the people to see whether the cars were coming. So, as they were coming down the ramp to see if there were cars coming because their parking lot was back there also and that's where the station wagon and the van was parked.

O'Hara: Well, yes.

Roberts: And it's also where Hale Zukas and other people learned to drive motorized chairs. Yes, if they weren't in the office. So, going up this funny ramp that was just a masterpiece of, I want to say jerry-built engineering. It looked none too sturdy but it worked. There was a non-slip surface. It was very steep, yes. But it worked and it got into the back of the apartment, our office.

There was a little entry that came in to what became the dining room. Then, off to the left was a big kind of closet that became the wheelchair workroom. Then from the dining room area or that first room, I guess, that would have been the bedroom in the apartment that became our dining room and meeting room, you went through the kitchen and past the sink on the left hand side. Over on the right hand side there were cupboards and then the stove and like a little work table and through that into what was another, would have been the living room, I think, of the apartment. And it turned out to be offices and a meeting room. Then, around into the entry hall and then another, what would have been a bedroom. That turned out to be John's office. There was a bathroom off of that entry hall also. There was a door
into the main hallway of the apartment building. That was the beginning of our PDSP office.

The guys had gotten their funding. Their federal funding was funneled through the university. The university took--did they take 10 percent, do you remember, at that original time?

O'Hara: I haven't looked at that. I don't know.

Zona Works at PDSP

Roberts: I think so. I think the 10 percent or more, as there was some contention about that, but, anyway, they were very glad to get the funding. They asked me if I would work with them on a part-time basis to get the office started as they kind of needed a parent type person to front for the, to the other parents of students coming in and somebody to be sort of a liaison with families and asked me if I would do that.

O'Hara: John asked you?

Roberts: John and Larry. John and Larry and Mike Fuss. I believe all of them did. They'd obviously talked about it and asked if I would do that.

O'Hara: So, you knew them well.

Roberts: Oh, I knew them well, yes. I didn't know Mike Fuss as well, but I'd met him. But I certainly knew John very well and Larry I got to know, of course, better. But I knew him, too. So, I said I would do that, work part time. That part-time job lasted maybe six months or less before it grew into a full-time job. My office was in the, as you came up the ramp into the first room, I had a desk in that room first.

I remember the first time the office was officially opened and we had some administrators coming through. I sat there in my chair and I put my feet up on the desk. It was kind of an outrageous thing to do and I still wondered at my behavior and I still think about that as being such a bizarre thing for me to do. It evidenced the feeling between our office and the university of being, I want to say separate but equal. But definitely separate. We were not going to be part of the definite university campus offices. This was a different kind of office and we wanted to establish that right on, early on, as they say. And we did.
O'Hara: The leading of DSP, it was PDSP at that time.

Roberts: Yes, it was known as Physically Disabled Students' Program. That's how it started.

O'Hara: Did they choose to be off campus? Was it that the university wouldn't give them a space or did it work out just that they wouldn't give one and they wanted to be away from the--

Roberts: I think it was that they had to find their own space in which to have this office.

O'Hara: And they were happy to have it a couple blocks away.

Roberts: Right, yes. Of course, we wanted it as close as possible for students. We had a station wagon that I drove most of the time and eventually drove home in the evenings if it wasn't being used otherwise because I would get calls at night if someone was in trouble. And I think I didn't have a car at that time. I would drive the station wagon to rescue people or to take them to the hospital or whatever would be needed.

O'Hara: What would you be rescuing people for?

Roberts: Oh, one gal got locked in her apartment. She finally got to the telephone but she was trapped in the middle of the room and her chair just suddenly quit. Another time, I remember several times having to take Bob Metts to the hospital. He had a very weird allergy that his throat would swell and he could feel this coming on. If he couldn't--he was a hemiplegic--and if he couldn't get his medication, why, it was dangerous. He was in danger of choking. So, he had to often be taken to the hospital. Sometimes it was in the daytime and there were a few times it was at night. He used a golf cart to get around campus. This wasn't the first year we were there but maybe the second year.

I remember when he was in the student housing complex off of, I think it was Channing off of Dwight, I remember one night standing out on Telegraph Avenue trying to flag someone down. The fire truck went by. I wondered if I should flag them down but I didn't because I needed some help. He couldn't get up without his brace on and we had to get him up and into the golf cart to take the golf cart to the station wagon to get him in there so I could get him to the hospital. I don't know who I finally got but I finally stopped somebody and had them help me get him into the hospital.

Sometimes an attendant wouldn't show up or sometimes people's leg bags would break. Just all kinds of things. I
can't even think of all the possibilities of things that would happen.

O'Hara: And everybody felt free to call you.

Roberts: Yes, yes. But people were hiring and training attendants. My days in the office, I was a counselor. That was my official title, was as a counselor. I would like to have a job description in front of me right now of all of the things that this involved. It involved interviewing people who had come in looking for attendant referral, attendant jobs. It meant talking to families. I've spent a lot of time on the telephone talking with people, calling about the program. I did preregistration with students. That's when I met Bob Brownell who was in the registrar's office and turned out to be a wonderful friend of PDSP, helped pave the way for students coming in. He was someone that was nice to know. He was just nice to deal with.

Some of the programs were not so nice. Some of them really had a great bias toward students in wheelchairs coming into their departments, particularly the chemistry department. There was a woman who, as Bob Brownell said, was there before the streets were named, who really felt she had to defend the whole building against anyone coming in in a wheelchair. So, through the years, people worked around her. But it would always be difficult and we always kind of would wonder who was going to get the assignment when it was preregistration time to deal with her.

People in the community would call for the services we offered because we offered counseling, orientation, preregistration, wheelchair repair. Chuck and later Andy came in. But Chuck Grimes started that. Andy Cayting was an attendant.

O'Hara: The files show a lot of advance work for housing, finding places for people. Do you remember doing that yourself?

Roberts: Mostly that was Eric Dibner's job. He had been an architecture student and he had dropped out and he was one of the attendants for John and for Ed who went down to Carmel Valley and then went to Paris with John.

Eric made a wonderful map that's still going around. As people moved into the community out of Cowell, he used this map. He had a description as to what this living situation was, who could live there, what kind of disability, could power chairs go in or did the person have to be able to walk or was there a step inside or three steps outside. He kept a marvelous record of these places. I guess I drove him around sometimes but mostly
that was his baby. That was his thing to do. It was fabulous. It was just wonderful to have that kind of continuity and description because by this time, he knew what people needed, if they were blind what they would need, if they were deaf, if they were hemiplegic, quadriplegic, paraplegic, what would work.

O'Hara: I did see in the files that you'd cosign the lease for friends of one of the students. Did you do that frequently?

Roberts: I did it a few times. You reminded me of that because I totally forgot about it. It's not something that was--I remember a couple of times doing it thinking, well, I hope this is the right thing to do and several times knowing it was exactly the right thing to do, that some landlords were reluctant to rent to students with disabilities. If somebody who was working at the university cosigned, why then, it seemed to make it all right. And I never got stung. It always worked, thank goodness.

O'Hara: And I see that there were times when you lent money. So, were you doing--did PDSP at least do some kind of financial advocacy at times, also? Was that part of their job?

Roberts: Yes. John was very good. John and Mike and who else would be in on that? Linda Perotti was working there early on. Nora Laasi. There was a lot of that. I didn't do much of the financial advising. That's not my forte.

O'Hara: You just lent the kids more money.

Roberts: I just lent money once in a while to both—we had people coming in off the streets looking for attendant jobs. Some of our earliest and most wonderful attendants including [Andy] Cayting and several others. They came in as conscientious objectors. Walter came in that way, Walter Gorman. Andy Cayting. Another, who is that guy? He later became a quad. But he came in first looking for--

O'Hara: Alan West.

Roberts: Alan West, yes. He was an attendant first and then became a quadriplegic and it was quite a role reversal for him. But some of them would sleep in the park or sleep on the hillside. It was a little difficult to get them jobs because they didn't have telephones and it was hard to let them know because these hours were so sporadic.

O'Hara: You mean, conscientious objectors were sleeping on the hillsides?
Roberts: Well, some of them. Some of the people who came to Berkeley. When they first got here. They were leaving home, coming to Berkeley because Berkeley was a place they wanted to be. They wanted to get away from where they were and they were not going to go in the military.

We composed letters that were sent to the major in charge of CO's placements. At that time, the laws were that they could only have their conscientious objector status if they worked in hospitals or asylums and in institutions. But Ed and Ann Benner got that changed to allow CO's to work for individuals in their homes. Ann Benner worked this through the Unitarian Fellowship of San Mateo.

Some of them worked at Cowell. Edna Brean, when she was there, got to be very good about writing to the major and we would describe in vivid detail about bedpans and toileting and all of the kinds of terrible jobs these people would have to suffer through--

O'Hara: That was a vivid detail.

Roberts: Vivid detail. Worked beautifully and it was true. These guys did. They had odd hours, early mornings, late nights. They had bedpan duty. They had to take people to the hospital sometimes. They had myriad of duties and odd hours and not much money for it. It was--but some of them were just such fine people, wonderful.

My list of attendants grew, of possibilities, and I got a good file system going for the possibilities and tried to match people. People in the community would call. We had the station wagon first and then got the van and then golf carts for some of the students. Then as motorized wheelchairs became more available, the chairs were being repaired at PDSP. People in the community would call for rides and for some of the services that we had.

O'Hara: Where did the other attendants come from that weren't conscientious objectors?

Roberts: Same place. They would come in the same way. Some of them were COs and some weren't. The difference between COs and the street people, because there were many young people coming to Berkeley to sort of live on the streets and do their--they were determined not to work for the phone company, PG&E or IBM or some other huge corporation, they were going to do what they were going to do, whether it was photography, art, study philosophy or be out of school for a while or be in school for a while.
But they wanted to live the lifestyle that they thought was appropriate. And they heard that Berkeley was a good place to do that. Some of our attendants were doing pottery and selling pottery on the streets, on Telegraph. Some were doing leather work, some bead work, some photography, some--name it and I'm sure that one of our attendants was doing something about it. Some of the women who were coming as attendants would cook, would shop, would come in for a couple of hours in the evening and get meals for people, as students moved into their own apartments.

O'Hara: It seems as if that was a very typical part of the early 1970s, a Berkeley cultural phenomenon. There was a lot of crashing--people could stay at people's apartments for a length of time or even you took more than one person in for a few days.

Roberts: Right. Yes.

O'Hara: How did that work?

Roberts: I remember one young man who came in to apply for a job and he had been teaching a course to conscientious objectors and was kind of getting himself in a little hot water here and there. I invited him home for dinner one evening. We were laughing about it later because as I invited him he thought, well, he would come to this older woman's home and kind of keep her company. She was probably lonesome. He got to my house and there were several other people there and we all took turns cooking meals. This was the house at 2223 Ward Street that came to be known as the green house.

Walter Gorman had come in looking for a job and we matched him up later with Michael Pachovas. Walter must be five [foot] five, something like that, and a little on the slender side. And Michael Pachovas came in via telephone. When he arrived, he was much taller than five [foot] five and much wider than five [foot] five. [laughter] Walter has forgiven me, I think, but we still have a laugh over that matching up where I had never laid eyes on Michael Pachovas and didn't know because I kind of took pride in matching people up. This one was, sort of got by me.

Yes, at my house we had many dinners and pot lucks and people, not only at my place but John took in people sometimes, too, and so did some of the others. In some ways, it was to their advantage to have extra hands around to help for a while, while people got on their feet or found their own place to live.
The Beginnings of the Center for Independent Living

Roberts: The Center for Independent Living grew out of this pressure from the community for more rides to medical appointments, wheelchair repair and attendant referral. We supplied what we could. I would certainly give people names of attendants, particularly attendants who we would like to keep working, good ones, who needed more hours. If somebody in the community needed a few hours that our students didn't need, students came first for our office. But if there were extra attendant names to go around, they certainly would be supplied to people in the community.

Phil Draper and Larry Langdon, Larry Biscamp had--he applied to the program. I think he was in for a little while and dropped out. He decided college really wasn't for him. But he and Phil Draper got together, would come to the office, would sit in the dining room area and would talk about the need for these same services to be put into the community and eventually applied for an R&R Grant.

O'Hara: R&D?

Roberts: Research and, was it, Review and Research?

O'Hara: I don't know.

Roberts: Research and Development grant from the government, but R&D Grant applied for it. They got one. They rented a very small apartment in Berkeley and started to put together the same kind of thing for the community that we had going for the university at PDSP.

O'Hara: Were you involved in those other meetings at all?

Roberts: Not really. I certainly listened to some of their talks. We were getting busier every year, of course, and every few months we'd get busier and busier at DSP. Talking to parents, many parents would come and be terribly frightened for their students, not only their students applying to Berkeley but should they allow their young people to come here and go to such a place and would they be in good hands and how would it be. We had support for letting go, of letting parents know this would be an okay place for their kids to be.

Also, we had a lot of rehab counselors coming through, looking at the program for their students. We had rehab directors. We had people coming from out of state. We had
social workers. We had hospital people. We had students and administrators.

**PDSP Attracts Publicity ##**

O'Hara: You were talking about visitors to the DSP and about publicity. How was the DSP publicized?

Roberts: Besides word of mouth?

O'Hara: Or was it mainly word of mouth?

Roberts: No, it was word of mouth but it--oh, I remember. The Toomey J. Gazette would have articles about Ed and articles about John. The Toomey J. Gazette was a paper put together for old polio survivors. John, then, was included. They expanded, talked about such programs as PDSP as a chance for students with severe disabilities to attend college.

O'Hara: Now, they were in St. Louis?

Roberts: They were in St. Louis.

O'Hara: And how did they hear about it?

Roberts: Gini Laurie was the editor and prime mover of Toomey J. Gazette and, many years before, had had polio in her family. So, during the years she had learned about polio and lived with it and then gradually became more involved in all aspects of polio from research through disseminating information and bringing people together and bringing information to them. Huge conferences she would put on in St. Louis. I imagine there still are. They're still going. But the Toomey J. Gazette was a good paper.

Then there were other magazines that came out, all kinds of rehab things. People from Cowell, of course, nurses and doctors who had worked at Cal would be interested in what was happening to these students. Some of the young men and women who had been orderlies--they were mostly men--while students at Cal went on to medical school.

I remember the time I took a quad to Alta Bates and I was waiting thinking well, I'll have another education process to go through because so often people--I would take Ed in if he had pneumonia or something was, first of all, somebody would want to do a tracheostomy and I would have to explain to them that really
wasn't necessary and there were other things to be done. But this young doctor came through and knew what to do and how to do it. He knew about dysreflexia and I was so thrilled, Maharg, and it turned out to be he'd been there--

O'Hara: Oh, Maharg.

Roberts: Yes, Graham spelled backwards. He had been an orderly at Cowell. He wasn't afraid of disability and that got to be a wonderful thing. When Debby Kaplan had her accident and injury, she had graduated from UC Santa Cruz. She was taking a year off before she did any graduate work. She dove into a pool as she was hiking on a very hot day in the Santa Cruz mountains. As she dove into the pool, she exclaimed, "Oh, my!" She was diving into a rock and hit her head and luckily had friends around to pull her out. They put her on a board and carried her out and somebody ran ahead and got an ambulance and they got her into the Santa Cruz Hospital.

Dave Kaplan and the Stanford Medical School Connection

Roberts: Her father was teaching at Stanford. Dave [Kaplan] was a social worker, Ph.D. teaching at Stanford Medical School and he called our office as Debbie had been in the hospital for I think something like a month and a half and Dave was just not wanting her to lie around and do nothing. He wanted her to be up and doing and he didn't want this to be the end of her life. I went down to see her and helped eat her lunch. She wasn't very hungry and I was. I ate her lunch. We still talk about that. Then, eventually, we helped her get into Boalt Law School where she got her law degree.

But then Dave and I became very good friends as he came to visit and was quite impressed with what we were doing and we did a program in combination with Stanford Medical School that gave a course to medical students. It was a one day workshop type hands on course. It meant that students had to take a day out of their very busy schedules, come over to Berkeley, visit both PDSP and the residence program and then when CIL was operating, go to the Center for Independent Living. We would fix a dinner in the office and have them sit down together. And this, for some of them, was the first time they saw people with disabilities not as patients but as students, shoppers, and dinner partners. It was quite an education for all of us.
It was a great thing to do. I think that continued on for some time but I was very pleased that we could do that. We had many visitors coming in from out of state, people who were writing books and would want information about what we were doing and how we were doing it and why this was so successful.

Life Around the PDSP Kitchen

Roberts: The kitchen turned out to be a very important part of the whole function of the office because the kitchen was there and people needed to eat lunch. Going out to lunch, the small places around campus were not accessible. Many were upstairs or up one step. Top Dog was right next door but you still had to go up a step to get into Top Dog.

O'Hara: I think you still do.

Roberts: You still do. I passed through it the other day, and I saw it. But they got to be very good friends of ours and of course, they would notice when they could that somebody was outside. But students got very good at recruiting help. Get me one of these Top Dogs. You know, get the money out of here. Put this back. Do this. Some of our students, of course, have gotten ripped off on the avenue but, surprisingly not too many have had serious injuries as a result of a lot of the people who live on the avenue and kind of prey on other people. So, it has happened. It didn't happen frequently, luckily.

I began fixing lunches. We started sending out for food and then eating together. John was very big on eating. John liked his groceries and he liked his food and he had never been much a part of the kitchen.

We found student after student coming in who had never seen a meal prepared. They had never been in a kitchen in their home. It was such an alien thing to begin to think about food because here they were in a place that it was up to them, mostly, to begin to think about how they were going to eat and when and what.

To feel that not only food preparation was a possibility, overseeing it, having some say in what you eat is something that a lot of us take for granted. For many people this was not true. They had had very little say in what they ate, depending on what mom or the family would, what input they would let them have. It turned out to be a very popular place to be. We began to fix
more soups and stews and some people had separate diets. I know Mike Fuss who was working there had a wheat allergy so I had to learn to cook avoiding wheat which was just totally alien to me. I had a very hard time doing that. But I did, learned how to do that. It was good for my education. Then we began to take turns. Chuck would cook one day a week. Nora would cook one day a week. Whoever was around, it was their day to do something and I think John--

O'Hara: Chuck made chili.

Roberts: Chuck made chili, yes. And John learned to use, in fact, I think I gave him first a big electric fry pan that he used at his house and he learned to do some kind of stir fry things and he was so proud of himself. Not only did it mean that he could save money, he didn't have to go out to a restaurant. He could invite women in if he wanted to and show off his prowess and also let them help. He was very proud of his abilities as he was learning to cook.

He was the one who told me the story about being at home, sitting down to his meal and with his mother and father and brother. And they would pick up the salt and pepper and salt and pepper their food. John thought, for many years, that that was the way you cooled your food was to put salt and pepper on it. One of those wonderful kids stories.

O'Hara: It had nothing to do with disability.

Roberts: Nothing to do with disability. That was just John. But we would invite rehab workers to come and eat lunch with us. We would invite people who were coming on a visit to come, a parent to come and eat lunch with us. It got to be a very popular spot. Sometimes dinners, when Hale Zukas would want to stay on to a movie, he didn't want to go clear home. So, I would stay and fix him some supper when I could. And then he would inveigle me into the wheelchair repair room and want to have something fixed on his motorized chair.

Hale had learned to drive his chair when Phil Draper had a bowel program day. Phil would take to his bed for one entire day and he would loan Hale Zukas his motorized chair. That's how Hale learned to drive the chair. It started at a meeting when Hale leaned over and tried to run the controls with his headstick. And John encouraged him and Phil encouraged him and then they let him borrow Phil's chair the day that Phil had to be in bed for the whole day. Hale out in the parking lot and inside the building learned to drive a motorized chair and Hale still zips around Berkeley. And he travels every place he can go.
across the country, alone or with somebody. But when he's zipping around in his chair--

The famous story of Hale crossing the street shortly after he got his motorized chair. He was crossing Telegraph Avenue and the plug on his new motorized chair disengaged just as he was close to the curb, but he was still in the street. Hale was born with cerebral palsy and is quite spastic. His hands have to be tied down but he uses his good neck and head control. He drives the chair with a stick that comes from a cap that his mother made originally for him. So, he's good. He can do that.

So, someone came by and asked Hale if he was all right, if everything was all right. And Hale said no. And the person could understand no so they went to call 911 or call an ambulance and luckily Chuck Grimes was in the restaurant that was right on the corner, a hot dog place. Chuck came out and saw what was happening and put in the plug and Hale was fine. But this was one of our--

O'Hara: That happened more than once.

Roberts: Oh, yes.

More on PDSP

Roberts: Many stories about wheelchairs and people. As the education of the public continued, the Dercles made a movie. She was a student and she'd gone to France and met this young man. He was asking why there were so many people with disabilities in Berkeley. They put together a movie that they researched and came up with lots of information. Do you remember what the movie name of that was?

O'Hara: What is their name?

Roberts: Dercle.

O'Hara: Oh, Rights of Passage.

Roberts: Rights of Passage. Yes, they put together Rights of Passage. It's a wonderful movie. I just loaned that to somebody the other day. But it describes the early coming to campus of people who were blind. Some came from northern California walking down to campus in the early 1900s. They were the first people with disabilities to be on campus. The blind school, then, was
developed close by. The education of the public had to grow along with this.

Some of our trips to conferences, one of the first conferences we attended was in Fresno at the hospital. John and I and Chuck went down. I don't know if Nora Laasi went along with us. I've forgotten. In corresponding with the staff at the hospital—the rehab department who were putting on this conference—a lot of it was involving intermittent categorization. They were one of the pioneering teams to do this. Of course, John was very interested in that personally. The doctors in Fresno wanted us to come down and talk about our program.

Social workers at the hospital had a young man they wanted us to meet who was living in a home. They thought that he would be a wonderful candidate for our program at UC and had us meet Lennis Jones. I went out to visit Lennis while John stayed with the conference and met this young man who was a quad as a result of a diving accident when he was eighteen and had just graduated from high school. A very bright young man.

He couldn't live at home, as John hadn't been able to. John, just because physically he was so tall and so large, his parents couldn't handle him physically. And Lennis because there wasn't enough family around able to take care of him. He would get pressure sores—he had very fragile skin. He was living in a home with another guy who had a disability and one older man who was taking care of both of them. Lennis would get to take classes when he could. But so often the van wouldn't come. Transportation was a real nasty problem for him.

He did hotline work for people contemplating suicide and depressed. He was just doing whatever he could to keep contact with the outside world. But these social workers realized that he was pretty locked away and he had a very good mind. We got him started making his application for coming to Berkeley.

He eventually came and I remember Edna Brean's horror because she was the R.N. in charge of the third floor program at that time. Lennis had pressure sores that were quite severe. He needed to have these healed before he could get up and think about attending classes. So, it was kind of iffy for a while, with Lennis' physical situation. But he made it. He then worked for while with us at the Physically Disabled Students' Program. He then went on and got his doctorate and he's now moved back to Fresno, closer to his family. He lived in Berkeley for many years, a nice addition to our group. We have a long time friendship and still are in touch.
Then we traveled through Colorado, Wyoming. We went to some kind of a conference there. I remember driving the van and John would be in it. We'd take turns sleeping and driving.

O'Hara: Did John drive also?

Roberts: John would drive some of the time.

O'Hara: This was the big blue van?

Roberts: This is the big blue van. John was so proud of that giant van. He just loved it. And John said that when he drove that blue van to visit his parents, his father looked at him as an equal man, that he hadn't done since John's accident. John was so proud of his ability to drive. He drove as much as he could. He just loved having hand controls and being able to do that. He worked very hard to get accessible vans that he could drive.

O'Hara: Do you know if that was a first, the first in Berkeley, of a quad driver?

Roberts: It may have been. It certainly was--I don't think it was the first in the United States but there certainly weren't many, that's for sure, as there were not many motorized chairs during those times.

O'Hara: But it was equipped so that the doors and the tailgate would operate remotely so that he could do it all himself?

Roberts: Yes. I'm trying to remember what--I know at first the doors didn't operate remotely and the lift. I don't remember exactly, Susan, about that first van. But I just know that John could drive and he was thrilled to pieces to be able to do that. It meant liberty for him and freedom and really to be feeling himself a man where intellectually he certainly had achieved that. It was a proud moment for him.

Our trips, kind of taking the word out and then having people bring back the word to us and keeping the office going. It was a very busy place. I was trying to remember those early days when I think of the office as being sort of bare, not much in it and not very many people. That didn't last very long. It seemed it got to be kind of, sometimes a hang out place. But more than that, students coming in. Janice Krones and I did a support group for parents of disabled kids at one point. There wasn't much of that going on in the community.

O'Hara: At DSP?
Roberts: At DSP, yes. We used the facility there to have the meetings. One of the things that Ed and Hale together had done when Ed was around when Ed was director of the Center for Independent Living. Hale and Ed visited parent groups at schools in the community where kids with disabilities attended. We also saw that the idea of PDSP was originally called Center for Independent Living, that you had found that some place.

O'Hara: I did. John wrote it in 1969 in a letter to--no, '70. I think early '70 he wrote it to a student.

Roberts: Yes.

O'Hara: What he said was that the name of it was being changed from the Center for Independent Living to the Physically Disabled Students' Program.

Roberts: Yes. So, then the name was taken over when they started Center for Independent Living. When Ed and John realized that there was some lack of steam and that it looked like the Center for Independent Living ideal was going to fade away, they decided to put some energy into it, get it reorganized, restarted and get a strong board with some energy.

They did that and Ed was elected as director. They rented a facility on University Avenue that had space upstairs. There was a very big elevator. The same emphasis that we had at Physically Disabled Students' Program that the people who worked there were either disabled themselves, had a disability or were very close to somebody who did. That was the philosophy of the PDSP and CIL. Ed had desks and work spaces designed for each person who worked there. Each disability was accommodated with whatever it was they needed in their working space.

That's when he met Catherine Duggan at Fairmont Hospital. She was an OT there and he went looking for help in designing the work spaces. They eventually married and produced their son Lee after Ed went to rehab in '75.

O'Hara: Did you or any of the people in DSP or in those early days have a sense of being part of something new and powerful?

Roberts: Absolutely, absolutely.

O'Hara: Right from the beginning.

Roberts: I think of the office as being sparse in those beginning days. We were getting a toehold in the university that had to be fought
for. There was a large portion of the university that still wasn't accepting of this idea, being part of the university.

But a lot of the university and people who worked there did have that feeling and a lot of the departments were glad we were there and able to offer students supportive services so they didn't have to feel that they had to provide other than instruction. They had someplace they could call if they had problems with the student, whether it was using a tape recorder in class or getting somebody to write notes or take notes for them. Accessibility to a classroom, allowing extra time for someone having difficulty writing or dictating the material needed to be dealt with. How would they do the take homes and was this permissible. These were the kinds of things going back and forth between our office and the different departments and colleges.

It soon became apparent just as it was, when Ed went in to live at Cowell, there was a great hesitancy and fear often for the physical safety of students. What would happen if the power went off and how could one keep somebody breathing. Luckily, Ed didn't die and some fears disappeared. There were better interchanges between professors, administrators and our department, and we gained a foothold.

The publicity about the "helpless cripple goes to college" title that was in the paper when Ed first went there, changed into disabled students program. Rolling Quads had their meeting and rebelled against a social worker. Rolling Quads did this. People across the country paid attention because during this time, more people were living and learning with their disabilities.

There were antibiotics. Urinary tract infections were one of the greatest causes of death with quadriplegics and, with antibiotics, that was no longer true. People were living longer. Families of professors would--their sons and daughters were quads sometimes. There were just more people living and more need for people to go on and go to college.

Social workers wanted to help their people just as Lennis' social workers had sought us out. As this information would be passed along more people heard about us. More doors were opened all the time. It was very exciting. I couldn't tell you now how many films or footnotes or articles that I have been in as people who were writing books about disability would visit or phone out and ask for quotes about how we did, what we were doing, and how it was going. It was very exciting. It grew in excitement. It
was a wonderful feeling. I can't--the exhilarating part of it, exhausting, sometimes absolutely exhausting.

The Phil Stephens story was--we began to feel that we could do most anything. I think your story of telling me about--who was it who called and said, did we take quadriplegics?

O'Hara: I think it was Brian Kelly.

Roberts: Brian Kelly? And I guess I answered the phone and I said, "Well, if you're not a quadriplegic, we hardly consider you disabled." And he said that he felt quite relieved and quite accepted as if this would be a place that he could really go to school, he could really come. That's what grew. When I think of the people I've met and known as a result of Ed's having had polio, it's just almost overwhelming sometimes that through that chance virus, an awful thing had happened, but what it's done in our lives is tremendous.

**Influence of Civil Rights Activities**

O'Hara: Do you think that DSP and the people there, the students, borrowed things from the civil rights activity that was going on in other areas? They got a sense of what from those movements?

Roberts: Independence, importance. Their right to be heard. In the meantime there were parades and megaphones and microphones and publicity and television cameras and microphones in front of people's faces saying, we have our rights. Hale Zukas was going, Hale and Mike, Mike Fuss. Hale was such a mover around Berkeley for getting things done. And Phil Draper was, too. They would go to Berkeley City Council meetings and get curb ramps, curb cuts. Eric Dibner was going along helping get curb cuts put into Berkeley streets and hassling the department of public works to be sure that those were carried out and done properly and Hale would examine each one for a long time to be sure that it was properly done and be there to complain if it wasn't, sitting in on meetings.

Hale has--it's hard to listen to Hale talk because it takes a long time for him to articulate the sounds that make up the words. His mind is racing. He graduated with honors from Berkeley in math and Russian. He's got a very active, quick mind and is very determined. That young man has gotten himself on planes and gone to Washington by himself. When I think about it, anyone else would have gotten thrown off and it would have been
allowed to happen but not with Hale. I'm sure they tried to throw him off but Hale went. He travels with somebody when he can afford it and when he gets somebody to go. If not, he goes himself and he does it. He is absolutely dedicated and determined to doing what he needs to do.

That was happening across the nation. It was in the civil rights movement, in the women's movement, in the students', in SNCC and some of the student activities. They learned a lot.

O'Hara: Antiwar.

Roberts: Antiwar demonstrations. When was the sit-in at the federal building in San Francisco?

O'Hara: Seventy-seven.

Roberts: Seventy-seven.

O'Hara: A culmination of this idea.

Roberts: Yes. But as people began to feel more powerful and I think, coming from a position where many people with their disability felt lack of power to begin to be around a place where they're more in control and powerful.

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Roberts: I saw my role at the office as it became known as I did in Ed's life, pushing Ed in front and being behind him. That's the way I felt about John and all of the people who were there. John had to be the director or someone with a visible disability had to be the director. I was asked to take that job a couple of times but that's not what I wanted. It so easily could have been subverted and become an institutional part of the university. As long as there was federal money coming in they would certainly accept it.

This was a place for people with visible disabilities to be visible, to be out in front. I found myself being in a supporting role, seeing that the office functions were going as smoothly as possible, seeing that there was food and heat and counseling and open doors and open access to information from us to the university and from the university to us, seeing that John felt supported and that other people on the staff did, as I felt support from them. But somehow we were in this together and it was a part of a wonderful movement. The time had come and we were in the forefront of the movement and we were told this from all over the world. That was a glorious feeling. Hard work and glorious feeling.
The Phil Stephens story was something I think needed to happen. We began to feel we could do about anything. We soon, in many ways, found we couldn't do everything. But I had gotten a call about a young man who was in Kaiser Rehab, Vallejo, who was going to be sent to a nursing home. He'd been a student in his senior year at University of Pacific and had had brain surgery in San Francisco by Dr. Feinstein. He had had several surgeries. He was able to walk and to talk but he couldn't carry a tray. There were some things he couldn't do. He decided that Feinstein had promoted his surgeries as something that would override these difficulties. He had a birth injury, cerebral palsy.

He had two very bright, charming brothers who have done a lot of work in Washington and had been very successful. Phil sort of felt like the odd man out in his family. As he was a senior, part of his drive was to be job ready and to have a better speaking ability in his job. Some of the people at UOP were telling him that he needed to improve his speech.

So, after the seventh surgery, he awakened and within a few hours was unable to talk at all and to hardly turn his head nor move. It was one of the most tragic things that I have seen happen. An injury or an accident or polio can be devastating. But this seemed to be caused by trying to make things better and it made it worse. Here was somebody who was unable to speak and who was going to be, at a very young age, put away warehoused.

We brought him on a visit to Berkeley. One of his brothers contacted us. His folks had been opposed to the surgery so they were having a very hard time with this as they hadn't wanted him to do the surgery in the first place. Phil has just written a book about his life and he titled it No Regrets. He won a large lawsuit from Feinstein before Feinstein died. I guess the settlement was even made after he died.

But, it took him, Phil, a long time because he felt very defensive about his part in having this done, about Feinstein's assuring him that everything would be all right and that this was a good thing to do. Finally, he realized that was not good advice.

He came down for the day. I think Chuck went and got him. We showed him around campus and fed him lunch and talked about what he could do there. I took him back. Driving him back, I was so overwhelmed with his story, it was like it was too much. When I got home that night, I tried to get drunk. I just felt overwhelmed. We had to do something for him but this was so needless. This kind of tragedy seemed to me--but it happened. And there was Phil. He just couldn't--there was no point. There
was no way this young man should go to a nursing home and be warehoused.

So, I hung a sign around my neck during that evening that said, "Totally incompetent until eight o'clock tomorrow morning". When I went to bed, I hung it on my door because I knew that I could be of no use to anyone that night. I really had to just kind of heal myself to get some distance between my emotional state. I needed a little rest and little respite.

At eight o'clock in the morning I was fine and I went to the office and then we planned on what we could do for Phil. We arranged through UOP that he would get his degree from UOP but he would do his work at Berkeley and he would have people working for him and he would take his classes here. That's exactly what happened. Phil got his degree through UOP but did the work here where he could have some help to do it. He's gone on. He went on to Fresno State where he worked in the, went on and got, I think he got his master's and has been of great help to the other disabled students at Fresno State.

But I've had to have my nosed rubbed into the fact of, you know, that there are limits. There's some I can't do. Whenever I begin to feel I can do more than I really can. That was one of the ways that I got my come-uppence.

Later we began to take in some students who hadn't completed high school. The pressure on the office was tremendous. We would get pressure from people to take in students who were ill prepared for Berkeley--who needed remedial help. We took in students and then got a program going with Vista College where they would do some preparatory work but we got them living in Cowell Hospital. We got a group of students who were kind of rowdy. It proved to not be the best thing either for the students or for our program.

But again, it was pushing the limits of what we could do and how we could provide a safety net under people who needed it, that other universities and colleges, junior colleges, high schools needed to provide more. But sometimes there's a great gap between what is needed and what is provided.
 Importance of Visibly Disabled Leadership

O'Hara: Well, I'd like to ask you a couple more things. One thing is, do you think it was important that DSP was headed by a person with a visible disability?

Roberts: Absolutely. There's no question about that. I think the university could have overridden the visible disability at any moment and have our office become one more department of the university that was like any other department. The director must be visibly in a power chair who demonstrates the needs to be met. Someone whose chair breaks down or whose attendant didn't show up or who, for some reason, can't make it some place in the building, it's much easier to have somebody around who looks like every other administrator but that hides the problems.

I think the visible disability part is exceedingly important. It always has been for Ed, for John, for me, for any of us. As I say, when I stood behind, when I pushed Ed forward and stood behind the chair, Ed had to go and do these things. John had to go and do these things. People had to meet them face to face and deal with them in all their glory and problems.

It's important that the differences be accepted. That our basic reluctances be faced. I say that as a person who wasn't around disability, didn't know anything about it until I was thrown in it because Ed had polio. I would have gone out of my way to avoid being around people if I didn't get to know them. Why get into that? Why bother? What's to know? But once you have it in your face, you deal with it and you get to know all of the wonderful things that go on behind this. Yes, you get to know the problems and you have to deal with them.

But I could see the university overriding that program in institutionalizing it along with every other program. But that philosophy, you see, became so successful so rapidly that it was easy to support it. It was the same kind of thing that in trying to get buildings made accessible on campus. There was one building that was almost totally inaccessible. Some of our students wanted to take classes in it. When the dean of the building had a stroke, they put an elevator into the building.

This is the kind of event that gets things done and changes made. When it's important, when it's in your face. That 10 percent of money in Washington earmarked for people with disabilities because some senator's son or daughter had a disability and they thought to earmark that money. That's the
way things began to happen. It's important to seize the moment and then carry it forth.

Original PDSP Staff

O'Hara: I'd like to know a little bit about who was employed, right in the beginning of DSP. Who was full time and who part time and who was a student?

Roberts: I wish I had employment records in front of me to answer that, Susan. Right to begin with, John was full-time director. Larry Langdon was assistant director. Mike Fuss worked, I think, part time. You'd have to check with him on that.

O'Hara: Mike Fuss was not assistant director?

Roberts: Yes, he was for a while. Yes, I think he was. But I think that shifted and Larry Langdon filled that role. I know at some point Larry was and whether it was right to begin with—maybe Larry was doing something else and Mike did it first. I think because Mike was the feet, he could walk around and get things that John would need. I imagine part of that would be for that reason.

Then Carol was with Larry, Carol Langdon at that time. She worked part time there. She was a secretary then, came as a secretary. I started out part time. I think I was part time for a few months. I'm not sure how many months, whether it was four months or six months because I thought I'd do a part-time teaching and part-time that but I soon realized that I had a big stake in that office and what went on and the opportunity was there and I wanted to do it. It kind of was a combination of the things I'd learned and the things I wanted to accomplish and that was there to do. I felt I was pretty good at it.

Nora Laasi came in a little bit later. Chuck was old time. People got added as our budget increased. John and Larry worked very hard at that and Mike also, at first. Getting more money for more funding for more help as we realized we needed it. Lennis worked there part time later, just a few hours. Some worked there just enough to not affect their SSI [Supplemental Security Income], some of their payments. That was pretty important so they could work a few hours. But Chuck and then Andy was full time. Linda Perotti, as a student, worked part time.

O'Hara: They weren't all there on day one.
Roberts: Oh, no.

O'Hara: You were one of the day one people, and John.

Roberts: Yes, well, I was day one when the office opened. I wasn't in on day one on the planning end. John and Mike and Larry were the ones who put together most of that planning.

O'Hara: And they all worked right from the beginning.

Roberts: Yes.

O'Hara: And was Chuck there from the very beginning?

Roberts: Chuck was there from the beginning.

O'Hara: Anybody else from the very beginning?

Roberts: Susan, I don't remember.

O'Hara: That's all I've heard.

Roberts: Yes, that's what I remember. I think we were the core group and in thinking about the trips we went on, it was John, sometimes Larry, and Chuck and Zona. Sometimes Linda Perotti would be in. But there were always--oh, and there was another secretary. We met some wonderful people coming in because there would be people who had been attendants and who would come in either asking for a job or come in as note takers or drop by.

Some of our greatest support came from the walking students who would have signed up for four or five classes and gone on a skiing trip, broken a leg and feel stranded. Wanting to continue their classes they were unable to get around that hilly, widespread campus, the buildings so far from one to the other. We would provide transportation to these people and they became dedicated helpers and spread the word about this marvelous office, both on campus and in their homes. It was wonderful.

O'Hara: Did DSP ever use volunteers?

Roberts: Briefly and occasionally, but not with very marvelous results. I would be tempted to say no. I know we tried it but it often didn't work.

O'Hara: Was it somehow related to the philosophy of the operation?

Roberts: I think it's related more to the fact that it's a hard, dedicated job. The jobs there were busy work. You had to work. They
would try to place people with us one time. We have the student or we have this person who's not fitting in anyplace else and would you take him and do something. We had one family, brought in a young woman who had kind of involuntary speech pattern problems. We tried taking her for a while and it just drove all of us crazy. I imagine that's what her family went through and what her school went through. Sometimes in the summer we would try to take in some students who were volunteers. As I remember, it didn't work very well.

**Importance of Knowing Regulations Better than the Agencies Did**

[Interview 8, January 26, 1995] ##

**O'Hara:** Zona, you were thinking about starting with the importance of learning the regulations back in those early days.

**Roberts:** Knowing the regs, a pivotal point. It's hard for me to begin this. My mind kind of goes back to when Ed was living in East Palo Alto in the black community and teaching some courses at Nairobi College. He took in a cousin of ours who had a breakdown in Mexico. Ed was having some trouble getting attendants. And he [Ed] wanted to get this relative of ours alternative service status.

At that time, alternative service was only granted to conscientious objectors who worked in hospitals or institutions. He wanted to get it for people to have CO's work in homes. CO's were conscientious objectors. So, that's when he worked with Ann Benner and the Unitarian Church in San Mateo and they got this changed through Agent Major McRea in Sacramento. That was one way of knowing the regs and getting things changed.

I think part of that goes back to when rehab wouldn't take Ed in or pay for his going to school because he was too totally disabled and what would he do. Those were the days when rehab was the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation. They only did things, retraining somebody who was working already and lost a finger or became blind or something. This was kind of beyond their scope at that time. Gradually getting these things changed meant being persistent and having a little pressure put on in different ways by different people.

I think that meeting at College of San Mateo between Jean and Phil and Department of Rehab people was crucial to Ed going to Berkeley. Jean Wirth and Phil Morse as being the vice
chancellor of the CSM and Jean having been one of Ed's teachers and an advisor to the honor society and promoting Ed's and displaying his record there when they were saying that Ed was too aggressive, he was not college material.

Ed was sort of overwhelmed at first. It was scary for him to be the first one living at Cowell not as a patient. He had to maintain his not-patient status. Then when John came in and the two of them talked about first of all, learning to be students, college students and keeping their grades up so they could be there. They liked succeeding. It was important to them to succeed, just in their private lives, both of them coming from families where neither Verne nor I had attended college. John's parents hadn't either. So, they were kind of the first in many generations of college students. Ron, Ed's brother, was already there.

Gradually other students came in to the Cowell Program and then they had this experience with the rehab counselor who was telling them what they could write for their dissertations and other papers. What they had to maintain, this imperious manner, banded the students together in order to get this changed. But they had to know what they were doing in order to get together and get this change. They had to know how to get publicity, how to call the television cameras, how to get these things on the front page, which they managed to do. It was big news. This woman took off for Japan as this news was about to break. She was not around. But they were successful in getting her moved aside so they could go on with what they wanted to do. Lucile Withington thought her job as their voc. rehab counselor was greater in scope than the students needed or wanted. The S.F. Chronicle wrote the story.

They were successful in living at the hospital. But they had to know what they were dealing with. Part of it was learning what rehab was about, who was the power, how did it work, how much money was given, who else got money. Many of the rehab workers weren't as familiar with the regs as some of the people who lived at Cal were. And particularly John, well, Ed got to know, but this, John Hessler and Larry Langdon and Donald Lorence came along and he was very big in some of this and some of the funding things.

As more students would apply, some were accepted and some weren't. Ed told me last night that Hale, that it was a very selective process by rehab as to who was let in for the Cowell program. We were talking about color because in the beginning there were not many people of color. He said he thought one Chinese man had applied, was turned down. Now, on what basis, I
don't know, but Hale Zukas had applied to live in Cowell and was turned down. Hale was already attending Berkeley and living at home. But on what basis he was turned down, Ed wasn't sure.

Things loosened up a little bit as more people applied and there was more pressure as more were accepted and then by the time the program moved up to the third floor and got off the second floor, the second floor had been the main student floor where patients were staying. When this program, then, was segregated to the third floor and had a wing of its own later, that was when more students came in--more students of color and some with not quite the qualifications that Ed and John and others had come in with.

But in the meantime, as students, as people would apply and social workers would come in and rehab workers, they would find out what other people had been getting, how much a month, what kind of help they were getting and begin to advise each other and some of the new students who came in as to what they were entitled to and how to get it. This was such an important aspect.

This is one of the bases on which the program was founded and this continued. They would begin to do this before they arrived. They would apply to California Rehab dealing with the rehab if they were coming out-of-state, dealing with the rehab in their state and then through California Rehab to get into the program.

O'Hara: Are you referring to staff people, your own staff?

Roberts: Yes, absolutely.

O'Hara: Not necessarily over students but--

Roberts: No, to our own staff because these were the people going out of the Cowell program who put together the proposal for funding and then started the office. This would be John and Mike Fuss and Larry Langdon. They were the core. Donald Lorence had a large part of that. He would often be the one who would study the regs. He was not very good with people but he was very good with figures. He knew how to tell people what they were entitled to receive. I remember seeing him sitting there, this funny little guy. He certainly was not personable but he knew his figures.

Donald's life depended on being included with some of those guys because Lucile Withington, the rehab worker who was out to kick him out, and the students all closed around him and saw that he didn't get kicked out. That she couldn't tell him what he
could study and that they were successful with doing that. And Donald was indebted.

He'd come from a very sheltered house. He was one of the people who'd never been in a kitchen before. As mad as I got at him later, I still have to give him credit for being the man who would--man; I can hardly call him a man; he was such a boy, who knew the regs and in his little voice, was just telling people what they were entitled to and how to get it and who to talk to.

O'Hara: I found a couple of his letters in the file, to rehab counselors, detailing the most specific items: the regulations and how an individual student matched every single one of their regulations and was entitled, therefore, to such and such amount of money.

Roberts: Yes, and the maximum, I'm sure.

O'Hara: Yes, and the maximum.

Roberts: Yes, well the money was paramount to getting students into Berkeley. My part was taking the phone calls and talking to parents, to students, to perspective attendants. Trying to provide the ambiance that said, "This is a friendly place and we would like to see you here or you can send your kids here, parents. It's okay. I did it and it worked."

There's something about those years. I was trying to think of, at the beginning of PDSP as it was known, how many years of disability experience those of us in that office had. I think we could push a hundred or so years combining the--I think Ed was thirty around that time. So I had thirty years of experience with disability, living with it. Ed, or John had--he was a little younger than Ed--he had been able to say twenty-eight years of experience dealing with it. Larry Langdon would be around the same; Donald the same. So there were many years--we weren't a crew put together from the street. These were experienced, with disability, people. So it mattered a lot in talking to people and talking to faculty, parents, relatives, that we knew what we were talking about on that level.

Now, fitting it into the university was something else but because we were two blocks from the main campus, we did have our own headquarters and were a little protected from having to deal with the bureaucrats all the time. John had to go to meetings on campus--later Betty Neely was coming over a lot and we had meetings at the office but--and the bigger we got, then the more bureaucratic they became at the new office but right to begin with, why, we just kind of tried to keep our records straight.
Donald Lorence as Director of PDSP

O'Hara: I do remember when I started working there with all of them. No one really showed up until ten o'clock at the earliest. This surprised me but on the other hand, nobody left at five o'clock either. It was quite—it set its own rules.

Roberts: The only people who would call us at eight in the morning or nine in the morning would be people whose attendants didn't show up or somebody from the campus. Usually students didn't schedule classes before ten or eleven. But I think that knowing the regs was exceedingly important and I think those years at Cowell of people getting together and knowing each other and knowing where the strengths were within each person was exceedingly important in the starting of PDSP.

I'd mentioned getting so pissed at Donald Lorence because eventually, when I quit there it was due to Donald's ineptitude, after I had worked there for five years. When Ed went to Sacramento in '75, as director of rehabilitation for the state when Jerry Brown appointed him to that job, he asked John Hessler, who was director of PDSP, to go along as an assistant director of rehab for the state and John did, I think later to his regret. It did move him out of the university system and he soon got himself into civil service where the appointed jobs that Ed had--Ed was never in civil service. He was an appointee and then when Deukmejian came in, why, Ed was out. I doubt that Deukmejian would have asked him to continue and even if he had, I think Ed would have not continued under Deukmejian. Ed was by this time ready to come back to the Berkeley area. It's not as easy to find attendants in Sacramento and living up there was, he felt, he kind of felt out of the mainstream of—he was in the mainstream of state politics but not of disability politics and he missed that.

In looking for another director after John left, we put on some kind of looking around. That's when Betty Neely had asked me if I'd be director and I said, no. I wasn't qualified for the job to begin with and I was not—I wouldn't have taken it under any circumstance. There had to be someone with a visible disability as director. That's my firm belief. People have to be aware.
Donald with his financial abilities was chosen and I thought that he could do the job as he knew so much about the financial workings of the program but he proved to be just a horrible administrator, just really very, very bad and allowed other people who weren't part of the office to come in begin to--he was very, very easily influenced. He was a very lonely kind of an isolated guy who was looking for love in all the wrong places, I guess would be a popular way to put it and had some former students come back and begin to try to get in, work their way into working there and he was just easily coerced.

I still remember the office staff meeting that we had and sitting around the table when Donald turned to me and asked me what I did at the office and why I was there. It's one of those moments in life I shall always remember. It just--it was so awful. It was such a horrid time. It took me quite by surprise. I don't know why. I guess I didn't think that that triumvirate could get to that point. I thought they were more sensible than that but they weren't. It did certainly lead to my leaving.

O'Hara: Which triumvirate was this now?

Roberts: This was Judy Taylor and the man she was living with and--

O'Hara: Donald.

Roberts: And Donald. They just, they surrounded him. They stayed; they fed him and they just kind of coerced him and Judy wanted very much to take over control of that office and she started working on Donald to do it and she was not in good mental shape herself; those were sad days around there. It was not good. That was just early '77 when this happened. I remembered Nora Laasi and I and Susan, you were part of that, too.

You remember we were trying to get the university in to try and get things straightened out so this couldn't continue but I finally realized the one thing I absolutely could not stand in my life as an only child, perhaps, but as somebody who cared a lot about what happened to that office was that Donald Lorence was my boss and there was something about that that I found so offensive, that somebody like that would be running the office.

One of the things that began to happen was that students were not getting the services that they'd gotten before. There were a few favored students who had come in and received services and the other wouldn't. Their phone calls wouldn't be answered and they were not welcome in the office. I found this just reprehensible. So I did write a letter and I tried to get things changed and then I realized that I was quitting.
So after five years of working there I departed, absolutely terrified. It was like stepping out of an airplane into open space. Here I was at fifty-five and leaving a job with a nice paycheck and health insurance and all those things, stepping into I didn't know what but it proved again to be one of those better steps in my life.

Oh, also around the same time I had applied to the School of Social Work to get a masters as I had heard about family therapy. I had attended a dinner given by a woman who said she was gathering together some interesting women she had met. She wanted us all together for a dinner. We went around the table talking about the things that interested us.

All of us were sort of in our fifties, some a little older and a couple a little younger. One woman was learning to fly and had done some fascinating things. One was Ingrid Mays, who had been married to Rollo Mays, was a German woman who had a retarded daughter back in Germany and I had mentioned at that time that I had just heard about family therapy and I was quite interested in it. I would like to know more about it. I think I was putting together my application to the School of Social Work. I thought that would be a good way to get it because it would be right on campus and it would be a cheaper way, certainly the least expensive for me, living close to campus and working there. This was before I quit.

Well, I got turned down by the School of Social Work because they said to me, why would I--and I thought they would be so interested in my experience in disability, certainly, and they were. The woman who interviewed me certainly was but in the reviewing my application, they said, "Why does she want to take up room in our school of social work? She's got a job and she's got all this experience and she doesn't need this extra degree." So that was their take on it as to why they turned me down. They must have had a lot of people applying. At this dinner I mentioned that I was fascinated with the idea of family therapy.

One day when I was still working at the office, this woman came by, the woman who'd given the dinner whose name I cannot remember. She had a ticket for me to attend a family therapy conference in San Francisco at UC San Francisco given to me by Ingrid Mays who had to fly--was going to attend and had to fly off to Germany because her daughter became ill and she had to go back and see her. So she donated this ticket to me. It was one of those gifts that just changes one's life.

Megan Kirshbaum was going to the same conference and we went to UC San Francisco to this conference and found the topics and
people fascinating. I liked the people who participated, the things they said, what they were doing, and guess where the first class was, done by Friedman, a psychiatrist living in Berkeley. The first beginning family therapy was at his home in Berkeley.

Megan and I both started into learning about family therapy. I followed that up by applying to John F. Kennedy University in Orinda and getting my degree there because they have a night and afternoon program. Most of the students there are older. They had a very good program in family therapy.

O'Hara: Any further thoughts on regulations and rehab?

Roberts: I think the fact that they knew the regs that thoroughly kept the rehab workers on their toes. Soon, the ones who didn't know the regs very well were not coming around or they weren't representing the students. We narrowed it down to a few and I think Karen Topp was one of them. Who was before Karen?

O'Hara: Ruth Dushkin.

Roberts: Ruth Dushkin, yes, was excellent. Oh--

O'Hara: Brad Carter?

Roberts: Yes. Well, I'll have to remember some of the names.

The social workers and the rehab workers who came around, who were interested in us and interested in the movement were the ones who really had the students' best interests at heart, too, who wanted to promote their students who did, for their students what had been done for Ed when we first went to Berkeley, Catherine Butcher, who said, sitting beside Ed's bed, "How may I help you?"

For some rehab workers, this is something it doesn't occur to them to say. It's almost thought, "How can I protect the state's money? How can I not give any of this money away? What's the least I can do?" This maybe this is downgrading but that was the attitude that many of them had and some of them still have which is too bad. It keeps students from getting on with what they need to do.

The name I was trying to remember was John Velton who was such a big help to us. He was an administrator and he would help choose some of the rehab workers who would be appointed to work with some of our students. He's still around, just a really fine man.
Physical Accessibility Issues

Roberts: First Ed, then John, then Larry had to find their way around campus, how to register, find classrooms and buildings, how to take notes, were recorders permitted or whether you could take exams orally, whether you could take them home.

When Zellerbach was being built they needed to be reminded of seating because this was one of the things they were running into in the local theaters. Ed and I had gone to a theater in San Francisco one time, the Geary, I believe, and this elderly man threw up his arms across the entrance and said, "No, you can't come in here. You're a fire hazard." These kinds of things happened frequently in the theaters. They did not like wheelchairs in because wheelchairs, you see, were going to get in the middle of the aisles and block people who were stampeding out. [laughter] It was kind of like Ed's iron lung that was going to blow up in the hotel in Washington, D.C. And Susan, you've got opera house stories of--

O'Hara: Yes, oh yes.

Roberts: Of being behind barriers, some of our local crips just sued some of the local theaters as they had segregated seats where people in wheelchairs couldn't sit next to their friends. This does not work very well with Berkeley crips. They want to go to the theater and sit next to their friends, not behind some barrier. So they're pursuing all of these things. I think the sound heard round the world of where these ideas have gone is just fascinating.

The social life in Cowell expanded as more students entered. Sex, drugs, and rock and roll stories about Larry Langdon being in Cathy Caulfield's bed when her folks came and Linda Perotti as the attendant finding the folks and thinking, oh, my Lord. I'm trying to keep them out while Larry jumped out of bed, into his chair and wheeled into Cathy's bathroom, except he forgot his clothes. Mama was horrified--

A Vibrant Community ##

O'Hara: You were going to say something about the social life for the--

Roberts: Yes, I think that's where I seem to have been headed. The university, learning the regs, finding the feeling of power, and
out of this developed a social life that was educational. They were so happy to be sprung, to be out in the world—this was a future they hadn't foreseen.

A lot of them stayed around Berkeley and didn't get jobs but stayed around. There was a social scene beginning and our office had a big part of some of that social scene around our lunches, dinners, our getting together, our meetings with parties—John had several neat parties in his apartments. Other people just beginning to get together and have a social life and the dating and who was sleeping with who and all those wonderful kinds of things that students talk about under their circumstances. So they seemed to be progressing on many fronts and for some students it was catching up from years of not having, really, an adolescence, of not being able to be out and date and think about sex and think about partners. It was wonderful to see that grow and develop, to see people need each other.

Attendants were a big part of that, too, sometimes as lovers. This gets kind of confusing and makes people feel more confined if they're afraid to fire that person or not have them around anymore as an attendant if they're going to lose their lover at the same time.

When Ed and John were talking about this possible Center for Independent Living, now that meant PDSP, what became known as Physically Disabled Students' Program. Their first name for that was Center for Independent Living. They changed that. You said you came across that, too, didn't you? The first thing they talked about, Ed told me last night, was that they were talking about having a halfway house, a place where people would live. And I think that was their planning about what was going to happen to them when they would have to leave Berkeley. So, the planning of a halfway house.

Then they soon came to realize that this would be too expensive both to start and to maintain and besides it was not part of the philosophy of people living independently wherever they chose to live and then coming together for building friendships and careers in other ways but coming together with people they would choose but not living with. I hadn't really thought about that. But that was almost going from the student concept back to the nursing home concept.

Center for Independent Living not too long ago had a big dispute as to whether they would provide a halfway house, whether they would, provide a living space. That was one of the first questions people would ask when they called the Physically Disabled Students' Office or program. They would assume that one
could live there. At Center for Independent Living the same thing happens. They would assume that they could send their relatives or kids there to live. So, for us to explain that no, no, no, we didn't condone that idea, that it was quite the opposite, that people needed to find their own places to live and that we would help them not only find a place to live but attendants to be with them and what their funding would be and which classes they would take and those kinds of things. But the halfway house was certainly one of the things that they did come up with.

Ed said that the architects on campus with the planning of Zellerbach and Moffitt were very cooperative. They listened and gathered knowledge soon about the buildings and what needed to be done to make them accessible. There weren't any fights about some of these buildings that he remembered anyway. I remember there being something around Moffitt and those turnstiles but I really didn't follow that through.

Arleigh Williams, as dean of men, was of great help. He was a very supportive person from the time that we first went there and he sent us up to see Henry Bruyn at Cowell to tell us why Ed shouldn't be on campus. Ed wound up working for him later in the Dean of Students office. That was nice to have his support. He had a good voice on campus.

Talking about some of the students who didn't make it and I guess the first student I could remember, Tim Danaher, who committed suicide and was living with Cindy Anderson and she was going to leave him and he couldn't take it. I remember his suicide because of the shock of it and because when he came through the office before he went home and blew his brains out, back to his apartment, he was so strange. There was something so bizarre about his cruise through the office. I felt myself pulling away from him. It was all I could do to say hello and I'm not even sure I said hello. It was as if he had already gone. There was a strange kind of "I'm above it all" kind of look on his face. And it was one of those experiences in life I remember because he cruised through, he wheeled through the office and went into the back room with John and Larry or whoever was there at that time.

O'Hara: I don't think John was there.

Roberts: I don't think John was there either, yes. And I think Nora [Laasi] may have been and maybe Cathy Jay was and maybe Dennis Fantin. But that strange aura that he had about him, that strange kind of feeling and I, having gone on with the work I do now, it's kind of interesting, the vibes that you can pick up on
from people and it was too bad. That was quite a loss. His Freidrich's Ataxia was progressing, of course, but he was a nice guy and it was too bad that he couldn't find a way, couldn't find counseling or couldn't find a way to get through that. He took it so hard that she was going to leave him.

Other students who would drop out, go away some place else or leave. And I don't have a list in front of me of students who didn't make it. I would have to take it on a one by one basis, I guess.

O'Hara: Most did make it, though? Most were successful? At independent living and graduation? And that, of course, leads us to what independent living is.

Roberts: Exactly, because I saw the office as a pathway between home and the world. My feeling was that anybody who came through who had gotten to Berkeley, whether they were a student or whether they were not, was making it in some way, whether they died later as a result of their disability, which happened several times. Remember we were talking about him the other day. What was his name who came from Fairmont Hospital?

O'Hara: Jeff Long.

Roberts: Jeff Long. He wanted very much to be part of our program. He was a C-2 quad or a very high quad. He needed constant breathing help. It was a great risk to take Jeff along. Then he did die shortly after his arrival at Cowell. But he so wanted to get out of Fairmont Hospital and to be a part of Berkeley. We were worried immediately about his attorney father, whether he was going to sue us or not. But we all knew, because Jeff had made it very clear that he would, even if he died, for him to get to Berkeley was the goal that he wanted. That was what he wanted to do.

Other students came to Berkeley, then, would move out into their apartments. I remember Eric Dibner living with one young man who died of his progressive illness. But he made it here. He made it away from home and got to do part of his life that he wanted to do.

O'Hara: You've painted a vibrant picture of the community at that time. It was a close knit but maybe expanding group of people who were exploring and living to an extent they hadn't lived before. Is there anything more we need to discuss about that? It seems like a very important point.
Roberts: Each student who came brought with him or her a personal story and a personality into this melange. They bounced off of each other with the hatreds and the affections. The dynamics between these students were to watch and to be part of. The attendants were always in and around also. They were a great part of this life as a lot of attendants were very good students who were going on. Some of them now who are in the medical field who are doctors and scientists and people who have a lot to offer the medical community because of their knowledge of disability. When Donald moved into the same building the office was, he lived with—who was that tall guy he lived with who was his attendant? Bill MacGregor. That was within the same apartment building as our office. Attendants who were coming in and out, people who were coming out with their gay lifestyle that they hadn't been able to explore for whatever reason, wherever they were but they were exploring it now.

Geographically, the expansion just through the community as Hale and Phil and a lot of people were going out and going to Berkeley City Council meetings, getting curb cuts all up and down Telegraph Avenue and on Shattuck, when Shattuck was being redone. So these people just expanding the community, pushing at the periphery of it, pushing within the university and into the city itself. I guess I've mentioned the dark place in a film about why, when they asked the question, "Why are there many people with disabilities in Berkeley?" Now, I still talk to people who have never been students at Berkeley but who came as a result of PDSP and Center for Independent Living because of its national and international coverage about this idea and how this idea could grow.

Reasons for Success of Independent Living Movement

Roberts: In thinking about why this was so successful, it was certainly the right people in the right place at a time when something needed to happen. People with disabilities were living because of antibiotics. Many quads early on died because of urinary tract infections, but with antibiotics people don't have to die of urinary tract infections anymore. There was kind of—across the nation, across the world, people were living longer with disability. That 10 percent that was earmarked in Congress for students with disabilities came about because there was disability within a family. The engineering building on campus that got an elevator was because the emeritus dean had had a stroke.
With the publicity in papers, on radio, on TV, friends and relatives with word of mouth, more people became aware of the possibility for change. The pressure grew in the United States, and in the world for a life beyond the bedroom walls for their relatives. Susan, you at home in your dining room, Ed in his dining room. Something was going to have to happen. You lived, Ed lived, John Hessler lived, sometimes against some pretty severe odds. But you did. So, now what was going to happen.

I think of my Republican great grandparents, their need to perform independence was a necessity. They had no social security behind them. They had to keep working into their eighties, keeping food on the table and the cow milked. Food was in the storage basement in glass jars. Fruits and vegetables were what they ate in the winter along with some cereals and grains. They would help each other with nursing. I know both my great-grandmother and my grandmother would do practical nursing of people who had cancer in the community and their block. The community was very often just within a couple of blocks.

People very often couldn't afford to go to hospitals. Doctors would make house calls. But it was people helping each other within the family and then within their close neighborhood and within the church groups.

Roosevelt brought to the United States a great feeling of support, government support for people who needed it. I think it was an attitude that grew out of a depression into beginning prosperity. Maybe it took a war to do it but it began a thinking that still continues.

But I think that kind of hope that came about through that Roosevelt administration that said, people need some help. Ideas seemed to grow out of some need once a seed is planted. Maybe because Roosevelt had had polio and survived. Maybe he knew what it was like to be at Warm Springs and felt fortunate in having good care. He saw other people who didn't have that support and knew about people in poverty.

I had a great admiration for John and his abilities and his strivings and his loves. John and I got to know each other quite well. We worked very well together. When Larry and Carol, Larry Langdon and Carol Fewell were married, John and I would go to Larry and Carol's house and get a pizza or have supper together and then we'd play bridge in the evenings.

From one of those bridge games, I was walking home. I didn't walk down Telegraph Avenue as I walked a block below Telegraph to get to my house on Ward Street. In those days I had
long hair. It was the first time in my life I'd ever grown long hair. I had a skirt on and was walking down when I heard footsteps echoing behind me. I was wondering if I should be alarmed by this but I thought, well, other people are walking home at eleven o'clock at night also.

As I got down to the corner of Ward Street and made a right turn down and had gone a few steps, I heard these same feet in running pattern. I turned, stepped back to be out of the way of the sidewalk when this tall young man came up and he stopped at me and he had a scarf over the lower part of it face. He poked me in the ribs and said, "This is a gun. Come with me or I'll kill you." And we started, he took my arm, and we started walking down Ward Street. At first I was wondering where we were-- [Doorbell rings]

So he took my arm and walked me--we were walking down the street and I--my experiences at CSM and with having black students live at my house, this was a tall black man about nineteen years of age. He was so much like so many of the young men I knew that I was first of all thinking, well, I guess it wasn't theft. He didn't reach for my bag. He didn't reach but he was poking this in my ribs. He mentioned about three times that this was a gun and he would kill me.

Then I realized that there had been incidences of rapes around and that walking down the street that seemed to be what was next and I really didn't think that I wanted to be part of that and that he was more frightened than I was right then. So, I finally realized that it had to stop there. I didn't want to be--there was nobody on the street at that time but I didn't want to be behind a house or some place and we seemed to be walking toward my house. It was another block.

But I finally just planted my feet and said, because the first thing that came to my mind as he came around the corner and I stepped back to let him go by was, what was the matter. So, I planted my feet and I said, "What is the matter?" The guy didn't seem to know what was the matter. So he sort of looked at me and then he left; he turned and walked up toward Telegraph Avenue and I started on down Ward Street. I took about four or five more steps and my knees gave out, they were going to buckle.

After he left I was more frightened than I had been while this was going on. I turned once and looked back as he was turning onto Telegraph, he was putting these things in his pocket, the mask and the, or the scarf around his face and the gun, if it was a gun, whatever it was, a metal thing that was poking at me.
And I walked on down the street and got to my house and I felt like those cartoon characters that as you go up the front steps, your feet make a circle like a wheel because you're trying to go so fast and you don't feel like you're getting anywhere. I went in the house and one of my housemaids came in pretty soon and started telling me about her day. She said, "Oh, I've had the most interesting experiences." She went on for a little while. Then I said, "Yes, I've just had a most interesting experience, too." But it was one of those things that seemed to bring out the-- "What was the matter?" was non-threatening and it reminded me of the LRY, the Unitarian Liberal Religious Youth Conference, where Ira Sandperl had spoken to the group and he talked about his experience in San Francisco with being held up by somebody who needed some money and how he took the guy to dinner and then shared a little bit of money he had with him but how this non-violent concept worked and somehow with me it was automatic because the "What was the matter?" sentence came out so rapidly.

O'Hara: That's a good illustration of your personality, isn't it?

Roberts: Yes. Because I realized what was going through my mind was, here I was fifty something years old. I realized later from the back I could have been any age. My legs were slender and I had on tights and a short kind of coat and a skirt and my hair was down my back so I think from a distance in the dark I probably looked younger. This was what he was after was a female. There were all kinds of young ladies hanging out on Telegraph who seemed to sleep with about anything that came by and I couldn't see why this young man was out looking for an old lady to rape. It didn't make any sense to me.

But what brought that story up was playing bridge, John and I going to play bridge with Larry and Carol. Before Larry got very sick and before he died he was a very self-destructive young man. Larry never quite came into his own as far as I could see—his health wasn't very good either but he was kind of a—he wasn't antisocial but he had a little more trouble relating to people, certainly than John did. He didn't have the confidence in himself that he really needed to survive and I think his disability could get him down frequently and he also was drinking and smoking and getting into drugs and that really eventually killed him, which was too bad because he was certainly a bright young man.

But we helped each other out in some ways. I knew—John knew that he could call me and I would do anything I could for him and I knew the same about John, that I could count on him to help me if I needed. We all felt that way within the office.
There was something about--and then this gradually expanding community of people we felt supported by and supportive of each other--in this sort of enclave of people striving to get something going that we believed in. We were pioneer explorers.

O'Hara: Was there an enemy or enemies that at all figured to coalesce the group?

Roberts: Sure, all kinds of them. Anywhere from families, to administrators, to rehab people, to police to, I mean, name any group and it could be an enemy depending on what had gone on. That's why I think my presence in the office added a lot because I could represent parents who were supportive and kind of another generation of people who could--because there were lots of supportive parents but there were some who weren't and some who had such trouble letting go of their kids regardless of if the kids were thirty years old or twenty-nine or forty or nineteen. They had a lot of trouble letting go of their disabled kids or spouses or whatever. So that generation could be looked upon as people to avoid. There were lots of doctor stories. Everybody had a doctor. Like Ed, you know. "I'm sorry you lived."
Zona Roberts in the Physically Disabled Students' Program office, circa 1972.
Troubled Years for PDSP, 1977-1979

O'Hara: Zona, I think we were going to talk about the year 1977 at PDSP.

Roberts: It was exasperating. Oh, yes.

O'Hara: Why was that so?

Roberts: Why was that so? Well, a very bad director. I think I can just say that from--Donald Lorence was director at that time. I helped promote him for the job. He was very good at funding. I think we've discussed some of that. He knew the regs and he knew who to tell what to, and how students coming in could get the funding that they needed in order to come to Berkeley to get rehab to sponsor them and how to get their in-home services. He was excellent at that. But his socialization skills were zilch. As a director, he was just, he was really in over his head. I think that was too bad. He couldn't acknowledge the difficulties he was having so what happened was he was pulling back more and more into that rear office with Bob Metts and the blind guy--

O'Hara: Fantin?

Roberts: Dennis Fantin. Then Judy Taylor and her friend, Rod, were dropping by and kind of entertaining, insinuating themselves into the office procedures. Judy wanted very much to work there, Judy Taylor. She had been one of the students, a very bright young woman who had done class work. I think she graduated. I'm not sure. I think she did. But she seemed to have some emotional difficulties and she sensed this opportunity with kind of surrounding Donald, cutting him off from other people and trying to get what she wanted and it seemed to me she wanted to work at the office. I came across a letter that she had signed and sent out to a prospective student that she had no real authority to do
because she was not employed by the office. But it was things like this that were beginning to happen and the management in some terms was entirely separate from the organization of what was happening during the day. So I have an agenda for the closed staff meeting called for July 12.

O'Hara: Closed to whom?

Roberts: Oh, closed staff meeting, just for staff, and that was to keep out Judy and Rod and other people who were not staff. Donald would get these people around him and he wouldn't be available to talk. So we called it for five p.m. on July 12 and Zona Roberts, Susan O'Hara, Nora Laasi and Lisa McCampbell called the meeting because we'd gotten together and had been talking about what was going on and what we could do about it. It just seemed it was a shame. He was adding people to the staff but less and less was happening. There was inadequate organization. It affected morale and the members of the staff who were working. Some people were getting paid for doing next to nothing or paid for not coming in, friends of PDSP being hired for positions whether they were qualified or not as consultants. Staff was no longer being asked who's going to work at the office.

Fewer students were coming in. They weren't getting the services that they had been getting before. It was like some students could get services if they were in touch with that back group, with Donald and some of those people. And other students were just not being served. This, I think, offended me as much as the difficult working things. It was just like the office was going downhill, like it was losing its momentum. It was retreating rather than expanding.

When we'd started the program, we had hoped that sometime we would be not necessary on campus at all, that those services would be just built into the university per se. But this way, it was like everything was going to go down the drain, so to speak. A need for a budget manager and a director of PDSP and personnel, what the priorities were and did we need more money or to figure out how to properly deal with what we already have, the physical appearance of the office and the office equipment. Very few people were cleaning up and that was getting to be a problem.

O'Hara: Going back to priorities, did you mean nobody knew what the priorities were?

Roberts: Yes. It was as if there was an abyss that somebody stepped into and there was this kind of abyss between the front office and where things were going on by the rest of the staff.
O'Hara: How did a student not get served? I mean, how was that happening?

Roberts: I'm thinking of that as I said that. I was thinking about how could I give an example of that.

O'Hara: I saw a couple of notes in the file that seemed like the office was apologizing for a very late response to a letter. Is that the kind of thing that happened?

Roberts: That would be probably the kind of things that would happen; vans not being available, only available to those people who were friends of Donald's or Dennis'. But they had to have that sort of connection. As I say, Donald's personality was not very outgoing and he didn't socialize well. There were people who had to know to go back there and ask for something they wanted. A lot of students didn't know how to do that. It was as if there was a barrier. Part of it was a psychological barrier. There was no outreach. Things weren't growing. They were get---I think that's probably as good a definition as I can give, was a closing down rather than an opening up, a kind of growing in on itself. I suspect Donald felt that he was getting in over his head. But it didn't evidence itself in any kind of saying, "What can we do to make this a better place?" It just began to kind of be a seedy place to work.

O'Hara: Did you say this is a large contrast to John's leadership, John Hessler's leadership?

Roberts: Oh, tremendous. Where John was inclusive--John was dictatorial in lots of ways but John got things done. He could deal with the administrators. He knew how to talk to staff and how to talk to students and how to have kind of an open door policy of people in and out. He knew how to make things grow and how to expand and how to include people.

Attempts to Change

Roberts: As I've said about hiring staff, where with Donald we didn't know who worked there and who didn't, which, you know, it's just outrageous when you think about the few people that we were and then to have these people coming in and start kind of giving orders to some of us who had worked there from the beginning. It was very strange. It was like there was no plan. It was those people who could insinuate themselves in were getting in, into
the back office and that's where the money and the funds were being dispersed.

That doesn't mean that we weren't providing the services that we could all do. You were and I was and Nora and Lisa. Wheelchair repair was provided for those people they chose to work for. But it was the lack of outreach, the lack of expansion and the closing down that was a scary feeling. The office was slipping and it had been for some time. The place looked seedy and felt seedy. And that's not a place I like to work. I think in your writing, it says, "The need for an advocate who is here every day consistently, open avenues of communications." Those were the very things.

So we called a meeting, the four of us, you and I and Lisa and Nora called a meeting for the twelfth of July and those were the things we discussed with Donald and I remember some of the feeling in that meeting because it was pretty hostile. By this time, Chuck and Andy and Dennis Fantin and Donald and Cathy sort of formed a clique and then the rest of us who were trying to get things expanded were on the other side. It was like two armies drawn up.

So we had hoped that this meeting to open things up and say, you know, this is how we're feeling, this is what's going on in the office, this is what we see and feel and what can we do about it. But instead of being, after two hours of frank discussion of program and personnel problems, we realized the director was threatened and angry and declared himself the best director the program had ever had. "People tell me so all the time," was a direct quote from him. But we laid out our problems and hoped for some improvement. We had asked for who worked in the office and when.

Then the next day that meeting went on for two hours with not much being said, except we did all say what we were feeling and felt like we were in a war. So, the next day at one of the few staff meetings Donald had ever called, and he had Judy Taylor and Rod at that one along with the rest of the crew, he asked me what I did at the office and he started the meeting with, "Zona, what do you do at this office? I don't know what you do. Unless you can come up with a viable job description by the end of this month, we shall use your salary for other things." He stated his anger at the meeting of the night before and at our criticism of his management of the program.
Zona Resigns from PDSP

Roberts: So that was the note upon which I realized I was quitting. It wasn't going to work. I guess as I'd mentioned before, there's something about having Donald Lorence as my boss that was just absolutely intolerable to me. Not only was the program suffering but so was I. I couldn't work under those conditions.

O'Hara: Did he truly not know what you did?

Roberts: I think this came straight out of Judy's mouth. I could almost hear it. That's the job she wanted. So she started in this kind of thing of what did I do there because that's where she wanted to be. She could see herself doing that job. Now, that's my take on it. I didn't hear the exact words but I saw this beginning to happen and some of the moves toward it.

O'Hara: It seems that it would be rather embarrassing for us, for a director to ask an employee what they do.

Roberts: Of his own staff.

O'Hara: Publicly. It's hard to think of a director not knowing.

Roberts: Well, and a director publicly stating that he didn't know. He was trying to either prove that I was incompetent or get me out. I know he was pissed at me at this time. He felt the threat with our having had the meeting of the night before and I guess of some rumors getting back to him in the meantime of things we wanted changed.

But I thought the balls of him to say, he declared himself the best director that the program ever had because people told him so all the time. And that's exactly who he was surrounding himself with, with people who told him how wonderful he was. For Donald, that was just exactly what he wanted to hear. He did not want to hear there were problems. He wanted to hear it was wonderful. I wasn't quite willing to tell him he was wonderful.

When Chuck Grimes, who worked there, came up after some of this started and said, "Zona, you know how to get along with Donald. Why don't you just stop this?" I remember that statement very clearly because I was so appalled that Chuck could be part of that. People like to hang onto their jobs and so did I. I was fifty-five and to step out into the wide world was going to be a scary kind of thing to do but working there was scarier.
So I wrote my letter of resignation that I mailed into Roland Maples who was director of student activities on September 15 and said that I was leaving, effective October 1, 1977. There were some--I had cc'd it to Donald and to John Hessler, who was up in Sacramento with Ed as assistant director at the Department of Rehabilitation; Carol McKenzie, program director of Region 9 of HEW; Robert Kerley, vice chancellor; Michael Heyman, vice chancellor; and Norvel Smith, Dr. Norvel Smith, associate vice chancellor of student affairs.

O'Hara: What did you say in that letter?

Roberts: In that letter I said, and I quote:

"It is with regret I announce my resignation from the staff of the Physically Disabled Students' Program, effective October 1, 1977. While my earlier retirement will cause me some temporary financial discomfort, working at PDSP this last year has become increasingly difficult. The apparent mismanagement of funds, the non-supervision of hired friends who prove to be incompetent for their jobs but were kept on the payroll of federal funds, the writing of job descriptions for particular friends rather than for the program's improvement have led the office into its present dirty and often empty of students state.

"Student services often begin at noon, at which time the present director usually arrives. With increased funding from the university and continuing funding from the federal government, the program has never had as much money, as large a staff, and proportionately served so few students. On some days, the staff utilizes more office services than do the students.

"The exception to this chaotic situation is the department of rehabilitation's sponsored residents' program which is competently managed by a separate coordinator. With a similar sized staff and a smaller budget, services are routinely delivered to new students.

"I shall miss counseling the students and seeing their growing independence, as has been the case since the inception of the program five years ago. However, I shall not miss the agony of
seeing students not receiving the services they 
need when they need them. 

Zona L. Roberts, Counselor 
cc: [to the people that I 
already mentioned]"

So having said that and having gone to the--meet with the 
retirement counselor, I found that having worked there for five 
full years and being over fifty-five, I could get an early 
retirement which meant I could get my health insurance and that 
to me was the biggest bonus. And I could also get somewhere 
around ninety dollars a month as a pension. So I danced around 
in this man's office. I was very, very happy about that, 
particularly about the health insurance. But this has continued 
to be in my life. I'm continuing to be covered with health 
insurance, dental insurance. Now, my little monthly stipend is 
around $202 a month and that just keeps coming in regularly and 
it's very nice. But that was a plus. When I wrote the letter, I 
didn't know that that could be a possibility so I was delighted.

O'Hara: What was the reaction to your letter, to your resignation?

Roberts: A lot of it, Susan, is a jumble in my head. In some ways it felt 
bad to move off from you and from Lisa and from--

O'Hara: Nora.

Roberts: Nora, yes. But it was intolerable. I mean, I was obviously--I 
had to go. So, that was--I did have interviews with Roland 
Maples and someone else. I was called into their offices and 
said pretty much the same things that I said in the letter with 
some expansion of it. Who was it who called me, later, with poli 
sci?

O'Hara: Sandy Muir?

Roberts: Sandy Muir called me and I had lunch with him a little bit later. 
So, there were continuing investigations and Donald threatened to 
sue them if they tried to remove him. So they tread pretty 
carefully around how they got him out but that's another part of 
the story. That, I wasn't in on. So, I think I set the wheels 
in motion all right.

O'Hara: Were you still hopeful for the future of PDSP when you left or 
did you think it was all lost? Did you think your resignation 
with your letter and your discussions with the authorities, did 
you think it was going to give PDSP a chance to recover?
Roberts: I had every hope in the world that PDSP would recover and I didn't see why not with some of the good people in the university. Now, the wheels at the university move exceedingly slow and they do watch very carefully for suits. And they're not always successful in that. But Donald did use that kind of a threat and it did delay things. But it worked. How long did it take to get him out?

O'Hara: He was gone by the end of 1979.

Roberts: Yes, it took a while to get him out of there. But they'd brought someone else in in the meantime hadn't they, who was--

O'Hara: Sharon Bonney.

Roberts: Yes, as director. So what it was like around there during the next, during that next year, I really don't know. I didn't keep in touch with anybody. When I walked away, I was out of there, hoping that the shakedown could occur and that the, just the fact that I'd written the letter and had people looking at it, I knew something had to change, that things could not stay the same. They'd have to cover their tracks or would have to see that students had services. They were getting federal money and it could have been a real boondoggle. So I notified all the people I thought needed to come in and shine some light on. One of the nice supportive things that happened to me after I resigned was my nomination to the Order of the Golden Bear. Sharon Bonney and Susan O'Hara were responsible for the honor to me. It gave me a great lift to be an honorary part of the university.
But one of the things that was happening while I was working from '70 to '75 was that I started taking trips. Two of the things in my life that I'd been very jealous of as I was raising my kids and going to PTA and mental health meetings were people in college and travel. They talked about their college education and about travel and I never thought I'd be able to do those things. Ed and Ron and Mark and Randy gave me my first round trip ticket to Europe when I graduated from Berkeley in '69. That was the beginning trip.

Then when I was working at PDSP, I had a trip to Japan. My friend Phyllis was over there. I think I got a round trip ticket for something like under $500 during those days by joining the, I think it was the Chinese American Students' Association. I flew China Airlines to Japan. Phyllis Birnbaum was over there. I stayed with her for a couple of weeks. That was very nice. And she spoke Japanese so we could go around and see things in Japan. She knew a Japanese family and we visited them. The mother, Mrs. Hamou, and I became friends. She had two daughters and one was Phyllis' age and a writer, an editor. That's how Phyllis had met her. So that was one trip.

Then I started traveling to the East Coast when Phyllis lived in Boston. And I had some friends back there. Then Martin Dibner came into my life. Eric's father came out to visit him and we met and liked each other. On one of my trips to Boston, he called one of my friends and wanted to see me. So I met him in Portland and went to visit him at his place for a while. I had a little romance going on with him for a while. For quite a while as a matter of fact.

Then one of the students, Susan Zimmerman, came into the office. She was going to Northwestern and she had a heart
problem. She'd had an enlarged heart and had a pacemaker. And she could walk. You'd look at her and she looked just fine but she walked very slowly and as many people with hidden disabilities, she had a lot of trouble with her hidden disability. She would walk across the street and cars would honk if she was in big cities because she couldn't walk fast enough. So one of her doctors told her, "Get a cane. Get some visible means of--this is why you're walking slower."

Her folks lived in southern California, had given her a car and she was driving it back to Northwestern and asked if I'd like to go with her. I did. We took a--went up to Seattle and then out through and drove across Canada until we went down to Michigan and got her back to Northwestern just in time for her to go into the hospital and have her pacemaker replaced. It was getting weak.

We had some great adventures. Her sister went with us. We met her in Seattle. We were camping when a great storm hit and the rain came flooding in the tent. We had to get up in the middle of the night with soggy sleeping bags and pile everything in the car. A tree had been hit by lightning and went across the road and we had to wait for somebody to come with a saw. Another camper was leaving and luckily he had a big saw. They cut the tree and so we could get out of the campground and go into the next town and dry things out in a dryer. That was one of my adventures.

**Ed's Trip to Japan**

O'Hara: You traveled with Ed at least a couple times, didn't you? Or did you have more?

Roberts: The trips with Ed came later.

O'Hara: Oh, I see. Those were all with PDSP.

Roberts: Yes. That was during the time there. Each trip I take--I smile at the airport. I'm still delighted that I can travel.

When Ed was invited to Japan by the Japanese government, I went with him. That was fun to meet, now, the emperor and empress, at that time the Prince and Princess Michiko. It was a rehab conference and Ed was one of the speakers. That was quite an adventure and we were invited by the government and stayed in
nice hotels. It was a little nicer trip than I usually take but I liked it and we had wonderful interpreters.

And big Steve O'Connell, Russ O'Connell's son--Russ O'Connell was director of rehab in Massachusetts when Ed was director in California. That's how Russell and Ed met. Then big Steve had just graduated from high school and was taking a year off so he came out and lived in Sacramento with Ed and was his attendant for a while. He went with us to Japan.

O'Hara: That was when Ed was director.

Roberts: Director of rehab.

O'Hara: And how did you happen to meet--I mean, how did you meet the prince--?

Roberts: Princess. Oh, yes. It was a huge rehab conference. People came in from rehab work from all over the world. They opened the proceedings, Ed fell asleep in front in the front row and snored and I had to nudge him, I think partly out of nervousness and partly just fatigue. I nudged him and he woke up and he said, "Don't do that!" [laughter] Oh, dear, because he uses the respirator. He had a portable respirator with the thing in his mouth so if he falls asleep, his mouth opens. So this thing makes a bigger whooshing noise than it usually makes. That's when I'm aware that he's fallen asleep. And other people are, too.

Then there was a reception and they were in the reception, and she had an interest, I guess, in kids with disability. Her English is wonderful, too, so it was nice to be able to talk to her.

Ed also--there was a young woman interpreter and one of the men who was a friend who was there told Ed that, and he spoke Japanese. He said that the interpreter had given the impression that Ed wasn't sexual. And he said, "You need to correct that." Now this was a big boo boo. He never should have said that. But Ed did because this was something that he doesn't like to promote the fact that disability means you're not sexual.

So he asked for a little time that afternoon at the conference and said that he wanted to correct, if there was any misunderstanding about the interpretation, he wanted that corrected so that he was, indeed, a physical person and physically sexual, which embarrassed the interpreter and caused quite a brouhaha that I remember parts of to this day.
It's just not a thing you would ever do in Japan, in polite Japanese circles. You just do not criticize an interpreter in public that way. Just, you let go of whatever it was. But Ed didn't know that. This guy who told him that had been living in Japan for a while but he felt the correction needed to be made. So it happened and the girl didn't commit suicide or anything but it was pretty touchy. I guess she was humiliated was what it was. It was probably just something that we wouldn't like to have had happen but it did.

We went to Kyoto and Osaka. A big celebration in Osaka with many Japanese crips and we danced to the drums, and we had these wonderful people--Senator Yishiro was our host. We went to a conference where he and his wife were and they brought in parents of disabled kids. Ed and I spoke to that group one evening. They were very hospitable and wonderful. And one of the best evenings I had was with a representative from his office and another Japanese man. We went to a sushi bar where we drank sake and ate sushi and had a great time.

Ed Marries Catherine Duggan, 1976 ##

O'Hara: Zona, one more thing before we leave 1975. That was the year of the sit-in at the federal building in San Francisco. Were you at all involved in that?

Roberts: No, I wasn't. Ed came down from Sacramento for it. I think he was still in Sacramento at that time. He came down for part of it but he didn't stay in the building.

Ed was in Sacramento during those years. I had a list of all of those dates and things. Ed and Catherine got married shortly after he went up to Sacramento. He had met her while he was here. The Center for Independent Living got started out of PDSP people. Larry, not Langdon but the other Larry. Larry--

O'Hara: Biscamp.

Roberts: Biscamp and Phil Draper used to come by and hang out at the office and sometimes around noontime, sometimes in the afternoon or evening and talk about the services that were being given to the students and needing these services put in the community. They got a little funding and research grant to--and they rented the small apartment and started getting together some--the way to do this.
When Ed came back, before he went to Sacramento, when he came back from Riverside, I believe, he and John talked and John had been watching what was happening with the center. I think he was on the board and that it was sort of at a standstill. Things were not going any farther and they decided the idea was too good to let drop so they got in and started putting in some energy into it and decided this must go. When John and Ed decided things must go, they seemed to go. So Ed went in as director and rented a bigger place and started an office, some offices on University Avenue. Did you ever visit those offices on the second floor?

O'Hara: And third floor, yes.

Roberts: Yes. And then he was trying to figure out work spaces for people with various disabilities and how to set up these different situations. He went down to--he was searching out for an occupational therapist who could help design these things. He went to Fairmont Hospital and met Catherine Duggan, an O.T. there. They started dating and when he went to Sacramento, she followed him up there and they were married in the backyard of the house he bought on Sherwood Avenue.

Lee Roberts Born, 1978

Roberts: A couple of years later they produced a baby boy, Lee. In 1978, Lee was born. He's now seventeen and a very big, tall boy. His mother's tall and Ed would be tall if he were standing up. He plays basketball.

Lee and I go to summer camp together, to the Cal alumni camp, the Lair of the Bear, Camp Blue. There's Camp Blue and Camp Gold. And Camp Blue is our favorite. My sister-in-law and brother-in-law have gone to this camp since their kids were in high school. Their kids and their grandkids go there and some of them have been on the staff. As a family we meet there and there are lots of cousins. Sometimes there are twenty-seven of us, sort of interrelated who go there fifth week. Lee and I have been going for quite a few years. My son Mark comes with his sons and Ron comes from Hawaii with his three kids.

O'Hara: Does Ed ever go?

Roberts: No, Ed never liked camping, even when he was a kid. The one camping trip we went on with Ed, he got an asthma attack during the night. His father loved to fish and we'd take the boys
camping in the summertime. Ed got what was close to an asthma attack during the night, I guess our first or second night on this camping trip and I don't think he ever went camping with us again. He didn't like it. Somehow it scared him. He had polio not too long after that. Camp Blue and Camp Gold, they're not rugged but the terrain is sort of rough. He'd have a relatively hard time getting around there.

It was the way he felt when he was living in Woodside during the year of Common College in Portola Valley. He felt very isolated. He just couldn't get in his chair and go to town or go do things. Somebody had to take him all the time.

Roberts: But the start of Center for Independent Living was--it was out of that that Ed was tapped to go to be director of rehab for the state. It was a very large appointment for him. Some of his friends, Ralph Abascal, and some of the lawyers at Public Advocates were the ones who had known Jerry Brown and had been in school with him--I'm trying to think of the other guy's name who was in Mill Valley. Phil. He's been Ed's friend for so long.

But they just thought that he'd make a great director of rehab for the state and that would be quite a coup. They got Jerry Brown's ear and talked about Ed Roberts and what he could do. It eventually happened. We knew about it a few months before and kind of waited to see if Jerry Brown really, in fact would appoint him and he did. Ed was in Sacramento for seven years until Deukmejian was appointed as governor. And being an appointed job, Ed resigned. But that's what started--when Ed was there, he took John with him as an assistant administrator which John didn't like very much. He stayed for a while and got himself onto civil service and went on and got himself other jobs.

O'Hara: Why did John not like it?

Roberts: He didn't like to be second in command. He was used to being el primo chiefo and he was good at that. But he liked the salary and he liked the idea of the job and he went over to the Department of Health and got on civil service and had himself a nice career, bought several houses. I always said about John's death that he went fast and he went behind the wheel of his car
but that was his biggest--it was a great accomplishment for John to drive.

But the start of Center for Independent Living was quite a--made a splash in the community and in the nation, as a matter of fact. People coming in from all over to visit both Center for Independent Living and PDSP. We had--that was when--and I talked about Dave Kaplan coming over and bringing the students from Stanford? Okay. And they would get to PDSP, to CIL, and to the resident's program, then come for dinner at the office and that was a great program. Some medical students have knowledge of disability that they wouldn't have gotten any other way, but by being able to see people as people and people with disabilities and not as a disease and something that needed to be treated but someone as a whole.

I started going to JFK, John F. Kennedy University working on my master's degree. While I was at Physically Disabled Students' Office, one time I went down to Mark Roberts' home, my son who lived in Menlo Park at that time, and he was making wine and we would go down--people would donate grapes and say, "Oh, somebody gave me this parcel of land. It's got some grapes on it. You can have the grapes if you'll go and pick them." So he would gather friends and family. We'd go pick grapes and then go back to his house and have a feast. We'd all bring food.

And one of the women there said, "You're an interesting woman and I'm giving a dinner for interesting women," and named the date, "and I would like you to come. I'll tell you more about it." So she got in touch with me and I went to her place over on Solano and there were about eight women sitting around the table.

One of them was Ingrid Mays. Did I tell this story? No, oh. And one woman was learning to fly. We were all older except the two young women who put the dinner together and Ingrid Mays had been married to Rollo Mays. They were separated at the time. She was a German woman who had a disabled daughter in Germany, mentally retarded, I believe. So she talked some about her life and I don't think I realized she was Rollo Mays' ex at that time.

But it was an interesting group of women and we sat and ate dinner and talked about various things that we wanted to do and I had mentioned that I had been interested in family therapy, that I'd read something about it and it was a developing field that I thought sounded just fascinating. So I mentioned that at the dinner.
I was sitting at my desk at PDSP one day when somebody came through the door and came in and handed me a ticket. This ticket was from Ingrid Mays to a family therapy conference in San Francisco, kind of an introduction to family therapy presented by the Family Therapy Institute in San Francisco at UC San Francisco. Ingrid had to fly back to Germany to see something about her daughter and could not attend the conference so she sent the ticket to me because of my expressed interest.

Some of these things, the way they happen--it never fails to fascinate me. This meeting through Mark and the wine and then the office, going to this dinner and then having this ticket come from a woman who had to go back to Germany.

Zona Trains for Family Therapy

Roberts: Megan Kirshbaum was interested in family therapy also and she went to the same conference. It was a two day presentation in San Francisco and I liked the people and I liked what they were talking about. I liked the way they dealt with things. The first class was to be held in Berkeley. Dr. Friedman was a psychiatrist giving the first course and Megan and I just kind of looked at each other. It was like, well, of course. Of course we're going to do that. So I did. I took the course in family therapy and then applied to John F. Kennedy and their family therapy program and started working on my master's degree.

Zona's Work at CIL

Roberts: I had also done some work at Center for Independent Living. They would call me once in a while when they'd get a mother of a kid with a disability. Peter Leech was a psychologist who was working there. They wanted somebody to talk to the mother, they'd call me and I'd set up meetings because Janice Krones and I had done that parents' group.

That came out of Ed Roberts and Hale Zukas going out to various schools that had special education classes as part of the school. They would visit the parents' groups and sometimes there would be six parents and sometimes ten and sometimes three. But for some of them it was the first time they had seen adults with mobility problems who were working and were role models for their kids. These were parents who just didn't know what was going to
happen to their kids because some of them were cerebral palsy, you know, they had a variety of things: cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, polio, all kinds of things.

So out of that came this, more parents coming to Center for Independent Living because some of their services were free and later when we had a counseling department there that Megan's husband, Hal, was director of that, Kirshbaum. The services were free so the parents could come and have counseling services done by people who were knowledgeable about disability and there was no other place that they knew of that they could get these same services.

I started volunteering there and worked part time. I applied when there was an opening for a counselor position there and I worked there for a few years. That was an interesting time because we'd have street people come in. One slept under our trailer office—a lot of druggies came in besides parents. Some from Walnut Creek. The range from affluent to non-affluent was large. Again, we were making history with one peer-counseling concept.

Everyone who worked there was either disabled or very close to someone with a disability, the same principle that we had at PDSP. Bill Rogers had been in an accident. He had his nursing degree and he and I once in a while would go out on calls with these people that would come in and—I remember one street person who used to punch out cops every once in a while. She would come in and have seizures. It was a fascinating place, all kinds of things happening there.

[Jack] Rowan and I did some group things there. Lennis and I worked together and did some things. He worked there part of the time. Vicky Thornton worked there. Hal and Megan, of course, worked there. Randy Hepner worked there. She was the drug counselor. So we got a cross spectrum of people, families, singles, people with severe disabilities, and brain damage.

We began to get some people coming in with brain damage and we hadn't handled brain damage nor learning disabilities nor things like that that they do now at DSP, at the university. They handle all of these. How many students are there now? I think 900 or something.

O'Hara: The last count, 836.

Roberts: Eight [hundred] thirty-six students. A lot of those are learning disabled people. It's quite a different place than it started out. But that's how things changed from what is included as
disability. It's fascinating and I think it's how we have to expand what our knowledge is and what we accept as disability and go on from there. But the incidence at Center for Independent Living of brain damage, and this was kind of confusing to us because we didn't have the background to know exactly what to do with some of these young people and older people who were coming in with multiple disabilities. So they would bring--Hal saw to it that we had different kind of services available to us as a staff. Again, he was creative about that. We had some training from a hypnotherapist and we had training from various drug doctors. We got our funding through the drug, federal drug program.

**Drug and Alcohol Problems in the Community**

Roberts: Many of the people with disabilities had drug problems. Our students often had attendants who had good access to drugs on the street or through the drawers of the students they worked for. So we had one we used to call Darvonovon because he was on Darvon a lot and I guess would--he wouldn't share that with his attendants, that's true. They would, if they would find any he would get unhappy.

But the drug problem and alcohol problem with people with disabilities seems more intense than the general population because doctors often will give an open prescription to someone with a severe disability for anything they want. Just kind of get them out of their office because they don't know exactly what to do. Now, this isn't every doctor, of course, but this was a common practice. Of course, if you want a pain killer, of course, you want this. So that's how the funding came about.

Nancy Van Couvering was working at the veteran's administration in San Francisco. She's a neuropsychologist and she came to CIL and talked to us about brain damage. Nancy and I both smoked so we'd be out on the deck of the trailer having a cigarette or we'd go across the street to Fondue Fred's and have a cup of coffee and a cigarette and started talking and we became good friends. It's been a nice friendship. It's been nice to know Nancy. Lots of other people I met during that time, too. Oh, grandchildren.

Catherine and Ed had Lee. Then Benjamin was born. Mark Roberts married Elizabeth Roberts and they produced Benjamin in about, I think 1980. In 1981--so I had had four sons and I had two grandsons and was thinking, "There are lots of boys in this family. Where are the girls? I need a girl in this family."
XIV REFLECTIONS

Randy's Death

Roberts: My son Randy was the youngest, my youngest, was twenty-nine and he was working at Center for Independent Living as a driver, driving vans. So I'd see him in the parking lot as I was also working there. He was also selling marijuana and had an apartment in Oakland, downtown Oakland.

And one evening a woman friend of his was in having dinner with him and the doorbell rang and he answered the door and someone, a young black man came in and the woman came in the kitchen and she said all of a sudden, the voices changed and she heard Randy say, "Well, I guess you'll have to, then." Apparently, the man had said, "Give me that or I'll shoot you, or I'll kill you." And she stepped into the door. She saw this man shoot Randy and as Randy looked up and saw her in the doorway, he jumped up in front of her when the man shot again and shot Randy in the heart. Then the man ran away.

Apparently, there was a car out in front with a couple of other people in it. She called 911 immediately and they kept her on the phone until the ambulance got there and they took him to one of the Summit Hill hospitals where he died. So, it was, one of the bullets was in the heart. They put a pressure suit on him.

Andy Cayting had been one of our first, wonderful young men COs to apply for an attendant job. His wife, Doe, was working there as a nurse. She came in and she said it was a Saturday evening and she was--the first thing she was surprised. She heard it was a shooting victim and that this man was white. There were so many in Oakland who were black coming in on Saturday nights who had been shot. Then she realized it was Randy.
I was at home when the police came to the door about midnight, a little before midnight. I'd been asleep when they told me that he'd been killed. And it's a shocking thing to have happen. So they didn't want to leave me. I was alone there. I called Edna Brean at that time and she came over and then I drove down to the, let her drive me as a matter of fact, down to the coroner's in Jack London Square in Oakland because I had to see his body. I had to see that this was Randy. I mean, for them to tell me was one thing but I had to see that that's who it was. And it was indeed Randy.

He was twenty-nine and we had a memorial service for him at the Center for Independent Living. So many people came and I got many wonderful letters from people letting me know of his kindnesses to them as he was driving and the things he would do for them. He was a very, he was such a sweet young man. He was a non-violent type. Of anyone to die by a bullet, it was just kind of the irony that it would be Randy who has just had a terrible time with violence as he was growing up. He dropped out of Berkeley High School because he couldn't stand the violence around the school.

He had no business selling marijuana in Oakland. I think he was, it must have been a turf thing. I don't know. They've never--as far as I know, they've never caught the person who did it. But the woman who was with him and saw this guy said that he just, he looked like a crazy person and he was probably high on something as my friend, Nancy, said. He probably doesn't even know what Randy would look like or could describe him. He would have been in his own world. But the woman, too, just was describing Randy. She said he was just an angel. He was such an angel. Of course, having jumped in front of her and saved her life led part of that thinking, too. But they had had dinner together frequently. That was a very hard time.

Ron was living in Hawaii at that time, married Jan, and he wanted to come over for the services and I said, "No, you've got to stay home," because their baby was due. A week later, Hana Lei Roberts was born in Hawaii. That was such a blessing. That was just such a gift to have this little girl come into the family and kind of one life gone but another one kind of coming in. It was a wonderful thing.

The memorial service was at Center for Independent Living that we all had part of was very comforting. The people began to call as soon as people heard about Randy and his death. The house was full that day of people coming in and out of there. I had just stopped smoking the month before and I kept thinking, I want a cigarette. I said to myself, Would that help? And I
thought, No, I think it really wouldn't help but it just seemed like a good idea, like something I'd want to do.

O'Hara: That memorial was packed. There were hundreds of people at that I remember.

Roberts: It seemed like that there were friends and family, friends from Burlingame, people I didn't know. People Randy had driven various places through CIL, people who worked there. He was a hippie looking kid, kind of long hair. He liked his dope. He liked his beer. And he played the drums. He was into jazz and a drummer. The group he played with, they brought me a tape and then they played at the memorial service, too. That was those three guys. Randy was into chocolate. He had just gotten this twenty-pound block of fabulous Callebaut chocolate that he'd found and he was so happy to have that. He made chocolate truffles and he made chocolate Easter rabbits and chocolate molds and he made filled chocolates.

   But his refrigerator, I just looked at that and I thought, oh, Randy. He had some of the finest food in there, the finest beers, the finest chocolates, and ones that he had made with these wonderful fillings and good cheeses and good little snacks. He liked to cook. He made some of our dinners at the green house on Ward Street where I lived for about twelve years. When Randy was there, he would make chocolate mousse. He was the first one to make good, rich chocolate mousse, the Julia Child recipe of chocolate mousse. The first time I tasted it, I could only eat a teaspoon of it because it was so rich. Later, I learned how to eat a little bit more of it.

More Travels

Roberts: A year later I took a trip to Europe. I took a month's tour, a two week tour of Spain and Portugal. Spain, Portugal, and Morocco. Then I had a friend who had a place in the south of France. I got pickpocketed in Barcelona, as I was getting on the bus to go up to France. So I had to spend an extra day in Barcelona, but I got to see more things and learn what it was like to have--go to the consulate and get this passport renewed because they got my passport and my traveler's checks. I had a credit card and I'd tucked a twenty-dollar bill down in another part of my wallet that they didn't get because they just pickpocketed the traveler's check, passport, and health card from the back of my purse. Luckily I had my plane tickets and things in another place.
So I got up to Betty Boynton's house in the south of France the next day. I was in Toulouse, having crossed from Spain into France. I had all my luggage with me and I wanted to go out and see Toulouse because I had a few hours between the bus that I'd come in from Barcelona and the train was going to take me to Baran where Betty lived in the Dordogne region. I wanted so much to go out and see areas and just walk around but I couldn't because I couldn't carry all my bags and I didn't have enough money to leave them there. I just had enough money to make a phone call.

[Interview 10: February 23, 1995] ##

O'Hara: Zona, once again, what did you do when you were stranded in Toulouse without money to store your bags?

Roberts: I had enough money for a phone call and being very fearful of the French telephone system because my speaking French is horrible, but I ran across an English-speaking lady who made the call for me and got in touch with Betty and I told her when I would be in because I was a day late, having been delayed by my pickpocketing experience in Barcelona. So I walked around the train station with my bags.

I had already spent three weeks going on an extended tour of Spain and Morocco. It was a wonderful trip. And I was on my way to France to spend a week with my friend Betty. I'd met her in the coop nursery school in San Mateo. We had kids in there at the same time. So she in the meantime had sent her kids to school in Switzerland at one time and then bought this place in the Dordogne region of France and invited me to come and spend some time. So I delightedly accepted and worked my trip around so that I wound up there spending a week with her.

My train came in and I went up and Betty met me that evening. Then I stayed with her in this wonderful tiny, little town, little kind of village almost, in the Dordogne region. She took me around, having lived there and spent quite a few years and summertimes. She lives in San Carlos otherwise, or San Mateo. She knew neighbors and the region and had done a lot of tours around. The restaurants and hotels and places to go and we had this wonderful food. It was great and some of the chateaux we visited. It was great, a great time. I stayed there about a week and then took the train, a night couchette and went up to Paris.

I got there early one morning and parked my bags in a locker in the train station and took the subway out to the Eiffel Tower by the Seine. It was early morning. It was still, it was one of
these wonderful experiences you have that was kind of scary because the sun wasn't quite up yet and there were many working people in the metro system. And I was walking around and my feet were kind of resonating, the sound of my footsteps resonating against the buildings and I saw the Eiffel Tower and I started walking over to the Eiffel Tower and there were some cleaning people underneath beginning to clean up before the day's visitors arrived. And I walked around there a little while, kind of waiting for it to get a little lighter.

Then I walked along the Seine and I walked--and then I had to go to the bathroom and I had this experience of watching some man standing, peeing over the side. I was so jealous, and I finally found a little bar that was open. I went in and ordered some coffee and found the restroom and I relieved my discomfort greatly. It was wonderful to have that relief.

Then I spent a day walking around Paris and then took the train. I'd already had a hotel reservation out by the airport so I spent a day just walking around and looking at things and just had a--it was one of those wonderful days that was, luckily the weather was just perfect. It was great, and I watched out for pickpockets. I kind of got to see what some pickpockets look like so I got a little education.

O'Hara: Well, you didn't have money in Toulouse for your candied violets.

Roberts: No I didn't. So Walter Gorman bought me candied violets about two years ago when he went on a trip to France and asked me what I wanted and he was going to be in that region. And I said I wanted candy violets that I wasn't able to buy. When I stayed with Betty I had my credit card so I got an advance on my credit card and got some cash while I was there for, just for my expenses, for taking Betty out for a meal and my own meals and things and then my trip up to--luckily my tickets hadn't been taken. So I did have all my tickets and my ticket home.

After walking around Paris all day and then late that afternoon I went out to the hotel and had a wonderful hot, deep bath and just soaked in the tub for a long time and stretched out and I had had an early supper and then I slept like a baby until the next morning. I think I'd left a wake up call and went to the airport and then flew home. But it was a kind of nice ending for a month's trip.

I had, I don't know if I've mentioned I was in Seville for the anniversary of Randy's death. He died the year before and I was, I went to a bullfight. I had to tell one of the women who had been on this tour with me because I was a little anxious
about going to a bullfight and this being an anniversary of Randy's kind of shooting, the shooting and everything. I thought maybe I would have some kind of reaction but I wanted this one woman to know that if I fainted or had any such reaction that this was part of what was going on. It was fine. I got along okay. I just had some--it was a mixed day. It was sad and the memory of him was good but not the memory of his death. That was hard. But I was glad that I was in Spain and that I was doing this trip for myself. It just felt like the right thing to do. So I just kind of pushed myself a little bit and did it.

So back home, and that was another one of my trips and I had--I have since had trips to France in '87 and in '88. And in 1990 I went to Oxford and took a three week course at Oxford. Edna Brean and I did that.

O'Hara: What was the course in?

Roberts: It was in gardens--it wasn't gardens particularly. It was estates, country homes, country homes in England. Yes, it was wonderful.

O'Hara: Many field trips?

Roberts: Many field trips, yes. And then staying at one, but just staying in Oxford at this college in Oxford and then walking around Oxford watching--now, when I watch Inspector Morse and the detective stories on Thursday evenings, I love to watch Inspector Morse because he, most of those stories are shot around Oxford. And while we were there, we saw one being--one was being done at one of the colleges so it was fun to see. Yes, and we did field trips out of there.

Then from there we went to--we had spent a couple of days in London first, staying at the University of London. This course was offered through UC Berkeley. We were able to stay at the University of London with, at a very reasonable price. We went to some plays and did a few things there before we went down and took the train to Oxford. Then three weeks there, then off to--then we went to a travel agency in Oxford and got tickets to Bruges, Belgium and to Amsterdam.

I think I spent something like four days in each place. It was wonderful, and got to see many things. Bruges is just an exceptional place to visit. It's just a--it's a medieval town that had gotten its harbor sealed up. It had been a seaport and then it got silted in and sealed off. And it wasn't bombed out in the wars. So there's these wonderful places to visit. Then a few days in Amsterdam. That was great. Then we went back to
London and then out to the airport and flew home. That's another nice trip.

O'Hara: And you have an upcoming trip.

Roberts: Yes, well then, and after that I have been to--I went to Sicily into Palermo in 1992 with Herb and Mickey Leibowitz and we did the Sicilian elder hostel trip and that was a remarkably wonderful trip, too. I also had done an elder hostel trip in Santa Fe and did two elder hostel trips back to back, both in New Mexico up at Taos.

O'Hara: Taos?

Roberts: Taos, thank you, yes. Taos first, an elder hostel there. Then it was my, in fact it was during my birthday and I got to sleep in what's her name's bed [Mabel Dodge Luban]. They had this wonderful house where D. H. Lawrence had lived. She's kind of a patron of the arts. Oh, I'll think of it after a while. Then the next week we went down to Santa Fe and spent a week there at the University of Santa Fe taking another course. We rented a car and drove around, Edna Brean and I did that, also. But I, from years ago not being able to take any trips, all of a sudden I have taken lots of trips and I love it.

O'Hara: Actually, oh, from the sixties on. And now for your seventy-fifth birthday, you're traveling on a special trip.

Roberts: For my seventy-fifth birthday, my wonderful friends have been gathering money for me to take a barge trip in France because I had this dream of having a barge trip in France. It just--I've read some, the Prose was marvelous. Whoever wrote the Prose really hooked me in. First it was an elder hostel trip that tripped me up. I just wanted to do that. Edna Brean and I applied to do an elder hostel barge trip in France and we got on a waiting list and we were like fiftieth and fifty-first or something so we didn't get that. That's when we did the Oxford trip instead.

Since then, I applied again last year and got on the waiting list again. So I've kind of given up on them because not only do I not seem to get in but their trips are later. They're kind of early in the season and then at the end of the season and I really would like to go when the weather is remarkably good, possibly April or September or some wonderful time. Just pick a time, I'll go. Yes, I'm really looking forward to that, greatly.

And I've had several trips to Hawaii because my son, Ron, moved to Hawaii and now there are three grandchildren in Hawaii
and I'm planning to go in a couple of weeks and spend maybe two weeks there. I like to go. I often go once a year. I had never been to Hawaii before Ron moved over there. And he's been there about fifteen years, I guess, sixteen years. That's enjoyable. The weather's very nice, and the grandkids, Hana Lei, Ginger Lee and John Winston are growing up. I like to cook for and with them.

O'Hara: Now, some of the, going back to a couple of your trips, they were with Ed, weren't they?

Roberts: Yes. Oh, this is the, yes, this is another--it's like Ed being turned down by rehab and then turning out to be the rehab director, what, ten years later or something. Some of these coincidental kind of things just delight my heart. Some of the trips that I couldn't take because I thought I'd forever be home taking care of Ed. Some of the really fine trips have been with Ed, and sponsored by the Japanese government for a trip there and then by the French government with two trips there, sponsored by the French government. Remarkably wonderful trips and the open friendliness of the people and the marvelous things we could say and do. It was with Ed and because of Ed. So I liked that, too.

Zona's Contributions to Ed's Life

O'Hara: So looking back to when Ed was fourteen and he had polio, did your life play out the way you thought it was going to?

Roberts: I had absolutely no idea how my life would play out. I thought, at that point, having never been around physical disability in any way I knew--there was a little mental, emotional disability in my family but not any physical disability. I'd never been around people so it was--. Like, first of all, that total devastation that I'd mentioned before of the world coming to an end, that something awful had happened and we would all be--. We knew that the veil of protection had been torn away and we were just vulnerable to anything happening, to looking back now of all the, all the experiences and richness of the people I've known and the things I've been able to do. A lot of it has happened as a result of Ed's having had polio.

It's hard to even comprehend that that could have happened. There was no way I could have foretold any of this, none, because at that point, Ed was going to be, if he lived to be forty, that would be a miracle. And he's now fifty-six and I'm going to be seventy-five. That seems kind of a miracle, too. But he's--yes.
But I thought surely I'd be staying home, taking care of him and if I got out to visit my friends, that would be very lucky. But I would see to it that I did that. I knew that. I knew that I'd get out and do things, that there was no way that I could not be active in something.

O'Hara: He frequently acknowledges your contribution and your meaning to his life, publicly. I've heard it myself, quite a few times. So you have been of assistance to him right along.

Roberts: I've never let him give up. Let's put it that way. Somehow my faith in his--I've thought about this quite a bit because it's not a--I think in the recent years of trying to get a separation, after he was married--when he went to college was the first separation that we had. He didn't go away. He didn't go through the usual kind of teenage things that a lot of kids do when they're doing the teenage rebellion from their parents. That just wasn't possible. He was too dependent upon us and he wasn't able to have some of those experiences.

So our first real separation was after he went to Berkeley. Then my life shifted considerably and I went back to college. Then his father died. Well, his father died and then I went back to college. So this puts some separation but I always trusted, I knew that he could handle his life. I knew he could do it. There was just no excuse for not doing it. I never had trouble with that one. I wasn't fearful for him in some ways that maybe I should have been but I just wasn't. It seemed like he had sense enough to handle things and it was up to him to do it. He was going to have to use what he had. I think I'd mentioned that first vacation we took when he was left in the hospital and we went away and the criticism that was, that I heard about later, but I knew Ed could handle it and he needed to do that.

After he was married and moved to Sacramento and I was involved with a man I was living with for a couple of years and our lives were quite divergent, and I would visit him some. Then I heard about some of the marital difficulties that were happening and that was hard to hear about. But again, I knew he had to handle it and he had to be strong enough to take care of himself. They had a child. They had Lee who is now seventeen, was very young when they split up and he was so fond of his child. I think it was wonderful that he and Catherine were married and had this nice boy. But that was another big division and our lives were in quite different paths. I didn't call him every week. There was no, you know, I'd call him sometimes and we'd get in touch with each other sometimes.
But when I was working at CIL and Ed was director of rehab, we went on strike at CIL because I was very unhappy with the management there and some of the things going on were pretty unfair to some of the people working there. So we went on strike. One day I was picketing out in front and Ed came down from Sacramento and crossed the picket line and went right into the building. [laughter] That was kind of funny, too. But yes, he does acknowledge me and I think I, in my heart, anyway, acknowledge a lot of the things that he's taught me.

But his family has been very supportive. I think one of the things that I forget to do and that he forgets to do sometimes is that early commitment that his father had to him and his brothers stepping in one by one to help him and that they did at home and they continued to do at Berkeley and they continue to do. When he went to Riverside, Mark went with him. Ron helped him a lot at Berkeley when he first went over there. It was just kind of the back up supportive things so somehow we were able to be the kind of arms and legs and a little push sometimes that said, "Here, do it this way," or, "What do you need? We can help."

As Katherine Butcher said when we arrived there and she was the rehab counselor and said, "What can I do to help you?" It was a wonderful thing and I think Ed was lucky enough. And some ways, being the oldest son and having had polio it was lucky that the youngest son didn't have polio.

O'Hara: Do you think that there's a special bond that develops between parents and disabled children, their own children, I mean?

Roberts: Yes. Yes, there is and it's one that can be exceedingly detrimental to both the kid and the parents. If there's nothing else going on in a parent's life--. Having done counseling with families--very often mothers have taken on the role of taking care of the child with the disability as being their function in life, of where they get their ego strength and their support from. Particularly if their marriage, if they're not feeling close to their mate, why, they'll kind of put the kid in the middle and devote themselves to being the best parent. And there's a lot of support from society for being in this role and it can be quite detrimental to the family and to the child because it makes leaving, makes the child leaving the family, a difficult thing to do.

I'm a great believer in independence. I think that was one thing I got from my early childhood experiences was maybe an overly dependent look to myself that if I wanted to get something done I have to do it myself and I still have to watch myself for that, of needing to ask for help at different times. The times
I've gotten into the most trouble have been when I have delayed asking for help. I still, I need to watch that. But I certainly--I value independence so much that it's been a push for me and I've wanted Ed to have those same kind of feelings.

But there is a special bond. You can't help but be, when you're with someone and feeling you need to be there. I still suffer from some of that. I suffer from twinges of, should I go out this evening? How late can I be out? Will Ed need me? Ed now lives in part of the house where I'm living in Berkeley and there are times when he has--he has attendants now for just about every hour of the day and into the evening. He has a night time attendant who will come in about six or six-thirty when he's in town, because he travels--talk about travel--he does. His attendant leaves and I'm on call during the night. He calls on the telephone if he needs something.

He's traveled all over the world. He's done more traveling than I have and we never could imagine that happening. A respo-quad traveling all around, traveling to Russia. I mean, come on. [laughter] In the winter? I haven't done that.

But I still kind of have my ear cocked to what is it I need to do and my stomach gets these little twinges once in a while. Should I be home now? Have I stayed out too long? Is he okay? Is he alone? Could there be an earthquake? And I have to kind of watch to have my privacy and my life and still kind of be there to see that things are going along okay.

Public Speaking Events with Ed

O'Hara: You and Ed and sometimes you, by yourself, have done a lot of speaking on traveling, on the subject of disability. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Roberts: Sure. I think one of the--I don't know, I just felt that there's something about being at Stanford and some of the things we've done with Stanford and with Debby Kaplan's father of having the Stanford students come in a little. I've talked about that. But when Martha Redden called us and asked if we would do something for the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the project on the handicapped in science.

So, "The strength through disability or was it worth it?" was the dialogue between Ed Roberts and his mother. That was on July 22, 1980 at Stanford University. I just remembered that.
Mark brought his wife Elizabeth to hear us and it was the first time that Elizabeth had heard some of the family history of the family she was coming into. But she had never heard some of our stories. So Ed and I talked about his having had polio and it says, "Ed and Zona Roberts will candidly discuss the problems, coping strategies, and successes of the process of growing up as a disabled person from the viewpoint of the disabled person himself and that of a parent of a disabled child." So that was--we did that. Each time we've shared these experiences, I think we've also had to distill our philosophies of life and of ourselves and life and some of our experiences.

It's, as I do therapy with individuals and families now, I have a small private practice at home. When people tell their story, unless they say the same thing over and over and over again and get stuck behind it, each time they begin to renew an experience, it comes up in a slightly different form. It becomes more and more distilled. I mean, that's the hope, that out of these experiences comes a distillation. It's like making a fine liquor out of the process of the food and then forming alcohol and then the distillation process. It can be a very fine liquor or it can be poison. But there's something about repeating these things that hopefully help heal.

The hit story I heard from Ed of his, when we left him that time in the hospital and what that meant to him because it said that we were not going to devote our lives to taking care of him and his feeling had been that we might and that he couldn't stand it. It was enough that he didn't know what he was going to do with his own life now that he was not able to be an athlete. But if he thought that we would devote our lives to him was just more than he could stand. It was a burden. Hearing that was--somehow I guess I knew that but I needed to hear it from him and that was very good. It helped, I think it helped both of us to know that we'd done some things right. [laughter]

We went to Tempe, Arizona and did a conference there on parenting and disability and they had some people coming in from all over for that conference and then we did that one. That was kind of interesting because Ed's father went to school with and lived across the street from Elwood Hansen who then later became president of Bay View Federal Savings and Loan Company. He and his wife came to this conference. They were vacationing in Arizona and wanted to hear us speak.

O'Hara: Who sponsored this conference?

Roberts: The University of--I'm looking for the papers. I just went through it. It was sponsored by Comprehensive, let's see--
ECESMH, Model Center for the Early Childhood Education of the Severely Multiply Handicapped, Department of Special Education, Arizona State University, Tempe. This was 1981. Then we did a conference on the dialogue for action at Grace Cathedral on November 23. What year was that? I don't know. This was a few years ago. Awareness training, team building, action planning with Bill Swing, [Episcopal] bishop of California. That was interesting.

Zona and Ed Move to Eton Avenue, Berkeley

Roberts: Oh, I haven't mentioned, I'm sure Ed did on his tape, Ed's getting--after Ed and Catherine were divorced and Ed stayed on in Sacramento for a while, he was wanting to come back to the Berkeley area and I was living alone on the house on Chabot and so I said, "Why don't you come and live with me for a while. There's room. You can put your iron lung in the living room," and he did. So he moved in, in 1983.

Seven years later, I realized I was a little tired of Ed's being in the living room and I felt my life getting constricted by his life because it not only took up kind of all of the downstairs with his presence and his attendants but I felt like my bedroom upstairs was about my only space with part of the upstairs. Then we found the house on Eton that had an in-law apartment in the back that we bought that and Ed moved into the apartment.

But while he was there, Ed--because Deukmejian had been elected governor of California, Ed was no longer in his--

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O'Hara: His divorce was in process, you said.

Roberts: Yes, he was having a very hard time getting attendants. He had a nice couple move in with him and they were working for him. That was great. Steve, Russ O'Connell's son, Steve, had lived with him for a year. In fact, Steve, big Steve, it was--the year between Steve's high school and college he took a year off and left Boston and came out here and worked for Ed. And he went to Japan with us. Big Steve was big in physical structure.

We were on the plane to Japan going to this conference, an international rehab conference sponsored by the Japanese government. And we're sitting on the plane. Ed and I both are fond of Japanese food, sashimi and sushi and all kinds of good
things and Steve was saying, "Ooh. I don't like to eat things like that." And I'm thinking, Oh, God. We're going to go out and be stuck with this guy who's making faces at the food. I don't think that's going to be so great.

Well, big Steve was just great, and he liked his beer. So he and some of the Japanese interpreters that were with us all the time and drank their "beero"--Japanese pronunciation of beer--and he got along just fine. He even learned to eat a few things that he didn't think he'd like. But that's when we met the, then the prince and princess, and now the emperor and empress of Japan. That's where Ed fell asleep in the front row as the prince was talking. I kind of nudged him and he said, "Don't do that!"

When Ed, then, was living in my living room on Chabot and he was having a hard time financially, he hadn't sold the house in Sacramento yet and life was hard. He was glad to be back in the Berkeley area. He was beginning to start WID, the World Institute on Disability, he and Joan Leon. Joan Leon has been a huge supporter of Ed's. I think Joan Leon deserves a lot more recognition than she's gotten that I know of. She worked for Ed at the Center for Independent Living. She went to Sacramento with him. She helped support and runs with--she's just been such a marvelous person and she's been behind both Judy Heumann and Ed Roberts in just every way she could be.

Well, Ed was in my living room. 60 Minutes came and interviewed Ed extensively and I had a little part in that, too. They went to--oh, that was a wonderful trip. They were in Paris with us, at one point, following us around Paris and went down to Burgundy area with us and it was wonderful having them around because they were very knowledgeable, really nice people, the CBS camera man and sound man and director. That was great. They were really neat people.

Ed Receives the MacArthur Award

Roberts: But Ed got a call one day. He had told me something about the MacArthur Award that was a possibility and then it hadn't happened so it just seemed like one of those things that, well, it was kind of a dream, like that television program, the millionaire who used to call people and say, "You've got money." Well, one day the phone rang and guess what. There was this person who asked to speak to Ed and I held the phone for him and I watched his face and he said, "Oh, the MacArthur Award. Would
I accept it?" That was the question they'd asked him and there was this kind of pause and he said yes, he would accept it.

Well, we whooped and hollered and we had a great time and we called people and we just called relatives and friends and everybody we could think of that Ed had gotten the MacArthur Award which meant money for him for five years? Four years or five years. And it meant also during that time they gave an award to, if you were associated with, affiliated with the university or nonprofit, you could donate some money to the university or Ed got it arranged, of course, to donate some money to WID. So some of that money helped start WID. I think there was $10,000 a year or something that could be used that way. I understand that they don't do that anymore.

There were some other trips as a result of that. There were conferences in Chicago and they started out to have them every year and then they went to every eighteen months. And I went to two or three of those and that was one of the first things I said. I said, "I don't care what else happens out of this MacArthur Award but I'm going with you to one of those conferences," and I did and had a great time, met some fabulous people.

O'Hara: Just the conferences for all the awardees?

Roberts: All the recipients of the awards are invited, all expenses paid and they have meetings that they set up themselves because these MacArthur Awards--there's no strings attached. Nothing is expected. You don't have to write a paper, you don't have to acknowledge it in any way. If you don't want to go to the conferences, you don't go. Ed's enjoyed going and he's always given a little talk which haven't been very well attended. There have been a few people, maybe two or three that would come in. But a lot of the talks are scientific or--. Geoff Hoyle has been a recipient.

Then there was the, what's he called, not Mr. Magic but he does all kinds of juggling and oh, motion. Michael Motion is what he calls himself. Then Randy, the great Randy who does the debunking of psychics has been there. So there are a lot of these things and then a lot of them are scientific explorations.

Ralf Hodgkiss got one a couple of years ago. So he and Debbie were there one time in Chicago when Ed and I were there. He's in technology and has built wheelchairs all around the world, helping people learn how to make their own wheelchairs. He said that many of the scientific community, the mathematicians and the scientists--look down upon the people with disabilities.
Ralf's been a little closer to them and has heard some of the comments that I had never heard. So I was kind of startled and I paid attention to that. It was kind of funny because it certainly didn't come from the management or the people who put the conferences on. Really, really nice people, just out to have, to see that people are comfortable and have a good time and there are people from all over the world. The Krauses come from Paris. Just, you never know who you're sitting next to. It's wonderful. I've met the most wonderful philosophers and psychologists and mathematicians and scientists and boat builders.

One is a boat archaeologist from Texas. They send him to all sites around the world where he digs up old wooden ships. He reconstructs what the ship looked like and what it carried and where it went and then salvages what he can. But these are people who write for National Geographic and these names you see. Oh, and Roger Payne and his song of the whales and he and Ed have been in correspondence and Ed has gone to, both to swimming with the porpoises in Florida and with the boat that Roger helped design and a little craft that Ed could float in and see all of these things. Then they went to Hawaii together, too, and Roger saw that this happened. So it was quite a boon to Ed's life. Mine, too.

O'Hara: What does it feel like to be the mother of one of these recipients?

Roberts: Oh, it was thrilling. It kind of, you know, coming back to these things that happen, it kind of--when Ed was in--he started school very early. He was four years and a few months when he started in kindergarten and I thought he was a very smart kid because he was very alert and into everything. Well, he was so quick, so active. He just ran. And he always had his kind of, upper teeth through his part of his lower lip because he'd run and trip.

So he started school and he had, I think, (the war started) and he had about four different teachers in kindergarten. He didn't learn to read well until he was in the fifth grade. So teachers were saying, you know, "He's great on the playground. Oh, boy, what a kid on the playground. But in the classroom, it's a little hard to get his attention," and it was like he wasn't very smart. And I was going, what? You know, what happened? I guess I was quite mistaken, so it was kind of like I was vindicated. [laughing] That's why he was always smart after all.

O'Hara: Oh, from all the way back.
Roberts: [laughter] Yes, and Ron had started kindergarten very late and he learned to read in kindergarten and he was kind of slow. He didn't get up and walk early and he didn't talk early. He didn't have to. Ed was doing all those things for him.

But it has great rewards, and in some ways I think it carries a lot of hype. They're called the genius awards and I think it would be easy to buy that idea that this means you're a genius but whatever that means--I don't know what being a genius means. I think it means you can be kind of peculiar, too. And if you get caught behind that hype I think it can be quite detrimental, and I've seen Ed have a little difficulty with that. But I would prefer he hadn't had--sometimes I thought maybe it was the worst thing that could have happened to him was getting that award. But it's meant, it's opened doors for him all over the world and in some ways it's been exceedingly good for the disability movement because it's given him so much more exposure.

Raising Expectations

O'Hara: In terms of the disability movement over your lifetime, have you seen changes in the lives of disabled people in general?

Roberts: Oh, Susan, I can't even begin to tell you. When I mentioned a while ago what it's meant in my own life and then when you just, going through some of the notes and things that I have and doing a little preparation for this, in thinking about the exposure of--and a lot of it has come about because of technology, of the development of antibiotics that have allowed people to live and quads to live and not die of bladder infections. That used to kill them. Medical technology, the advancement of other technology that's made better motors, better chairs, chairs that don't--boy, some of the earlier motorized chairs, people were practically killing themselves. I remember John just getting the--the controls could get wet and he'd just scoot across out, you know, off the curb down in to the street. Ed's had it happen, go over backwards and I'm sure you have, too, have had--

O'Hara: No, it never happened to me but I knew people who had that happen.

Roberts: Yes. John being able to drive the van. That just delighted his heart. And his proudest moment, and I've probably talked about it, but that proud moment when John Hessler could drive that van home and his father saw him driving in. John said that that, his father treated him like a man, again. This was--so these kinds
of technologies, the beginning of Hale's going around and looking at curb cuts and Eric Dibner looking at curb cuts in Berkeley and going into the early meetings of the city council to see that when Shattuck Avenue was being widened that there would be curb cuts put in.

The hours that some of these guys and gals put in, some of the Dercles who came and made the film, what was the title, The Rights of Passage, asked them the question, "Why are there so many people with disabilities in Berkeley?" And finding out that many years ago there was a blind school and then Van, what was his name, Ten Broeck, the blind law professor. Blind students would walk--some of them walked from northern California down to come to Berkeley and to be around here. So those were the first people with visible disabilities to be on campus. The campus is widely spread.

They certainly didn't encourage people in wheelchairs for a long time or people on crutches or students who would break their legs. That was some of the reason for needing a physically disabled students program. But seeing that grow, Susan, from a few students that we had to begin with and then just take off. Didn't you say there was something like eight hundred and something students now here at Berkeley?

Well, and the expansion of it's gone into learning disabilities and things that we didn't deal with. We didn't deal very much with brain damage nor with learning disabilities and now they are. So just by definition, disability includes most everyone. I think everyone has disabilities. It just depends on what we do with them and how we handle them and what we've learned and how we've learned how to cope with them through the years and what kind of help we had.

I was reading about College of San Mateo the other day. There was something in it and it said something about, "There are 50 percent minority students at College of San Mateo now." And that just amazed me to think that in nineteen sixty something or other, when we started that college readiness program, we had thirty-nine students to begin with and we had to help them learn how to get along at a college and how to be there and how to be part of a college community. Now, something like 50 percent of the student body belongs to a minority group. I think that just said a lot to me and that was just in the Chronicle two weeks ago. So yes, indeed.

O'Hara: Do you think that the Berkeley experience influenced the rest of the country?
Roberts: Well, I know it did. I know by the inquiries we got while I was at PDSP, the people who would call, people working on their degrees, people from hospitals, people from parents but--people in social work, people in medical school, the numbers of books that were written. They would come and interview us. And that was because the word was out that something was happening here. There was a climate for disability to be recognized, acknowledged and allowed to grow. People with disabilities, to find their lives. And I think some of those things were happening in New York and then they were happening in other places but not to the extent they were here. I think it's because the foreground of people, John Hessler and Ed Roberts and Hale Zukas, with their own disabilities, were role models in some way that allowed the movement to grow, led by these people, talking about their own experiences. That was what was so important about having John as director of DSP. It was what was so important about your being director of DSP. But visible disability still needs to be--people need to see it, to feel it. It was when Ed and Hale went to Shadelands, to these schools and in Antioch, California.

O'Hara: Can you explain that a little bit. We don't have that on tape, about Shadeland.

Roberts: When I was at Center for Independent Living or when Ed--no, I guess I was still at the university and Ed was starting the Center for Independent Living. He and Hale got the idea that they needed to go to the special education schools and classes and attend parents' meetings and see these disabled kids to see what was happening to the disabled kids, as they were hearing stories about what was happening to them that they didn't like very much. They went out to some parents' meetings and spoke to the group. For some of the parents, this was the first time they had seen men in wheelchairs who were working. The letters and the phone calls and the contacts we had from some of those people over the years--I'm still in contact with some of them who came through CIL and came for counseling at CIL--because of the role modeling that Ed and Hale had done.

And then I went out to Shadeland School also and to some of the parents' groups and talked to them. Again, they'd been in the same position that I was in years before. Where if you don't have any knowledge of what can happen if somebody is all of a sudden, you know, you have a baby who has cerebral palsy then lots of doctors say, "Put them in the hospital. Don't see this child," or, "There's no future for this child. What do you mean you're glad he lived?" the doctor said to me. They could see no future. Ed and Hale were proving there was a future. They could do something.
O'Hara: Sounds like they were raising expectations. For the kids as well as the parents.

Roberts: Oh, right, because the parents were stuck behind this. They didn't know what to expect. They were just kind of fighting for every day, trying to get through the day and keep the kids well and clothed and fed and in school and fighting with the school to be sure that they got an education. Then here Ed and Hale come in and that was a really important role model. It was like the 60 Minutes episode that Ed was in and they showed him around Paris and they showed him getting on BART here. When we were in Paris in the Louvre some man came up and said, "Didn't I see you on 60 Minutes?" We've been in Chicago and people say that. Ed goes, any place he goes in the world, they talk more about that 60 Minutes thing that anything I think that's happened.

Again, it raised expectations. "If Ed can do it, why can't my son? Why can't my husband? Why can't I? Why can't we do something like this?" It's that visibility that helps. We can't make up, often, what we don't know but if we can see it, taste it, feel it, hear about it. It's like hearing about it. The first articles in the paper when Ed was at UC, "Helpless Cripple Goes to College". People read it. Here was this supposedly helpless cripple, paralyzed neck down, who was going to college. John Hessler's social worker read about it and thought if that can happen there, why can't it happen for this student I have who's taking a taxi cab going from a hospital to a college. She found out and she did something about it and John got in. Yes, Susan. Does that answer it?

Zona's Private Practice

O'Hara: Yes. You mentioned your clients. You have clients, quite a few clients also with disabilities.

Roberts: Right, yes. When I went on strike at Center for Independent Living and shortly after that the counseling program was closed down. I think some of the funds were running out and the CIL was not in a very good place at that time, and I think the counseling department--what was marvelous about it was people could come, families would come and some of the families who had been, had seen Ed and Hale out there had started contacting, coming in and having counseling, and it was free. They were asked to give donations if they wanted to but they certainly didn't have to pay for it. It was funded with drug education money and so we all got some training because of the prevalence of doctors giving
drugs to people with disabilities, it's always a problem, especially around Berkeley, well, any place in the world.

From there I quit the Center for Independent Living and because of some of the clients I was dealing with and some of the families were asking if I wouldn't continue to see them at home, I said, "Sure," because we were, things were going well and I thought that was fine so I started having a small private practice at home when I lived on Chabot and I continue to do that. I think, as long as I have my wits about me, I can continue to do that. And I see the people in wheelchairs downstairs and I have an office upstairs in my home. I see couples or singles. I deal a lot with women and with mothers and with fathers and with couples and with disabled couples, couples with disability. And I love it.

I get frantic sometimes. Not frantic but thoughtful about what to do because each person's story has its own twists and hang-ups. If it doesn't interfere with where I'm hung up, we can work things out and help each other.

Beads, Dollhouses, Smocking, and Cooking

Roberts: I also make jewelry, a hobby I had when I was a very young child, of stringing beads. Mickey Leibowitz was stringing beads and we got together doing this many years ago and have continued to do that. I take jewelry classes at the Oakland Art Center, Studio One. And I'm learning to work with silver and learning to make glass beads and I'm learning to make some copper beads.

I just love it and I find that the tradeoff between stringing beads or working with the colors of beads and working with clients, one plays off against the other. It allows me to grow, to heal myself, to ponder and just to let flow ideas of what would be a good thing, what to watch for, what to look for, what to avoid with some of my clients. I find it's a wonderful tradeoff. It makes me happy.

O'Hara: Well, what about your dollhouse? I think that's a very important part of your life.

Roberts: Yes. Thanks to my good friend Nancy Van Couvering I now have two dollhouses at my house. When I was a kid, I was about five, I think it was my fifth Christmas, my great-grandfather had built me a dollhouse. I awakened Christmas morning and went out and there was this dollhouse with a light in it and I was absolutely
enchanted. Shortly after that happened, why my mother and that husband separated. Then she met somebody else and we moved to California and I don't know what happened to my dollhouse but it disappeared from my life.

So apparently, over the next few years, somehow Nancy and I would be talking about things. Nancy and I have gotten together for dinners since the time we met at CIL. We used to go out for cigarettes and coffee and now we've both stopped smoking and I've stopped drinking coffee. She still drinks coffee. I guess over the years, every once in a while I'd say something about the dollhouse.

So one day she said, "I might tell you about your Christmas present." And this was in kind of March. I thought, Christmas present? We just had Christmas. But she had seen a dollhouse in a store so we went and bought a dollhouse kit and then together we made one dollhouse. Then she said that's much too small. It's only four rooms. We need a bigger dollhouse, so we got another kit and started building that. This last year, we put in hours and these darn dollhouses. They're just, they're a lot of work but they are absolutely adorable and I'm delighted to have my dollhouses. Now, whether I never build another one, that's fine.

It was like having granddaughters, having had four sons, two grandsons and then having a granddaughter. I would go to Hawaii with suitcases full of dresses. I started buying dolls. I started making clothes for teddy bears and for dolls. It just broke loose something that had been waiting. Something I hadn't been able to use with the boys. I did sew for them and I did make things. Fire engines and skateboards and bikes and things are kind of nice. But boy, girls' dresses and dolls. I was waiting for that one.

I learned to smock and I made Hana Lei a little smock dress. I only made her one and I made another one for, I think, for Jeffrey Litke's daughter. Well, I made just a few of them but I don't need to smock. Oh, and I made myself a blouse one time with a lot of smocking and hem stitching and several kinds of stitches that I, and cross stitching, a kind of Hungarian type cross stitch. It was wonderful to learn, and now I don't have to do it anymore. I feel the same way about dollhouses.

##

O'Hara: You wanted to mention your love of cooking. It's something very important.
Roberts: I certainly did. I'm surprised it hasn't come up more. I know it's come up with PDSP and the lunches that were important. But what I had neglected to mention has been the trend in my life that food has played, both in my family and for me personally, for my marriage, for my kids. I enjoy cooking very much. In fact, my son Mark called from Hawaii. He and his wife are going through a divorce right now and he said something about taking his--

O'Hara: You mean Ron?

Roberts: No, I mean Mark. Mark and Elizabeth have--Elizabeth's bought herself a house and they're separated right now. They still like each other a lot and they spend time together but they each have their separate houses. Mark said how much he, well, he takes his sorrow to the kitchen. And I had caught myself doing that. I take my depressions to the kitchen and I work through a complicated recipe and when I'm through--I did a lot of this after Randy was killed--and I would make some complex dishes, get very tired, and maybe cry, but come through with something very good to eat. This has been an important trend in my life. I have a wonderful collection of cookbooks.

I have many people who stayed at the green house, young women who came and did attendant work and who've grown up to be wonderful cooks who cooked some of their first food in my kitchen or watching me. Phyllis Birnbaum in Boston who now makes the most wonderful bread and she's now in Japan and she's a wonderful cook. We exchange cookbooks as presents and talk about food and her husband, Ashok, makes wonderful cakes. And she hadn't paid much attention to food. Her mother ate a lot and was very heavy and it was a problem.

But through the years, I remember one of my first, I think I made cream of wheat when I was very young, maybe four years old. I think my mother was sick and I stood up on a chair and made some cream of wheat for my breakfast.

Another time when I was first doing housework and working my way through high school and living in people's homes, I remember looking in this refrigerator and thinking, Now if I take this and that and take these leftovers, I can make something. And it turned out to be tasty, luckily for me and for everybody else. And I just loved that experience of combining leftovers. I still get a kick out of that.

But I also like learning to eat foods in different countries. It's meant traveling has been exciting, like going to Japan. But I knew something about Japanese food before I went
there. And I learned to appreciate sushi when I, the first trip I took to Japan when Phyllis was there and we, she took me to a very famous sushi bar in Tokyo and taught me about sushi language, that only the sushi chefs yell to the person at the front if you sit at the sushi bar. And they yell out what the price is as you leave. You don't know what it's going to be. If you sit at the table, you know what it's going to be. But if you sit at the sushi bar, it's not advertised. She said, speaking and understanding Japanese the way she does, but even so, sushi language is a different Japanese.

And being in France and appreciating the French cuisine and Spain and appreciating the Spanish, I've--and being in Prague and seeing these wonderful open-face sandwiches. The soups and the chocolates and the pastries and the--oh, it's just marvelous. I'm a pretty good baker and I bake bread sometimes. I was saying the other day, I don't seem to know how to cook for one or two, having fixed meals for years for the four sons and then later with people living at the house it seems that I could cook for eight people, I think, better than I can cook for one or two.

O'Hara: But you do frequently to this day, don't you?

Roberts: Yes.

O'Hara: It seems to me that you have many, many people in your home for dinner. There's kind of a cement of all your friendships.

Roberts: I think it is and I love it. I get so much out of it. It's so rewarding to me and it was as the kids were growing up. There was something about making dinner every night that gets to be a chore, and thinking about packing lunches for kids at school. But there was something about the eating together that cemented our family with our separate ways of being and who we were and Verne's going off to work at the railroad and the kids going off to school. But we all came together around the mealtime and we had dinners together, always.

Once in a while, if I'm counseling a family, and they don't eat together at dinnertime, I am just, it kind of takes my breath away as to what--how do they do this, then? How do they maintain their family status? We did a lot of it around Ed's bed, when he was in the dining room. The fact that he was in the dining room--that was the central place for him to be. That's where we ate. And his bed was sort of the dining table and we all held our plates around there. It's added a lot of interest to my life and a little weight in these last few years.
I think when I started being sixty I began to put on a few pounds, after I quit smoking and began to eat. Then Randy introducing me to chocolate in this way he had with chocolates and his marvelous chocolate and chocolate truffles and other things that he made. I've learned to really appreciate chocolate. I'm glad I do, most of the time. [laughter] Except when I stand in front of the fitting room mirrors.

But my health has been quite good. I have had a little diverticulitis. I've had some lower back problems. I've had things but I've found with aqua aerobics I can, as long as I keep my body flexible, why I can handle that kind of osteoarthritis pain that can come in my thumbs and my lower back. And I want to keep strong. And I think who I am also depends a lot on doing things. I've found that I get depressed when I am ill. I'm the one who runs up and down the stairs and who fetches and carries and then when I can't do that, I realize I have problems and this is something I need to come to terms with because that's not all of who I am.

So when I started having my own breakfasts in bed many years ago on Saturday morning and my husband was quite concerned about this and my mother-in-law would call, "Oh, you're still in bed?" And I learned how to cope with that and have my time Saturday morning. Verne was there. The kids were being taken care of. Everything was going along and I stayed in bed on Saturday mornings often.

And I, to this day, have my breakfasts in bed about every morning that I possibly can. I go downstairs and fix the oatmeal and have it ready for Ed and his attendants and fix my own tray with my half of grapefruit and my oatmeal and my toast and my coffee substitute, take the paper and go back upstairs and as long as I have at least an hour to enjoy my paper and that's the way I've learned to take care of myself, of taking that time for myself. So it's changed over the years from doing for others to learning to do for myself. And part of this I had kind of a hard time doing. But part of it has been a slow, gradual process.

**Friendships and Family**

O'Hara: It seems to me that friendships have meant an enormous amount to you in your life and from my own experience of being at your house, you have an extraordinary number of people that you've been in contact with for a long, long time.
Roberts: I'm aware of this at Christmas time when I send out my Christmas cards because I'm not a very good correspondent the rest of the year so I do love to keep in touch with people at Christmas time. Around 100-120 cards go out. These are people that I like to keep in touch with all the time. And that's not the whole list but it's the people I am very fond of and do like to hear from and love hearing from them at Christmas time.

O'Hara: Then they've all been to your house many times for dinner, I know that.

Roberts: Yes, and most of them have had, have done that.

O'Hara: Your house is a gathering place.

Roberts: Yes, and that's meant so much to me. Times like Randy's death and times when things have been tough, I don't know what I would have done without my friends. There's always been some, like Linda Perotti and Walter Gorman and Erin Crowe when Randy was killed. They were Randy's age. They're Randy's contemporaries and they knew him very well but they just kind of closed in with me and Erin would call and say, "Let's go to the hot tub." Linda would come by and, because I had mentioned that I didn't want people not to talk about Randy. That was not the way for me to handle my sorrow. It was to hear about him and to know that his life was meaningful. And these, my friends did for me and my family did for me and I appreciate it a lot. But friends fill in. Your family kind of comes to you but friends you choose for their various and sundry qualities. And you can, it's like picking different beads of different shapes and sizes and colors and experiences and where they come from, and that's the way my friends are to me, like little jewels.

O'Hara: And what are you most proud of over seventy-five years?

Roberts: The fact that I'm educable. Whenever I get very depressed, mad at myself for doing something stupid, I will say, "Yes, that was not the smartest thing in the world to do but can you learn? Are you educable? Can you learn from this and distill something out of this and go on?" And now, my answer immediately comes back, "Yes, I am educable." And I am so proud of myself for being able to acknowledge that and to drop the kinds of blaming and self-putting down that I've done a lot of in my life, sort of trying to have some idea of what I should and must do and trying to drop that in favor of what I want to do and how I want to be. And I'm doing a pretty good job of it and I'm pleased with myself.

O'Hara: What have we left out? Anything?
Roberts: Susan, probably a lot. But I think--

O'Hara: Anything you want to say?

Roberts: I don't think so. I think that I don't know if I've talked much about Ron and what he's meant in my life and about Mark and Randy and, because a lot, I realize in some of these interviews and televised things, one that's coming on April 7 and a big PBS thing and after the interviews are over and I think, Damn, I did it again. I didn't say what Verne and Ron and Mark and Randy have all contributed to my life and to Ed's life.

O'Hara: I think you have brought that out in conversation.

Roberts: I hope so because it's important. It kind of got us all so that we each had to contribute and we each kind of put in what we could and I kind of kept the kitchen going and the house going and Verne could bring in the money so we could do that. And Ed could be in the dining room and his father would come home and we'd bathe Ed together. It was a family kind of breaking up when Ed went to Berkeley and I wanted to leave the home and do some things and Verne was very threatened because I wanted to do something outside the home. And it was--so whether we would have stayed together if he hadn't died, I don't know. I'm not sure of that. It could have been that we wouldn't have. It was time for me to go on and do something else.

O'Hara: Well, that's really very rich, a rich experience, your whole life has been a series of rich experiences and it's just been a really wonderful set of interviews.

Roberts: Well, thank you, and I appreciate your patience with me for my lack of dates and times and places and things and names.

O'Hara: Well, thank you.

Roberts: You're welcome. Thank you, Susan.
Judy Heumann, Loni Hancock, Zona Roberts, and Joan Leon at the Center of Independent Living dinner in San Francisco, 1997.
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Jean Wirth

COUNSELOR AT THE COLLEGE OF SAN MATEO AND EARLY MENTOR TO ED ROBERTS

An Interview Conducted by
Susan O'Hara
in 1996

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TAPE GUIDE
Jean Wirth was interviewed on June 4, 1996, as part of the documentation project of the Disability Rights and Independent Living Movement. She was invited to participate because of her early acquaintance with and influence on Edward V. Roberts.

Roberts credited strong encouragement by Jean Wirth as his reason for enrolling at UC Berkeley, a setting that shortly provided the hotbed of activism that fostered, among other movements, independent living for people with disabilities. Roberts was the first student with a significant disability to live on the campus at Cowell Hospital; he was to become an internationally known leader in the movement.

Jean Wirth talks about meeting Ed and his mother Zona Roberts for the first time at the College of San Mateo, visiting the Roberts home, and accompanying Ed and Zona on their first visit to the UC Berkeley campus in 1962. She describes her own and Ed's roles as consultants to the TRIO Program of the Office of Education in Washington, D.C., advancing the inclusion of students with disabilities in the program. She gives a brief account of Ed's less than successful year teaching at Common College and concludes with recollections of his later years.

The interview took place on the patio of Ms. Wirth's home in a serene and bucolic setting in Woodside, California. Nearby, in the carport, was her old Checker, a large car acquired because it readily accommodated her height of 6'5", her standard poodle, and the many students she drove to events over the years.

Jean Wirth died suddenly on November 8, 1996. The obituary is included in this volume.

The transcript of the oral history was edited lightly by the interviewer and then reviewed by her old friend Zona Roberts after Jean's death. Zona's comments are included as endnotes to the interview.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1954 to augment through tape-recorded memoirs the Library's materials on the history of California and the West. Copies of all interviews are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and in the UCLA Department of Special Collections. The office is under the direction of Willa K. Baum, Division Head, and the administrative direction of Charles B. Faulhaber, James D. Hart Director of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Susan O'Hara
Interviewer/Editor

March 2000
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley
Teacher and College Counselor

O'Hara: Please start with a little bit of your personal background.

Wirth: Okay. I was born October 15, 1932, New York City, New York, in Doctors' Hospital. My father was a man who set up cancer clinics throughout the country, so I lived all over. I was in New York for only the first two years of my life, so I'm not a New Yorker.

O'Hara: Was your father a physician?

Wirth: Yes, a surgeon. And in those days an oncologist; they were both, before the specialties got so specialized.

I went to the Bryn Mawr School for Girls in Baltimore, Maryland, and I went to Mills College [Oakland, California]. I stayed at Mills College to get a bachelor's and a master's. I spent two years at Berkeley working on the first part of a doctorate, at which time my father became terminally ill, and I quit and went to work to help my mother. My very first job was at the College of San Mateo teaching English.

O'Hara: What were the years at the university? Do you recall?

Wirth: Yes, '57 and '58. The first of those years--'58--I was also teaching night school at the College of San Mateo. I was starting down there and then went full time the '58-'59 year.

O'Hara: And what was your doctorate to be in?

Wirth: English.

1### This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.
O'Hara: And is that what you started teaching at the College of San Mateo?

Wirth: Yes. It's the only thing I've really ever taught. Not the only thing I've done, but the only thing I've taught. I taught and was a counselor at the College of San Mateo--with only one year out teaching at Mills College as a visiting associate professor filling in for a friend who was retiring--they hadn't yet found her replacement--straight through until '69.

O'Hara: What kind of counseling was it? Career or personal?

Wirth: College. In some cases it turned out to be more personal than it probably would normally be, because that's all that we had. This was before anyone who was working in the system had a counseling credential. These were academic counselors who ended up taking a lot of in-service training and doing a lot of other counseling as well.

O'Hara: Was part of your job directing students to the next step of their education?

Wirth: Absolutely. That was the major part of it. This step and beyond, yes [laughs].

Meeting Ed Roberts and His Mother, Zona

O'Hara: So somewhere in there, in the early years, you must have met Ed Roberts.

Wirth: It was the very first year, yes. Ed came on campus, and his first counselor was the director of student personnel, Phil Morse, whom I'm sure Zona [Roberts, Ed's mother] has talked with you about. Phil Morse was in charge of him because it was such a new and different sort of thing. Ed was raced in for the one hour he could be up, by our good friend Zona Lee [Roberts], who fortunately did not live far from the campus. The campus gate guard was ready for her vehicle as it came through and cleared the gates and cleared everything and just ushered her right in. She whipped Ed out of the car--in those days he was in a pushchair. ¹

O'Hara: So she would just transfer him out by herself?

Wirth: He only weighed ninety pounds in those days [laughs]. She did have help, but we could all handle Ed very easily. He was paper thin. He weighed nothing [chuckles]. He was so long that it was really very easy to handle that kind of weight. It was
interesting. Even during the period much later when we were going over with Ed to Berkeley to look at whether he might go there, he was still in a pushchair. That was long before all the paraphernalia. Really in the old days.

O'Hara: I remember it well.

Wirth: As a matter of fact, Ed--in the days when he was in a pushchair, when he came here--would be carried upstairs in his chair. Later when he came in his big chair we just stayed downstairs [laughs].

So at Phil Morse's suggestion the one course Ed took that first semester was an English course that I was teaching. Zona would bring him in and then be right there, because they really did race him back; an hour was a push, on being out of the tank.

O'Hara: For the benefit of readers, because he was dependent on the iron lung for most of the time.

Wirth: Yes. Ed had been in an iron lung, I'm not even sure for how long at that point. Many years. He had just gradually learned to do a little bit of frog breathing [glossopharyngeal breathing technique]. He got better and better and better at frog breathing. He had no external breathing apparatus at that time. All of those things that he had at the end that were so accustomed to giving him so much freedom came much later. So his time out of the tank was spent in active frog breathing.

O'Hara: What was the English course?

Wirth: It was one of those standard freshman English courses.

O'Hara: So this was his first college course.

Wirth: Yes, it was his first college course. He was a model student because he was so interested, and because his mother was so interested. She took it with him, I think.²

O'Hara: Oh, she stayed?

Wirth: No, she didn't, but she hand wrote for him all of the papers that he dictated to her. She discussed with him all of the readings, and she was certainly very much a part of the whole process--so much so that when the semester was over, and she invited me to come and have lunch she said, "I've certainly enjoyed your course." [laughter]

O'Hara: When you say he was so interested, what do you mean? How was this manifested?
Wirth: This was the days when freshman English was taught by using essays that would stimulate thought on controversial issues to get students thinking and writing and taking a position. Because we were talking about expository writing and we wanted them to take a position, we tried very hard to get them to read as many conflicting points of view as they could about anything that they might get excited about, and then would ask them to discuss it in class and then later to write papers on it. That was the method at the time of doing expository writing.

O'Hara: And Ed was able to produce some opinion?

Wirth: Oh, yes. He was always able to produce opinions [laughter]. (This is hard, because I know how well you know Ed.)

No, I think he was able to do that very, very early on. Because he was able to produce an opinion, and because he wanted to be persuasive, he also did a very good job in putting together whatever it was he wrote.

O'Hara: I was under the impression that after he was sick—in fact, he told me this—he was quite shy about going out of the house, and at one point had decided maybe he would like to be a star. But he didn't have any practice with—he hadn't been in public much, I don't think.

Wirth: No, no, he really hadn't.

O'Hara: Before he went to the College of San Mateo.

Wirth: And even during those years he was not in public much.

O'Hara: So he just jumped right in there.

Wirth: He jumped in a small classroom and for an hour a day. Not even a day; three times a week. It wasn't as if it was public speaking; you didn't have to get up and deliver a speech. You had to discuss something and then write about it. So most of what I got from him was in writing. And if he wanted to be a star in those days, it was not as if that was what he was working toward. He was working toward getting back in school and getting going.

O'Hara: Maybe this idea was more conceptualized later after he thought about it for a while.

Do you recall when you first met him? The day you first saw him? Was that the day he came into your classroom?
Yes. Phil Morse had not told me he was coming, either. He just came. The college was at Coyote Point then—a wonderful setting in the redwoods, with wood buildings. There were fixed chairs, so we had to sort of figure out how to get his chair in. We did.

Probably we should ask you: was this your first experience with someone with a severe disability?

Oh, no. For twelve years of my childhood we lived on the grounds of the Marine Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, and I did a lot of volunteer work at the hospital. In addition to that my grandparents, who were both deaf and dumb, lived with us, and I took them to all kinds of gatherings. I was very much a part of life and illness and death and all the things that you are when you live at a hospital.

Was Ed assigned to your class because you had a special ease about this?

Phil Morse claims that he was assigned to my class because I had come in to Phil's office the week before because we had some essays on the loyalty oath, and I said, "I don't have a copy of it. Do you?" And he said, "Oh, you want to see the source before you talk about it?" And I said, "Yes!" [laughter] He claims that that's why he put him in my class. I don't think Phil knew anything about me except that I was brand new at the college. Years later we came to know each other very well, but I think that probably is true; I don't think there was anything else he knew.

So it was quite random.

Only as random as the loyalty oath.

Was this a semester course?

Yes, we were on the semester system.

Was he in your class the second semester?

You know, I'm not sure. I know I had him for more than one class, but I don't think he was in my class the next semester. He did become my counselee the very first year that I started counseling, and I believe that was the year after, but all of this gets very vague this far away. These are the late fifties we're talking about [chuckles].

I think he started in San Mateo in '59. So in '60 he became your counselee.
Wirth: Yes, I'm pretty sure that's right. But of course we also were dealing with academic years, so it's like '59-'60. I think it was immediately after that first class.

O'Hara: And you mentioned lunch with Zona. Did you know Zona before or was this your introduction to her?

Wirth: No. My introduction to her was her bringing him to class. She invited me to lunch after the class was over.

O'Hara: Typical Zona.

Wirth: It was a wonderful experience. She told me that she lived in Burlingame. Knowing very little about this area because I was relatively new to it, I did know that people in Burlingame were generally not poor. Since I was a teacher at the College of San Mateo, I assumed that that meant that I ought to go in a suit and hat and gloves [laughter]. She hadn't said anything to the contrary. So I did [laughs]. I went in a pale-blue linen suit with a white pillbox hat and white gloves and white heels [laughs]. I went up to the door of the house, I rang the bell, and nothing happened. So I rang it again, and still nothing happened. Finally after I rang it for the third time, Randy [Roberts]--who was then this high [gestures]--came and opened the door and fled. He did not even say, "Hello," or "Come in," or anything else. He just fled.

O'Hara: Did you get in?

Wirth: I bravely walked in [laughs]. The living room of this house had in it an iron lung, one chair, and a couple of kids' bicycles.

O'Hara: And you were glad you wore your hat.

Wirth: Right. And by the time I got to the other side of the living room Zona's voice called out from the kitchen and said, "I'm in the kitchen making blintzes. Come on in!" It was a very hot day, and Zona was in a piece of terry cloth wrapped around her with a belt to hold it. [laughter] So I shed my shoes and my stockings and my hat and my gloves and my jacket. Zona and I made blintzes, and then we went out under a beautiful apricot tree they had in the backyard where Ed was, outside. I had one of the most wonderful afternoons I've ever had in my life.

Among the joy of being there with Zona and Ed, Zona had a small child there whose mother was having a very difficult surgery that afternoon. The child would play with other children and then come and just kind of curl up in Zona's lap and hang onto her. In typical Zona fashion, she would just hold on back and give a hug.
There were no special statements, no fuss, just that constant contact throughout the whole afternoon. And wonderful blintzes and the company of Ed and Zona Roberts. Can you beat that? [laughs] And that was the start of a long family friendship.

I used to go to that house a lot. Verne, Ed's father, was an avid fisherman, and Zona hated to fish. So on Friday afternoons after school I would go over, and Verne and I would pile the boat on top of the car and the motor in the car and go out to the bay and fish. We'd come back and we'd clean the fish and take it in--Zona loved to cook and eat it; that was fine. Then we'd all have fish, and then we'd play bridge all night. It was just wonderful.

O'Hara: That's a wonderful story.

Wirth: A wonderful family.

O'Hara: So you became Ed's counselor by mutual interest at that point.

Wirth: Yes, I think so. Counselee, too [laughs].

O'Hara: But that must have gone on for a couple of years.

Wirth: Yes.

O'Hara: Because he didn't leave San Mateo until '62.

Wirth: He could take so few courses at the beginning. He had to build up his ability to be out of the tank. Remember, the whole time that Ed was at the College of San Mateo he never had any other breathing but his frog breathing when he was out of the tank.

O'Hara: Was he able to be out increasingly longer?

Wirth: Oh, at the end he took a full load. But even in the early days at Berkeley he didn't have much [respiratory] support--I mean, this was all stuff that Ed and others developed during those years. I can't give you the history of it, as I'm sure others in the movement could, when each piece of apparatus was developed, but when we went to visit the Berkeley campus after Ed had finished up at CSM, he was frog breathing the whole day we went over there. He had no support system.
Visit to UC Berkeley with Ed Roberts, 1962

O'Hara: Do you remember that day you went over there?

Wirth: Yes, the first day real well.

O'Hara: Can you tell me a blow-by-blow description of it?

Wirth: The first day, not so much happened. I think the day you're referring to was--Zona later reminded me--the second time we went back and met with more officials. The first day we went over just to sort of scope the place out to see where Ed might live on campus. I had done lots of calling ahead and lots of checking and gotten lots of--"the campus for people in wheelchairs was UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles], and that's where he must go. He can't come here, and nobody can get around on this campus in a wheelchair, and all of our buildings are inaccessible, and we don't want him here" [laughs]. And I said, "Ed wants to major in political science, and they don't have any decent political scientists in southern California." [laughs] They had to admit that that was true, but they still wanted him to go there."

O'Hara: Who was telling you that? UCLA itself?

Wirth: UC Berkeley.

O'Hara: Oh, UC Berkeley was referring you.

Wirth: "Go south." I just said, "Look. This man is a political science major, and he's somebody who has to get an advanced degree, because he can't do anything with a bachelor's degree. It won't be enough for him. He has to be where there are people who will get him into advanced work."

So anyway, the first day we went over there it was a very, very funny day. Ed and I were extremely accustomed to being stared at and teasing about whether they were staring at him or at me. There was always this sort of steady banter back and forth.

O'Hara: Now why would they stare at you?

Wirth: Because I'm six feet five [laughs]. In those days it was even more unusual for a woman to be six feet five. Anyway, they would stare at both of us, and we would tease about who it was and who was getting the greater amount of attention.

O'Hara: Did you go by yourself with Ed up there?
Wirth: Ed and Phil Morse and Zona and I went.

O'Hara: The first time, to look for places to live.

Wirth: Yes. And to just sort of look the place over.

O'Hara: So you didn't really meet with anybody.

Wirth: We met with the head of the dormitory, and we met with the head of I-House [International House].

O'Hara: I see. Just general housing opportunities.

Wirth: I could not believe that no dorm was accessible. I just wasn't going to believe that, and it turned out it wasn't true. I mean, they told us later they couldn't get an iron lung in, but that wasn't true either.¹

O'Hara: I know that.

Wirth: So in any event we just wanted to go, and it seemed to me that it was high time that Ed and Zona went, because I had been running around all over there, and he needed to make the decisions, not me. I was willing to do all the fighting that we needed to do from the college's point of view, both with Rehab [Department of Rehabilitation] and with the university. Those were two big fights, with Rehab almost the bigger one, because they didn't want to pay for him to get an education. Their whole principle in those days was to take anybody who was part of Rehab and get that person doing the simplest task that was possibly slightly remunerative and make that be it. If the training could take a week that was just perfect. It sort of reminds you of managed care under our new health plans: how can we do this as cheaply as possible? [laughs] They had lots of gatekeepers at Rehab in those days.

O'Hara: Was Ed trying to be a client of the Department of Rehabilitation while he was at the College of San Mateo?

Wirth: He was a client.

O'Hara: But they didn't want him to go to the university?

Wirth: No. I shouldn't say that—they didn't want to have anything to do with helping to support his going to the university. I don't think if he hadn't asked them to buy a book that they would have cared. But we were looking for a lot more than that; we were looking for serious help with tuition and all kinds of things.
O'Hara: Going back to housing just for a minute, one of the things that has been confused, historically speaking, is what kind of attitude did you run into when you were talking to the people at I-House [International House] and the dorms? Was it horror or just lack of interest?

Wirth: It was more fear.

TRIO Program, Office of Education, Washington, D.C.

O'Hara: What did they say? "Not accessible"?

Wirth: "We can't, we don't know how, it's not safe." All the things that you say when you're afraid. It was very similar to what I ran into many years later in '69 when I went to Washington to work on Student Special Services. I'm sure Zona's told you some of this story. I got there, and my friend who was in charge of the program—who had in fact helped get the legislation through and then called me in to help turn the legislation into program—said, "There's something I didn't tell you about, Jean. At the last minute in the 'flea bargaining' in the Congress, we had to give 15 percent of it away to the disabled." I went, "Wonderful!" [laughter] He looked as if he was stunned. He said, "You don't mind?" Then I said, "I don't mind; I'm thrilled. This is marvelous." So I got to pick the consultants that I called in from throughout the country to work on developing this program. Of course I got Ed to be the one for the disabled.

O'Hara: Can you spell out the law and the regs or services that you were working on? Or at least give us a title and a date.

Wirth: Yes. This is part of what came to be known as the TRIO Program. It was Talent Search, Upward Bound, and then later Special Services. Special Services was the last of the three, because what people found out was that after they had done all the talent searches—and even the Upward Bounds—when students of color, and particularly poor students of color—have gone on campuses, no matter how much support they had had in getting them there, once they got there they really didn't do very well. Of course, those of us who were involved in such things know they didn't do very well because they ran into an absolute brick wall of racism and all kinds of other things.

The Congress was, during that period of time, willing to say, "Okay, we'll continue the support services for the first two years of their college," and even continue them in terms of
academic counseling and other assistance and to getting a few on into graduate school. So what Student Special Services paid for was whatever the college or university felt was necessary to see to it that they kept their disabled and kept their students of color and their poor students and guided them through. It varied from campus to campus, but pretty generally it was sensitive counseling and support groups, and in many cases tutoring. Certainly for the disabled it was readers and writers and all the other things that nobody thought might be needed [laughs]. Nobody else needed these things [laughs].

O'Hara: When you say "writers," is that what we call note-takers at this point?

Wirth: Yes.

O'Hara: And this was part of the Office of Education.

Wirth: Right.

O'Hara: And is there a title to the law?

Wirth: Yes, but there are many titles of the same number. I can even go up to the file and copy for you the little quickie thing, but if you just refer to it as Title VII, which it was, it could refer to many, many other things. The Office of Education is famous for that.

But most people who have anything to do with colleges know about those trios. And later a veterans' program was added to that. It was all very closely connected with the economic opportunity programs: all of the grants and loans.

O'Hara: Now why did they--the Office of Education--have to include 15 percent of it for the disabled?

Wirth: It was the kind of wheeling and dealing that goes on in the Congress; I'll pass your bill if you'll put in my disabled.

O'Hara: I wonder who promoted that.

Wirth: I can't tell you that, but I can tell you who could: the man who did this, who is my good friend David Johnson in Washington. But somebody in the Congress wasn't going to let that bill go through unless it included the disabled, because somebody had a disabled son or daughter or mother or father.

O'Hara: How interesting, at that period of time, that somebody insisted on that. And that's a fairly sizable chunk of money.
Wirth: 'I'll go your black folks if you go my disabled.' [laughter]

O'Hara: Now why were you called in to set up the services?

Wirth: Because I had been running since the summer of '65 or '66--

**Early Services for Students With Disabilities at CSM**

O'Hara: You were saying that from 1965 you had run a program at the College of San Mateo for students of color. And that was the reason that you went to Washington? Or you must have gained some notoriety.

Wirth: Yes [laughs]. The College of San Mateo, like most community colleges--and colleges, except for a few private ones--was almost exclusively white in those days. The then-president, Julio Bortalazzo, had been very, very much moved by Selma [Alabama] and other events in our history, and called on the 350-person faculty for someone to change the color of his campus. I was the only one who volunteered. Isn't that shocking? I don't think he would have let a white woman do it, except that I had done the disabled program. So while he had a lot of reservations, he let me go ahead and do it.

O'Hara: What disabled program?

Wirth: Whatever there was there; it was minimal. But I mean, Ed kind of started things, and so we began to move in ramps and move in systems.

O'Hara: You had developed some services.

Wirth: Minimal.

O'Hara: But you were the person to see.

Wirth: I was the person to see, yes. Don't get excited; it was so small [laughs]. It's embarrassing.

O'Hara: Were there others in wheelchairs at the college?

Wirth: There were a couple after a while, yes.

O'Hara: After Ed.
Wirth: Yes, after Ed. Primarily what we did was we did all the very early things that people do, which is to talk to faculty about the fact that if they have deaf people in a room and if they will write on the board while they're talking—I mean, if they'll just get as many senses operating as possible, not only will the person who's missing a sense do better, everybody does better. So we would try to do those kinds of teacher training things, and some people cooperated, and those who cooperated got the students who needed them in their classes.

College Readiness Program

O'Hara: So you had started a program of sorts for the students with disabilities, and that was the reason that your president--

Wirth: --said, "Okay, since you're the only volunteer, I guess I have to take you."

We were more successful than anyone could have dreamed. It had something to do with me and with the other people working in the program, but it had mostly to do with the fact that the nation and the world was ripe and people were ready. When I went out and recruited in bars and pool halls and jails and on the streets--

O'Hara: Literally?

Wirth: Literally. The response was just overwhelming. When I recruited among the students for tutors to help, students throughout the whole college turned over their lives to this program. So every single student that we brought to the program had at least one tutor, and some of them had two. They just had people taking care of them, and their instructions were, "Go to that kid's class, take that class with him, and see to it he gets through it, whatever you have to do."

O'Hara: So the student body was much more responsive to this.

Wirth: Yes. Well, it was the civil rights era. So out of that—and I don't mean it wasn't incredibly hard work—meeting with the students and the tutors and the faculty day in and day out and weekends and nights and all of us going off to training sessions. We developed a number of techniques and systems that worked. So the only problem we had was keeping up with it. The very first summer we had forty students. It had been anticipated from records of other places that we'd be lucky if five of them came back. All forty of them came back, and they all brought friends.
O'Hara: Fantastic.

Wirth: And it stayed that way for its whole history. So very quickly I was asked to go to meetings in Washington to describe this thing that we were doing.

O'Hara: Were you using any federal money?

Wirth: Not initially. It was one of those fluke things. Some low-level person in the Office of Education--oh, I know: somebody from College Boards wrote an article about us, and somebody in the Office of Education saw it, and then like everything else it just went--.

So whenever I was asked to go to Washington--or anywhere else for that matter--to talk about the program, I would always say that I would come, but that I wouldn't come without students. So they were always having to bring along the students and give them the experience of the travel and the talk and all the rest of that. So very quickly we became very famous, yes. The students did incredible presentations at the Shoreham [Hotel] and at all these fine hotels; it was great [laughs].

As you probably may not remember, unless you were really involved in it--and most people didn't--'69 was the year that all the campuses blew up. It was when Berkeley was so full of tear gas that you could hardly breathe, and the University of San Francisco blew, and Fresno State, and everywhere. There was a minor upheaval at College of San Mateo, and the president who had supported the program was by then gone, and a real Nazi was there in his place [chuckles]. The whole thing was just shut down overnight.

O'Hara: Your whole program?

Wirth: Yes, all of it, overnight.

O'Hara: For good?

Wirth: Yes. Well, they started up something and called it the same thing, but it was never--. At that point we started a private community college in East Palo Alto--Nairobi College--that Ed was part of.

O'Hara: And that was the reason, then.

Wirth: That's right.

O'Hara: So how long had your program run? Since '65, you said?
Wirth: It was the academic year of '65-'66 to '69 when all of this happened.
II ED ROBERTS AS CONSULTANT AND TEACHER

Consulting in Washington, D.C., with Ed Roberts, 1969

Wirth: One of these fluke things occurred. I had just left the College of San Mateo, I was trying to figure out what I was going to do--I had about two days of rest after an insanity of 315 tac [tactical] squad members in my office, and that kind of thing--and my friend from the Office of Education called me and said, "I realize this is very bad timing, and you're going to have to say no, but I'm going to have to ask you anyway. Can you come to Washington for three months?" [laughs] I said, "Well, as it happens, your timing is perfect." So that's how I got to go to Washington and Ed got to go to Washington.

All of this started with your question about what kind of reaction I got. When I called Ed and said, "You're coming, of course," he said, "Of course," and I said, "Let me get back to you. I've got to figure out where we're going to house all this, and where I can get a lung and whatever."

O'Hara: For his first time as a consultant?

Wirth: Yes, and his first away from home.

O'Hara: His first flight.

Wirth: Yes, all of it. So anyway, among other things I began calling hotels in Washington, D.C., to try to find one not that would do anything except let us bring--I find a hospital that would give us an iron lung and would let us take it to a hotel. That was not so hard. As I recall, I called something like 162 hotels. I got the same fear reactions from every one of them: "Those things blow up! We're not insured for that!" [laughs] It was just madness, just madness. Finally, a Marriott on the other side of the river with huge glass doors out to open patios said, "Sure, we can just bring him right in through those glass doors. No problem at all."
Don't ask me who I got who wasn't afraid or had had what kind of experience, but it was just [snaps fingers], "Of course, of course, it's fine."

Zona tells me that Ed was bitterly disappointed that he couldn't be in the same hotel with everybody else. I never knew this. He was so close, and we were there as much as he was. But anyway, I did not know that, but he evidently was very disappointed, but there wasn't a thing in the world we could have done about it.

O'Hara: Zona told me at one point that the first hotel was not acceptable --or maybe this was the phone calls that you made. I was under the impression that he had to move once he got there.

Wirth: No. Now there were problems. His plane was very late, and again we've got a man with no respirator, right? I was at the Dulles Airport, and I was frantic. We had this ride then from Dulles in. Fortunately, I had not known it, but the man who was there as the primary consultant for black students, a man I had worked with a lot in East Palo Alto, turned out to be a physical therapist. So when we got to the hotel and found out that there was no collar for the tank [laughs] he made one. But it was one crisis after another trying to get Ed raced from the airport to the hotel and into the tank and then, "Oh! There's no collar."

O'Hara: So you did it. What an achievement for the whole group. Now did Mark Roberts go with--?

Wirth: Zona tells me he did. And I have to believe her, because I do not remember anybody--somebody was with him, and I don't remember. It had to be Mark. I just remember how frantic we were trying to get him into that tank. Mark was awfully young then. If Zona says it was Mark, it must have been [laughs].

O'Hara: Can we go back for a minute to something? You said there were tac squads in your office? I don't know what that is.

Wirth: Oh, the tactical squad. The riot police.

O'Hara: They were in your office?

Wirth: I said there was a small disturbance on the campus, and they reacted by sending 350 San Francisco tactical squad members.

O'Hara: It wasn't directed at you.

Wirth: No. But it was directed at the program that I ran. When I heard that they were coming my secretary said, "What should I do?" I
said, "Make several pots of coffee." [laughter] So she did. When they got there I offered them coffee, but they were sure I was trying to poison them; they wouldn't touch it [laughter].

O'Hara: There are a couple of threads I wanted to go back to--certainly Washington. What did you and Ed do in Washington? Did you work together? Did you work alone?

Wirth: Ed and several other people came to a meeting which I think lasted for two and a half days.

O'Hara: Were the other people also from groups of disabled people?

Wirth: No, he was the only disabled representative in the group. No, that's not true. There was a man from the Office of Education who was head of--and it wasn't called disabled in those days; what was it?

O'Hara: Handicapped, probably.

Wirth: Something worse than that. Anyway, he was in charge of elementary school disability--whatever its name was. He was there, and he was horrible. He and Ed had some wonderful battles.

O'Hara: Right there in front of you.

Wirth: Right there in front of everybody. We had, during that entire period of time, wonderful battles between the same forces for the poor and for the students of color and for everyone. It had to do with how much you believed certain groups of people who have been left out of our world can do if they're given a chance to do it.

O'Hara: And by this time Ed had had a fair amount of experience in Berkeley.

Wirth: And he had had a fair amount of experience anywhere. Ed knew that I didn't call him to Washington to say, "Oh, no, you really can't do anything; you're disabled." [laughs] That was not the purpose of his being there.

O'Hara: It's interesting--Dr. [Henry] Bruyn, who was a medical director at Cowell, used the same phrase. He said, "Those students were beautiful battlers." What was the battle? How was it handled?

Wirth: These were the same kinds of battles from the very first day that we said to Rehab in San Mateo County that Ed's going to go to college. And they said, "Oh, no, no. We can't spare money for him." Ed was in battles with Zona long before he met me. Ed's high school not wanting to give him a diploma unless he passed
P.E. [physical education] is probably the first big one. But Zona took that on, very early on, and she had never thought she would battle anybody. I think that probably Ed would have remembered himself as someone who was always battling. A lot of people went to battle for Ed for many, many years before Ed took over the battles himself.

O'Hara: Such as Ed's mother and yourself.

Wirth: Sure. It's the most natural thing in the world. How do you learn how to do those things? You're just not born doing that. Zona had to learn. She had to go up against the board of education and then go see friends and get advice. All of those things.

O'Hara: How did he learn from you? What did he see you do?

Wirth: He saw me argue with the dean of men at Berkeley about whether or not he could be there. All of those things.

O'Hara: How much of an argument was it? What were the arguments?

Wirth: I'd probably tend to remember only the things that made me angry [laughs], which is not fair. And it's not an accurate representation, I think. But I particularly remember one of the people over there, and I'm not even sure who it was, who said to me, "Well, what does he do when he needs to go to the bathroom?" I said, "I haven't the faintest idea, and I think that ought to tell you something." Those were the kinds of things that we were always going through. "What do you mean it ought to tell me something?" "Clearly he handles it well enough so that none of us have to be involved in it. What are you creating here?" Those are the ones that used to be so annoying; I think that's why I remember them so much. And then of course they were always telling us that we overestimated his ability, because he was handicapped. And of course what you wanted to say back was, "If I thought you can read an English paper and understand it, I would offer you one of his so that you could see its brilliance." [laughs] I didn't say things like that much, but it's what you wanted to say.

O'Hara: We're back to Berkeley now. I think you're talking now about the second time up there with Ed. The first time was just looking at housing, and the second time was a meeting with the dean of men. Arleigh Williams, I think.

Wirth: I think so. Again, I'm very vague on this stuff. I'm pretty sure that's who it was. But I'm not sure that it wasn't someone from the hospital who asked me all those questions about Ed's physical handling of things, none of which--either I couldn't answer them
or I felt they were not relevant to his being a student on the campus. Many of them I really couldn't answer; it was none of my business or theirs.

First Student Special Services Grant, Funding the Physically Disabled Students' Program, 1970

O'Hara: Let's jump back to Washington.

Wirth: Ed was there as were people from all over the country, to talk about what Student Special Services--what the program should have in its guidelines. We were creating the guidelines for the program. So there were all of the people who had to be allowed to be there, because otherwise the Office of Education would have been sued by those conservative forces. And they [conservative forces] were the ones who were there trying to make the Student Special Services as restrictive and as limiting as possible--take the least disabled student, take the whitest black [laughs]. So there were all of those. And because I had selected them [the others] from all over the country--having gotten to know them in doing this work--they were all of the ones who represented the other side. We had initially, at College of San Mateo, selected the first forty students for the program with five characteristics: they had to be of color, they had to be poor, they had to have done badly in school, they had to hate school, and they had to not want to go on to school [laughter]. That was a very, very intentional selection, so that if we were using it as a pilot to demonstrate anything it would.'

O'Hara: Ed was an active participant in this meeting then.

Wirth: Oh, yes. Now certainly not the only or the most; these were probably thirty-five people from around the country.

O'Hara: Was there no one else from the--besides that man who had the elementary education charge--there was no one else to ask at that point?

Wirth: Oh, I think there was.

O'Hara: You had your group.

Wirth: Yes. And it wasn't as if I didn't know other people; it was just that I wanted Ed very badly, both because I thought he would offer so much to it, and because I wanted to get him started in that kind of direction. The credibility that you have back home when
you've done things like that is very helpful to whatever you're trying to do in Berkeley.

O'Hara: That did, as I understand it, lead directly to the first Student Special Services grant at Berkeley.

Wirth: Yes.

O'Hara: That, I think, arrived in 1970. That was used to start the Physically Disabled Students' Program.

Wirth: Right.

**Ed Roberts as a Teacher at Common College**

O'Hara: Where do we go from here in your work with Ed?

Wirth: It is the early days that were the fullest. Once Ed got going at Berkeley, I think I probably visited him twice, and his friends thought this was wonderful; they don't need me. [laughs]

O'Hara: Did you hire him at one of the colleges that you founded?

Wirth: Yes. I don't have the whole history of how this worked, but at one point Ed did go to live for a while in East Palo Alto. That was not a very successful period; in fact, it was after Sacramento.\(^{10}\)

O'Hara: After he was the director of Rehab?

Wirth: Yes. I don't know why he was there, I really don't. But I know he wasn't very happy about being there, and I know that I was--wait a minute. It wasn't after; when was he director of Rehab?

O'Hara: From '75 to '83.

Wirth: It was before, excuse me. Anyway, I was looking for something new and different to do, and I had a particular concern that the students of color in the College Readiness Program at the College of San Mateo all had some place to go and something to do. And the very active white students who had been so much a part of that program, it was sort of like it really totally died for them. For many of them the activism is what had kept them in school, and so many of them were just out there with nothing to do. So a mother of one of these offered me enough money to try an alternative college to try to expand my own bases, so I did. That first year
of that college, Ed came to live in a rural spot in Woodside, where he should never have lived and to be a part of the faculty at the college.

O'Hara: What was the name of the college?

Wirth: Common College. For him to be on the faculty was wonderful, but there were just many, many things which conspired to make it just not a real good year for him. For one thing, he had two brothers there.

O'Hara: At Common College?

Wirth: Yes. And that was not good. He was too isolated. Ed needed never to be isolated. He was in much more wilderness than this [Wirth's home in Woodside], with no immediate neighbors and without doing an awful lot of doing to get out, and no way to be in the middle of things. It was wonderful to have Ed there to share his experiences with students, and it was so bad for Ed that finally I just said, "I can't let you do this." And he knew it too.

O'Hara: He was there just a year?

Wirth: Just a year, yes.

O'Hara: It was not good that his brothers were there?

Wirth: No. That's too much family. I mean, they all lived in the same house, right? And his brothers were there as students.

O'Hara: With his brothers doing personal care also?

Wirth: Yes. So it was incestuous [chuckles].

O'Hara: What was he teaching? Was it a separate course or was it more of a--

Wirth: The idea was that these were students who were by and large very bright and just wanted to design their own whatever. So we had gathered together some people who would help them to design their own whatever. I think probably one of the most successful examples of that was [inaudible] desperately wanted to--this was in '71--they wanted to cure poverty. So we had tried very hard to see if there was some way we could nail that down to something that could be done in three months and preferably with assured success. And lo and behold, after lots and lots of times we did. We narrowed it down to creating what was the first guide to California foundations, which gave grass-roots organizations
access to information about philanthropical money which had not been available to them before. This is such a garden variety publication now that it no longer seems like a radical undertaking, but it was a radical undertaking at the time.

O'Hara: That was in '71?

Wirth: Yes. They searched in the records in Sacramento, and they interviewed foundation directors and board members and they put together the first guide. It was infinitely successful, and we got a chance to do consulting work, for free, but nevertheless consulting work, for farm workers in Salinas and a variety of other grass-roots organizations, and we helped them figure out how to get money. It was a good educational experience. [inaudible sentence] At least at that point in time Ed was not interested in finding out what the students wanted to do and figuring out a way for them to do it. It was not part of a big organized movement. In fact, the students did end up getting housed with the farm workers, and that was pretty organized. It was working on a pretty small scale with a few people to get these things going.

O'Hara: And it wasn't his cup of tea, so to speak.

Wirth: It wasn't his. It might have been later, but at that point in time it just wasn't. Too few and too low key.

O'Hara: I wanted to ask you your general overall observations, and you had said you had some problems with Ed when he was in Sacramento.

Wirth: Yes, and Cathy.

##

O'Hara: Have we said what needs to be said about Common College?

Wirth: I think so. It was wonderful to have Ed nearby as a friend. Working with him on other things had been infinitely successful, so, because it was less than that, it was disappointing for both of us.

O'Hara: Did he stay a year?

Wirth: He did stay a year, yes. Now I might add he was wonderful for the students who were there. Anyone who knew Ed learned a great deal about living and life and all of that. In that way, I think there were young people there whose whole worlds had been turned around. It's like anything that you come to know closely, and that generalizes to all kinds of other things. Maybe these other things aren't exactly as they've been portrayed to mean, either
[laughs]. It's like the first time someone is at an event that's reported in the newspaper and reads it and says, "Is that really the same place that I was? Or the same movie?" Then gradually that becomes, "Maybe everything that's in the newspaper is like that."

O'Hara: So you knew Ed well enough just to know that this wasn't working for him, and you knew it wasn't working for your general goals.

Wirth: It wasn't working badly for the--I mean, the students certainly learned a great deal from him. I just didn't think it was one of those good opportunities for Ed's participation. Ed was too much of a people person. He needed much more of an audience than that.

O'Hara: That's in '71. Then there were several years where Ed did various--

Wirth: What did he do?

O'Hara: He went to Riverside for a while.

Wirth: That's right. What did he do there? I can't remember.

O'Hara: I think he was working on the program down there for the university, helping establish it. I don't have a real firm idea of what he was doing between '72 and '75. But by '75 we know he was appointed to be director of Rehab. And you were still in contact with him--and his mother, of course."

Later Memories of Ed Roberts

Wirth: The most wonderful thing in those days was when Zona finally got all of her kids [through school] and said, "It's my turn now; I'm going to school!" [laughs]

O'Hara: She went to the College of San Mateo for a while, didn't she?

Wirth: Briefly. It was Berkeley and then JFK.

O'Hara: What were your observations of Ed as director of Rehabilitation?

Wirth: I remember the first time I went up there. It was just so wonderful. That was the first time I had a real sense of Ed getting into the whole business of using technology, because it had not been big for him before. He had been mildly interested in having a better wheelchair or a better--but not really in changing
all of the things that could make life much easier to live. So to
go from seeing him with a mediocre electric chair and a small box
that let him sort of read awkwardly to a desk that had been
created to rotate for him and all of this beginning computer
science--

O'Hara: And that's what he had in Sacramento?

Wirth: Yes. And a real good chair. He had equipped himself to function
and was beginning to work with all kinds of people on developing
new equipment. I found that very exciting, and I have always
thought that whatever you can design to make life easier and more
functional is really a large piece of what independent living is
all about.

O'Hara: That's so true. The change from 1970 to now is just so radical.

Wirth: And that really was the beginning of it--at least in my
observation of Ed--was when he was there in Sacramento. That's
when that became very important. I had at the same time a very
good friend at Stanford Research Institute who cracked voice code
for the computer, and so I was very excited about it in terms of
disability and being able to use a computer without any fingers.

So we had a wonderful day my first visit to his office,
talking about voice code and computers and new apparatus and new
whatever. Then I got to see the wonderful home that he had
designed for himself out there. Did you see that?

O'Hara: No. I don't know about it all.

Wirth: It was a mediocre home redesigned to be a perfect place for Ed--a
huge bathroom that just worked beautifully, and a room that for
the first time made an iron lung that looked like it was
absolutely the right piece of furniture to be there. Just a good
designer, a really good designer. And things at levels and
heights so that Ed was always a part of whatever was going on,
whether he was in the tank or whether he was in the chair. It was
a period in which Ed was paying attention to those things and
letting people design for them, and I of course thought that was
wonderful.

O'Hara: You were around for his wedding?

Wirth: Oh, yes, I went to his wedding. I was around for the early,
happier parts of the marriage, and I was around for the
dissolution. I think that was an awfully important thing for Ed
to do. I'm not sure how much of it was important for him to do
personally and how much of it was important for him to do
politically; it was certainly both. It was interesting to watch for both of those reasons.

Cathy was both the right person and the worst person. She had been around disability enough to understand and to be concerned, but she was not strong enough to fit into the role of Ed's wife. Instead of leading to her getting stronger, it led to her drinking.

O'Hara: He's very proud of his son and has always been proud of his son.

Wirth: And has reason to be. There were some moments in Lee's youth when I think all of us were a little concerned, particularly when Cathy was so bad, but he has turned out beautifully. He's just a lovely person.

O'Hara: I've seen him do some very nice things at the World Institute dinner last year and the memorial.

Wirth: I also think that his uncle Ron in Hawaii has been a very good influence on him. Ron's a dear person, and I know Ron's taken him under his wing as a tennis coach, but I think you can't be a coach of anything without being a coach coach, you know? [chuckles]

O'Hara: Did you have any official work with Ed through his Rehab years?

Wirth: No. It was very interesting to me, too. I think it was important. For example, when Ed went to Russia with the World Institute he took a man I've worked with over the years in a lot of things: Dale Flowers from UC Santa Cruz. He took him along to be the lead trainer on the work that they did when they went to Russia. There was a moment when I just went, "Well, damn--a chance to go to Russia, and he takes Dale instead of me!" [laughs] "That's not fair, Edward."

But once I thought about it I realized that it was terribly important that he do that. First of all because of Dale's connection with the university, and second of all because he really needed to take somebody who didn't know him really well and who would, by getting to know him, do the kinds of things that he did, which was to get terribly excited about the whole movement and spread that excitement. I would never have done that. It would have been--not old hat, but you know what I mean. It would not have been this epiphany that it was for Dale. And, because it was, Dale was brilliant.

O'Hara: How could Ed do that with people? That was one of his most remarkable characteristics, I think.
Wirth: If what Ed has done all his life ever works really, really well, what he did would be able to do it. A lot of what Ed did was based on people having some very bad notions about what disability was all about. That, in fact, it really is disabling. The first thing Ed did was to take everybody who wanted to say, "Wouldn't you rather have died?" and just knock that right off their heads. Once he did that and they managed to struggle back and ask other questions and think other thoughts, then Ed just took every other stereotype and knocked it down. In the process he made them look at a whole bunch of things about why you want to live and what you live for and what living's really all about.

O'Hara: Why Ed and not hundreds of other disabled people who had the same attitude?

Wirth: For one thing he was extremely disabled. That was very important, don't you think? This takes a nasty cut at our world, but I'm afraid it's true, he was also a very attractive disabled person, more so in his early years than in his later years. Ed didn't drool, he didn't snivel; Ed had terrific charisma. He was handsome. He had a smile in his eyes and on his mouth that would just knock you over.

O'Hara: Is that what attracted the media to him?

Wirth: Oh, I'm sure it is. Ed's what they call beautiful. This is one of the worst characteristics of our society, so I really don't like to--. But it is true. I remember one day when I had a young woman at Common College who had cerebral palsy, and she had been elected when she was five to be the Easter Seal girl. She met Ed one day when he was here, and she said, "Oh, you're another one of those pretty ones." Ed said, "Yeah."

O'Hara: Was he always as articulate as he eventually became for the media?

Wirth: No, of course not. But he was always articulate. The more you talk the better you get. He also had--I know only a few of them--some wonderful tutors along the way. I remember being at a meeting at his house one night when there was a man there who I think had been part of Kennedy's entourage and was going over a speech that Ed had given and was giving him some pointers. A lot of people flocked to Ed, and he took them in. Ed was a learner. I think he was a selective one; I don't think he just took what anybody said, but he certainly found a lot of people to help him make better speeches and write better things.

O'Hara: Perhaps he knew who to listen to. He referred to his conversation with you--originally about going to Berkeley--as a pivotal
conversation, in which you said, "You need to go to Berkeley." Is that correct?

Wirth: Yes, I did. But I did more than that: I said not only that he needed to go to Berkeley but that he needed to get an advanced degree, that he couldn't stop with a bachelor's at Berkeley. I said, "You have to keep going, because your mind is what has got to carry you through the big jobs and the kinds of things that you're going to do and want to do."

O'Hara: Are there any other observations about him or the independent living movement or his influence on it that you could make?

Wirth: I don't know; probably if we sat and talked. You know, you were saying, "Why Ed?" and I realized that even in that first year that he lived at Cowell when I went to visit and there were all those men in chairs in that huge room that they were in at the hospital, it was very clear that they all had tremendous skills and abilities, but Ed was sort of the nominated leader. Maybe because he had been the first, but I don't think so. He could have been the first and been washed over by someone else later.

O'Hara: He was just a leader.

Wirth: Yes. And if we really come back to it, I have always felt that throughout all of this Zona has never gotten the credit she deserved. None of this would have happened without Zona. Not ever out there in front, but just there from day one.

O'Hara: Yes, I think even his living on Eton [Avenue] and she feeling so responsible for nighttimes and--. That was an unspoken presence, I think.

Wirth: Absolutely. Their relationship has always been interesting to me, and how much of her life was given over to creating independent living and all the things that Ed did. Not because she decided at age twenty-something that that was something she was going to do, but just because of Ed. And if you ask Zona about a lot of those things, she sometimes is very vague about them, and she will act as if she doesn't understand the politics and she didn't understand the--[laughs]. But damn it, she did it. She even did it by saying to Ed, "You can't just lie around here and be crippled."

O'Hara: When he was at home as a teenager.

Wirth: Yes.

O'Hara: That's a pretty powerful statement.
Wirth: I can't stand it, your brothers can't stand it, we can't handle it. You can't do that. So he had a lot of that kind of help--the kind people are so reluctant to give. I don't mean she didn't do the bedpans too [chuckles]. It was kind of like an always unspoken statement in those early days that "I am not going to be bathing and feeding and taking care of you for the rest of our lives. And you're going to see to it that I don't." Then of course, in a way, she always did take care of him, which was just fine [laughter].

O'Hara: Is there anything that I have forgotten to bring up or that you were planning to say?

Wirth: I don't think so.

O'Hara: This has been extremely interesting, and I've learned some things myself.

Wirth: About the origins of your program.

O'Hara: Well, yes, details. I certainly had a sense of the growth for a long time. I really appreciate your time.

Wirth: You're most welcome.
ENDNOTES

Because Jean Wirth died before she could review the transcript of her oral history interview, we asked Zona Roberts to review the transcript for us. She provided the following comments when her recollections conflicted with Jean Wirth's, or to elaborate on some of Jean Wirth's statements.

1. The guard got used to our coming in, he wasn't waiting for us. I had help getting Ed out of the car and into his chair; I would ask students walking by to help lift half of him.

2. Ed had already taken two courses at CSM. Phil recommended Jean's class for the reason she states. He was impressed with her asking about the complete document to show her students. (In three years Ed took all of the required graduation courses at CSM: Spanish, political science, English, science, et cetera.) Ed always took more than one course per semester.

3. The iron lung was in the dining room; also there were the television, chairs, books, sofa, fireplace, and bicycles in the living room on the day Jean came for lunch. I was taking care of the kids of a friend.

4. We only went to Berkeley together once, Ed, Jean, Phil, and I.

5. Iron lungs couldn't come up in the elevator and the dorm rooms were shared by two students.

6. Thirty-seven returned.

7. Jean told me that when she arrived at the conference hotel they were just opening Ed's room request and said they couldn't have an iron lung because they "Blow up, you know." Mark was his attendant on that trip.

8. Not true. She may have talked with Arleigh Williams over the phone, but there was no battle with him the day we visited. He just sent someone to take us to the dorms and sent us to talk to Henry Bruyn at Cowell to explain why Berkeley was a poor place for someone with a disability to matriculate. They had had veterans on crutches who couldn't make it across campus in time for the next class.

9. She selected students of color who wouldn't be given scholarships, had poor test scores, but some teacher had a positive comment about this student and the abilities of same.
10. Ed taught at Nairobi College in East Palo Alto and lived there for a while before Sacramento. Then he went to Common College in Woodside. While in East Palo Alto he started working on getting the law changed regarding conscientious objectors, making it possible for them to work for individuals rather than only in institutions. He and Ann Benner of San Mateo were responsible for that change.

11. Joel Bryan, who was directing the Disabled Student Program at UC Riverside, wanted to take some time off. Ed filled in for him. Later a doctor told him if Ed wanted to live and breathe he'd better leave the smog of Riverside.
TAPE GUIDE--Jean Wirth

Date of Interview: June 4, 1996
Tape 1, Side A 234
Tape 1, Side B 245
Tape 2, Side A 256
Tape 2, Side B not recorded
GENEALOGY IN THE FAMILY OF ZONA ROBERTS-
NEE ZONA ALINE (LEE) HARVEY

Grandmother: Minnie Geneva Gilbreath b. Fall River, Kansas June 18, 1875
Two daughters, Nada Estelle Post b. Feb 23, 1903
Gladys Post b. probably 1905

Grandmother: Clara J. Harvey lived at 1500 Fern St. in Portland, Oregon in 1920. Howard (20), her youngest son, lived there with his wife Nada (17) when Zona was born April 1, 1920 in Minnie’s home: 4319 S.E. 43rd st.

Ronald Walter Roberts b. April 2, 1944
Mark Leslie Roberts b. Nov. 24, 1949

Gavin Roberts b. June 29, 1982

--Prepared by Zona Roberts, 1999
Extraordinary teacher

Jean Wirth, a teacher who saw talents in every student and turned thousands of college students on to learning, died Nov. 8 after suffering a stroke at her home in Woodside. A celebration of her life will be held Dec. 14 at Woodside Village Community Church. This photograph was taken by one of her students in the 1980s. See obituary on Page 29.
Jean Wirth
Innovative educator
See photo on Page 3

Jean Wirth, an extraordinary teacher who saw talents in every student and turned thousands of college students on to learning, died Nov. 8 after suffering a stroke at her home in Woodside.

A celebration of her life will be held on Saturday, Dec. 14, at 2:30 p.m. in Guild Hall at Woodside Village Community Church, 3154 Woodside Road, Woodside.

Ms. Wirth, the only child of an Army doctor and his wife, was born in New York 64 years ago, and came to California to attend Mills College. She received both her bachelor and master of arts degrees in English from Mills, and continued graduate studies at the University of California, Berkeley, and San Francisco State University. She returned to Mills in 1964 as a visiting professor of education in charge of teacher training for secondary credential candidates.

"Jean honestly believed that everybody was bright. She could bring out some talent in every student she ran into," said Sally Smith, the first student in the "College Readiness Program" that Ms. Wirth initiated and founded at College of San Mateo during the summer of 1966. This program became the model for the U.S. Office of Education Title IV, Student Special Services Program, and similar ones throughout the country and overseas.

Ms. Wirth went to East Palo Alto and recruited 38 black students — only those whose counselors said would never go to college — for her pilot summer program at CSM. They studied English and math, took a counseling course from her, received help from CSM student-tutors and became motivated learners.

When Ms. Wirth left CSM in 1969, this program had recruited 2,000 students of color, many of whom went on to four-year colleges, advanced degrees and good jobs. The program also changed the complexion of the previously all-white community college of 9,000 students.

Ms. Wirth founded Common College, a small, private alternative college for people of all ages seeking different ways to learn, in her Woodside home, and served as president from 1971 to 1985, when it closed. Her goal was to help students discover what they wanted to learn and achieve, acquire the skills they needed, and become "lifelong learners and doers as well as scholars."

Students at Common College developed individualized programs with their mentors. Their "classrooms" included work in their area of interest, projects, travel, tutorials, independent study, apprenticeships and retreats. A number of area residents served as teachers and members of the board.

Ms. Wirth, along with fellow teacher Bob Hoover at CSM, founded Nairobi College in a rented house in East Palo Alto in 1971. She wrote the curriculum and raised money for the alternative college that existed for 10 years.

Earlier, she initiated and directed a program for disabled students at CSM. Among its many success stories was Edward V. Roberts, who received a MacArthur Fellowship for his outstanding work as an advocate for the disabled.

She started the National Training Institute for Community Economic Development in Palo Alto, along with Peter Abrahams, in 1977. The government-funded institute designed training modules and provided technical assistance to community development corporations and other community-based organizations.

Ms. Wirth worked as a consultant for the past 31 years in schools, government and with nonprofit organizations, primarily those involved in education, community development, health and alternative solutions. She did training, designed curriculum and worked with organizations that wanted to build collaborative, community-based development programs.

Most recently she worked with Opportunities Industrialization Center West, or OICW, serving East Palo Alto, east Menlo Park and Redwood City, and wrote a National Institute of Health substance abuse prevention program called GOT IT, Greater Opportunities for Teens in Transition.

Working with the Youth Development Center of East Palo Alto from 1984 to 1994, she helped turn the 70 percent high school drop-out rate for low-income youth of color into a 70 percent high school retention rate.

During the years she worked in the East Palo Alto community, she is credited with raising $30 million for youth development programs, said Ms. Smith, the student who later worked with her as a consultant.

Ms. Wirth served on the board of Planned Parenthood of San Mateo County and contributed in the areas of proposal writing, program development and training.

Each year Ms. Wirth selected a program of interest for her charitable donation. She had decided to contribute this year to the Leadership Training Academy, a youth program for high school students in East Palo Alto. Contributions in her memory may be designated for that program and sent to the Peninsula Community Foundation, 1700 South El Camino Real, No. 300, San Mateo 94402-3049.
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