

INTERVIEW WITH ROSA MORGAN

NOVEMBER 10, 1998, AFTERNOON (AFTER MURRAY'S INTERVIEW)

Rosa: On both sides, my grandparents came from the same part of England, but not at the same time, from Manchester. My mother was born just outside Shelton in the woods, in Mason County, one of seven children. I think my grandmother, who was very small, must have been a pretty tough lady. She raised them all. Mother grew up in Vancouver Island and Seattle. My father came by way of Kansas to Portland first. That's where they lived when they were first married, where my grandparents had a farm on Salmon Creek just outside of Portland. They met in Seattle. Then our family moved to Tacoma by way of Chehalis, and Tacoma has been home ever since, although I've lived some years in Seattle, and some in Mexico, and some in Tacoma, and New York, and other places. This is home.

[My father] was a partner in a motor freight business. He was really a bookkeeper and accountant, but he learned because, like everybody else, he wanted to have his own business and two friends also wanted to give it a whirl. He could handle the rate. In the days before deregulation when all of these transportation services were franchised, there [was] a complicated rate structure. So that was my dad's contribution to the partnership. They had trucks going out to Mt. Rainier and to Seattle and around the area.

Mother was a mountaineer. She was planning to go on a climbing trip until a month or so before she died. She got to the top of quite a few, no major mountains, but her group had gone to the Grand Tetons the year before. She died just the week after her sixtieth birthday, so she was not

an old woman when she died. She raised three of us, and she was always a very good sport. We were each allowed to bring along a pal when we went camping. She'd take two tents. Dad didn't come along. He was busy at the office. Mother did all the cooking. In those days, you could camp just very near the lodge at Paradise. From time to time a ranger would come on his nice Palomino horse and make sure that you had plenty of firewood and that you hung your food up so the bears wouldn't eat it. My friends and I thought that they were the world's most beautiful men (laughs). We were in junior high school then, and mother was always a good sport about outings probably because she had this early experience in the wilderness, of going into Shelton with her older brothers leading her horse when it was too far for her to walk.

Amy: When did you move to Tacoma?

Rosa: I was a fourth grader. I suppose I was about 10. I have two younger brothers, *had*, they're both gone. I was the oldest one. I was a big sister. That's about all the family. I have very few relatives left: nieces and nephews and their children.

Amy: What are your first memories of Tacoma?

Rosa: I suppose the school, which was Hawthorne School¹, in exactly the position where the Tacoma Dome is now, right at the point of it. We lived there on McKinley Hill next to the park. It was a wonderful place then, just wonderful for a kid. There was a stream with yellow-bellied newts in it. I think that's my first memory, so pleased to find them (laughs).

Amy: What did you do as a kid for fun?

Rosa: Roller-skating and bicycling and just what everybody else did. We roller-skated to school and back. Several of my friends had beach cabins. We went to those for a week at a time. My parents were very good about letting us go on the little launch out to Spring Beach, just packing up food and a few changes of socks (laughs), and let us go on our own. At that time we were junior high school kids. Then we went up to Mt. Rainier and camped one time. Those are my major pleasant memories.

Amy: What schools did you attend after Hawthorne School?

Rosa: Willard², which I don't know whether that still exists. [It was a] big old-fashioned brick school in the south, around about 32nd St. I think it's gone. And Stewart Junior High and Lincoln High School, and then the UW.

Amy: What were you interested in in school?

Rosa: Reading. I wasn't very good in math, but I think I liked every[thing]. I took things that other girls didn't take in high school. I took wood-shop and metal, art-metal work and architectural drawing. But I took the other things that you need, enough Latin to get into college. I worked on the Lincoln News, on the school paper, which was a very good paper. I think that's

¹ Hawthorne School was located at 28th and E. F Streets.

probably the best luck I had in school, and I think probably it shaped my path. We always got the gold medal at Lincoln for that, for good work on the paper. And when I went to the U, I worked again on the Daily. Murray was the Daily editor so that wasn't hard to get a job (laughs).

Afterward whenever I needed a job, when we went to New York or Seattle, I could always get a job as a proofreader. It's not the ideal job, but it was always available.

Amy: How did it feel to take those classes that a lot of girls didn't take?

Rosa: Kids were not harassed in those days. The things you read about now (if a woman wants to be a fire-fighter or something and the fellows mistreat her) didn't happen. It wasn't like that *ever*. Nobody ever offered to help me handle the machines in wood shop, but I was pretty good. I made nice tight joints. So I built our bookcases and put cupboards in and have done quite a lot of building, since Murray does not care for that at all. He doesn't know which end of the hammer [is up]. This has been useful. My mother also liked to do things like that.

Amy: What do you remember about growing up? Did you have any family traditions, like a Sunday dinner, or anything like that?

Rosa: Well we did have Sunday dinner, and I suppose it was mostly English cooking. (laughs) I don't think anything that was at all different from all the other kids. We usually went to Grandmother's for Thanksgiving down at Salmon Creek as long as Grandma was there, but just routine things, nothing interesting (laughs).

² Willard School was located at 32nd and C Streets.

Amy: A lot of people now-a-days don't know what it was like back in Tacoma at that time. Do you remember---Did you go to motion picture shows?

Rosa: Oh yes. There was always a neighborhood theater [that we would] walk to. Ours was the Rex on 38th Street, just off 38th. We used to [go] to cowboy movies, I think. I was a Rainbow Girl. My parents were Masons (Eastern Star for mother) so there were lots of dances. In my time in high school, we rarely had dates "au deux". It was almost always a crowd, or at least three or four couples, not necessarily couples. Whoever could borrow the family car drove it up, and we went to nearby lakes to swim. This one occasionally [Trout Lake], but Surprise Lake more often, and Lake Wilderness had a dance hall too. Five Mile Lake is just up the road and then Lake Wilderness a little farther. I think we had a very good childhood. I mean we were very lucky, all of us. Nobody had ever heard of drugs (laughs), so our parents didn't have much to worry about. I never had a drink of alcohol until our wedding. I was once offered a glass of wine sometime before I was married, and then on our honeymoon on a Norwegian freighter crossing to Europe, I was introduced to various things that had alcohol in them, but it was a pretty mild childhood (laughs). I think you'd have to say not exciting. Nothing happened back in those [days].

Amy: Tell me a little bit about the Rainbow Girls.

Rosa: (laughs) This is silly. Lane³ said somebody asked Laurel⁴ to join. She considered it, but she turned them down. We never looked on it as anything with a mission or a message. It was just to gather together. There's a lot of nonsense. I remember that you go to the three [or] four stations, and you're carrying a candle, and there's a "worthy advisor." The person who's elected to be worthy advisor is usually a very nice girl, somebody with poise and confidence. What I remember is: "Now abideth these three: faith, hope, and charity, and the greatest of these is the sense of humor." (laughs) That was our little variation. We didn't take it very seriously. But I think the main purpose in this organization, as in any culture, parents liked to sort of see who's going to partner their daughters, so they managed dances which were well chaperoned, and it was one way to get a little social life that was not damaging. Although our social life was so tame (laughs). We didn't know that anything was lacking. We didn't know any better.

Amy: Tell me a little about the dance halls.

Rosa: The one at Five Mile Lake always smelled a little bit of mildew because it was shut up most of the year. It was only open in the summer. The dances were usually schottisches and polkas. We didn't dress up for those dances, but we did for some other dances. Big bands came through then, and we went to other places for those. You did wear silver sandals and a dress to the floor, and Rhodes Brothers had its corner windows all decorated with beaded handbags and all the things that you should wear. In case a traveling opera group came to Tacoma, everybody went--- and you didn't go in your jeans. In fact we didn't have jeans, and we didn't wear pants to school. Only on picnics. We didn't wear slacks. I don't know what would have happened if we

³ Lane is Murray and Rosa's daughter.

had shown up at school in slacks instead of skirts. It was a pretty dull world by your standards, I think. (laughs)

Amy: Did you learn to dance in school?

Rosa: Yes. Not very well. My mother sent me for lessons. Most kids had some lessons, ballroom lessons. So you learned to do a tango, but there was almost no opportunity to do a tango (laughs) in the dances. Murray was almost totally against dancing so I usually had to drag him, and then he would limp and say he had just turned his ankle (laughs) and couldn't get out on the dance floor. So the dancing lessons were not especially rewarding. But it was part of our scene. And bicycling. As I look at it now it just seems pretty tame, but we didn't know it was (laughs). This was the Depression. We didn't do anything that was expensive. Nobody did. Having a job was such a wonderful thing that you didn't fuss about the nature of the job. I worked at the Tacoma General Hospital, the end of my senior [year], the summer before I went to the U and earned enough for my tuition for the year. It was a room and board arrangement so I didn't have any social life, but we would have Sunday afternoon off, usually, otherwise we worked the whole week. But we were glad to have[it]. I was considered lucky because I got that job.

Amy: What did you do at the hospital?

⁴ Laurel is one of Murray and Rosa's grandchildren.

Rosa: Oh, I changed the flowers and carried soup and helped people eat, and just unskilled things. Made up beds and sterilized things. I learned that I did not want to be a nurse. I wasn't made for that.

Amy: What do you remember of the Depression?

Rosa: You have to be told that it's a Depression when you're a kid because you didn't know it before or after. Now if you're poor, it has to be explained why. But in those days, not having any ready cash was such a universal condition that we didn't feel sorry for ourselves. It really wasn't a big thing. But it was when it came time for getting a car, or replacing a car, or getting tuition together if there were three children in the family. Then medical things too. Medical bills were a problem, but otherwise I can't tell you about the Depression because it's only because people tell me that I was a child of the Depression, because I read about it from other people's feelings. My father was in business for himself. He wasn't fired. The business wasn't terribly prosperous.

Amy: What made you go to the University of Washington?

Rosa: All my friends did. Well, a few went to Pullman, and about half a dozen went to UPS. Everybody I know went to college. It was unthinkable not to, I think, in our group.

Amy: How did you meet Murray?

Rosa: In Sunday School. That was my mother's choice, though she had been brought up Methodist-Episcopalian. I don't know who took her first to Murray's father's church, the Universalist church at that time, later became Unitarian Universalist, but she liked it. After we parked the car and Mother and my two brothers and I went into the little church on Division at J Street, my father went across the street to the Congregational Church because their singing was so much better (laughs). The music was a lot better there. He didn't care very much about the sermon. His parents were devoted to their church, but it just didn't loom large with [him]. I taught a Sunday School class of very little kids for a while. I think Murray taught a class too. Sometimes we walked down to the park instead of staying for Sunday school after the first part of church. We even went to a movie now and then at the theater that was within easy walking distance from there.

Amy: Did you just become real good friends at Sunday School?

Rosa: Yes. I guess we began dating probably not until after I was in high school, I'm not sure. It might have been when I was still in junior high school because Murray remembers that it was after I played a duet. I took violin lessons, but I didn't play very well, but with a friend, with another girl, I played a duet at church, and he says that's what attracted him (laughs). It wasn't for my skill with the violin (laughs). But we didn't date exclusively. I began to go to football games with him almost as soon as he went to the U, and then [I] sometimes went over on the boat to Seattle, and [he] met me at the other end. There used to be a regular ferry service between Tacoma and Seattle. We just sort of eased into it. And after I was on the campus, I think we dated almost exclusively then, but it wasn't a big thing. We traveled back and forth a

lot together. He had a little car. Our parents were good friends. His father always thought I was the right girl for him (laughs).

Amy: Were you at the University of Washington together?

Rosa: Just one year, my first year and his last year. But after that I lived for awhile in a houseboat at the bottom of Lake Union, I mean at the bottom of the campus right on the canal, about two doors, three doors maybe, from where there's a theater, a floating theater there. It's part of the Drama department. It's not actually floating. It pretends to be. It's called the Showboat. But it's on pilings. It was a rooming arrangement, and Murray had a room there too with another friend from Tacoma. So that was after he had left school and was putting out a paper for the Municipal League. He was their executive secretary.

Amy: What was your job on the Daily?

Rosa: I was the morgue librarian (laughs). That meant that I took a streetcar downtown to the *Seattle Times* and sometimes to the *P.I.* to borrow a copper cut. These were the days when the [newspaper] was letter press. The paper was printed on the Avenue in the University District, at the office of the *University Herald*, and the school couldn't afford to have the cuts made, but if we had a story that had been illustrated in the Times, they would often give us or loan us at least the copper cut which we could add to ours. The *Daily* editor gets paid \$60 a month. It might have been \$60 a quarter, I'm not sure, and my pay was car fare (laughs) to go back and forth to the city daily. I read proof too.

Amy: Tell me more about the University of Washington.

Rosa: Oh, it just seemed wonderful. It wasn't so full of buildings then. I hadn't traveled very much. I think a trip to California and once to Eastern Washington, a couple of times maybe with the basketball team from my school or with the Rainbow Girls, a convention of some kind. And so the campus was just beautiful to me. There was a lot of grass then, where there's red brick now. It was just wonderful. The libraries were so great. I wasn't a tremendous student, but I sure had a good time. I read a lot. I had wonderful roommates. We lived in a little apartment across from campus. I learned a lot from that, just nearly everything. They seemed so wise. They were sophomores when I was a freshman. One was a journalism major. Her husband was the managing editor of the Seattle Times for thirty or forty years, and now her son is. She was a very good journalist herself. She just understood how to organize nearly anything. The other, Kay, was from Canada, and was a home-ec major, but it was Doris who knew how to run a household. Did you find that you learned something from your classmates? Lane, I think learned more from hers than she did from any teachers at Stanford. Soon she picked out a group of kids who were durable friends. I felt it was just fine, and I thought I had good teachers. I wasn't like you, knowing that if you wanted to do anything really you have to concentrate and build a pyramid (laughs). I just was more shotgun and tried everything, took everything. I was only a sophomore when we were married, but from time to time I took more courses. I had more than enough credits, but they weren't in the right patterns, so when I thought I would need a way to get a job, when Murray was so sick, I went back to get a teaching certificate and had to take a lot

of courses to get those that were usable. But I don't regret any of it, those I took. [It] just took a long time to get it.

Amy: Tell me a little bit about getting married and going on the honeymoon.

Rosa: Murray said "I've got two tickets on a freighter. You want go?" (laughs) It's always like that. I mean what if I'd said no? I said that I would think about it overnight, but actually it didn't take me very long till I decided to tell my mother. She thought we were too young. But I didn't have to think about it very long. I just thought paddling that kayak down the Danube sounded fine. "Where's the Danube?" (laughs)

Amy: Tell me a little bit about the freighter trip over.

Rosa: Oh that was fine. I'd recommend it to anyone. I crossed with Lane many years later on the *Ile de France*, which is a well-equipped boat, a really beautiful boat, but the freighter was more fun. So was the Yugoslav freighter that we went on later. It's just a fine way to travel.

Murray [comes in and places flowers on the table in front of Rosa]: I have to interrupt. There's too much giggling going on in here. (everyone laughs)

Rosa: No, we're solemn.

Amy: Those are pretty.

Rosa: Yeah, they are, honey. These are from the tulip tree. When we planted it, we thought it was going to be a very pretty little tree over Lane's---we made a big sandbox out there, and this was going to be just a little tree to shelter it. But it turned out that we got the wrong tulip tree, and this is a timber tree (laughs). We try to cut it down every year but there's nothing--- [Murray leaves.]

We were the only people on that [freighter]. There was one other couple who joined us in California on the Norwegian freighter. But on the Yugoslav freighter we were the only people, and so we had a lot of attention, and we could go anyplace on the boat. You get to see flying fish on the deck and things you don't see on a great big boat. I recommend it strongly.

We bought [a kayak] in London. It was a German kayak, but we bought it in London and took it to Germany because I think it was a little cheaper then. The Germans were subsidizing exports, and then we practiced a little bit. Our German wasn't very good. (laughs) Putting it together with the directions is hard enough. We never had paddled a kayak, only a canoe a little.

Murray [coming in]: The water is boiling...coffee or tea?

Rosa: Tea. You better dump this, honey. I didn't take the tea leaves out. It's way too strong.

[Murray leaves.]

So we put it together in the basement of Lilywhites, a London sporting goods store. It's pretty big, you know. It's eighteen feet long with the rudder, and the salesman didn't know (laughs) anything about them. When we were through I remember (Murray's tea pot reminded me) that he said, "This calls for a cup of tea." (laughs) So there in the middle of the floor in the sporting goods store, we had some tea, and then we were launched. We went to Chishester harbor where Murray's father had a friend and tried it out a little bit, and then felt nearly ready. Then [we] went to Heidelberg and paddled it a lot on Necker for a couple of days and then launched---went to Ulm and started for the Black Sea. But we didn't make it right away.

It was almost always exciting because we never knew quite what was ahead anytime. The only things that were not exciting were long---when the river gets to be more than a mile wide, and it's a very quiet stretch that's a lot of paddling and there's no shade. It was June, July, August. But it was exciting to approach the dams and try to figure out which of the arches under a bridge we were supposed to go through and what they meant by a sign that said "Danger of Death." (laughs) We were only supposed to go at certain times and they'd have [warnings] one after another, signs getting more and more animated about what we mustn't do, but we didn't know what it was (laughs). But the most exciting---I think maybe the first thing, just slipping away from the bank. That's the first time. The second time in 1964 we pretty well knew what to expect.⁵ But, it wasn't the same; the river was so changed. Lane almost got caught in a diverted river where they were building a new passage. I can't remember exactly what the reason was that they had channeled all the water around the usual place, and they told us where to land to make our portage. Murray decided that that didn't look good and we swung away. Lane was in the

single kayak, and she was fourteen and strong but for a few minutes it didn't look as though she'd be able to do it, to keep from going through the thing which would have killed her. That was pretty exciting. But she's a strong girl and I said, "You can do it. Pull harder!" And she did.

Amy: I heard on your honeymoon, you got arrested?

Rosa: Yes (laughs). We weren't taken to a prison jail. We were in a small hotel. But it wasn't pleasant because there were these two fellows outside with bayonets on their rifles (laughs) going back and forth in front of the door. But that's because we were so silly as to leave our passport with the woman who was in charge of accommodating visitors or people who have to do with the press, a Greek woman in Bucharest. We thought we would just very quickly scoot down to the Black Sea where they said we shouldn't go. We couldn't possibly have done that. We later learned when we went down in a river boat, we never could have even found which channel--- those islands are just so close. It must be like Florida, where the land and the water are just sort of mixed. We never [would] have found our way. It was just as well that the Romanians kept us from going. Eventually Madame Paleologu spoke to the naval police on the phone and said "They're harmless." We were not spies, though we had attempted a little German since they didn't understand English, so that made them pretty sure we were spies.

Amy: After you came back from your honeymoon what did you do?

⁵ Murray, Rosa, and Lane kayaked down the Danube again in 1964 for their 25th anniversary.

Rosa: We spent a couple of days in New York. The world's fair was on then. We bought a car and drove back in time to be here with Murray's parents and my parents on Thanksgiving evening. We drove night and day to get to Thanksgiving (laughs). Then Murray was going to write the great American novel, but he was writing short things too. He wanted to get a job on a newspaper, something like the one on the Grays Harbor Washingtonian, but there were very few jobs then. I think he wrote a hundred letters before he finally got a job in Spokane on the main paper there. But we didn't like Spokane. It was dry and hot, and so as soon as opportunity came to go back to this side of the mountains, to go to Hoquiam where he had a little experience on the paper while he was in journalism school, we took it. But he wrote stories for minor newspapers, journals, magazines, some for kids, and sports things, and got a lot of practice and a lot of rejections, but some acceptances.

Amy: What were you doing during this time, when you were first married?

Rosa: I worked a little while at Rhodes, but it was just wrapping packages, but that was just in the holidays. That's the only time I didn't have a job that I can remember. And then when we went to Hoquiam, I went to work for that paper. I was the proofreader, but I did the Society editing for a month or so, when they were between Society editors. I wasn't very good at that. I knew that was not my calling. After you've said that the dress was enhanced with pearls or with rosebuds, there's so little you can do with these stories that come every week or so, but they're very important to the people for whom this is the high point and so you do your best. I also had a chance to go riding regularly when we lived in Hoquiam. There was a Russian riding instructor and academy. He was trying to make us ride like Cossacks (laughs). He didn't succeed, but we

sure had good exercise. That was one of the happy times. New York too, I was able to ride pretty regularly in Central Park. It's easier to get a horse in New York than it is here, if you're not in the country. [In New York] I worked for Prentice Hall where I was a proofreader and copyeditor. Then I worked for Murray as a leg-woman, covering the Columbia campus, mostly the education school, which was in the lower-campus in a place by itself.

Amy: How did you feel about him having all those jobs when he was at Columbia? Did you see him much?

Rosa: I didn't see him much, but he has always been very intense, so I didn't think of it as unnatural. When we were on the freighter, the blissful thing about the freighter is that nobody can reach you on the telephone and you can read in anyplace. They won't let you steer the boat or do anything, so you just have so much leisure. But Murray couldn't stand that. He did not want to sit in the sun. He sat on a coil of rope with his portable typewriter in his lap and typed away. He was always work addicted, and it was his pleasure, so I wasn't alarmed. I thought that this is the way it is (laughs). But we took a vacation once during the year and a half when we were in Hoquiam. We went down to the Redwoods, and about the third day, Murray began packing up. He decided that the paper probably couldn't come out without him, although he had left it in good, competent hands. We cut the vacation short, and we had been working seven day weeks (laughs). I didn't think much of this!

Amy: What would you describe as the main influences that made you who you are today?

Rosa: I suppose my mother. I think the fact that I spent so much time on the school paper probably really determined my path, because I'm temperamentally made so that that was the place for me. Near-sighted people are not speed readers, they're careful readers, and that's the way I am. I'm quite nearsighted, and I'm a good proofreader or was---I don't see as well as I used to. So I suppose it's more that I was made for that job than that job made me, and I like journalism. Most of my friends have been journalists, and I'm comfortable in that. I think that's probably it, that and the times that we lived in. I mean the war. I did become a photographer while we were in New York. I took photography courses, and when the war broke out they didn't need proofreaders, but photographers were needed. So I worked in the shipyards as a photographer and afterward for a portrait photographer, and after that for the old *Seattle Star*. I took a course at the Clarence White School (photography for journalists) that Murray would have taken if he'd had time or the inclination. It was offered through the journalism school actually without credit.

Amy: What other memories do you have of the war?

Rosa: I went to join Murray in Alaska, in Seward after he was through with his year in the Aleutians. It was a very good place to be in the summer. That's where we were when the war ended. Afterward he had another year of duty at the Pentagon. Earlier, I had a houseboat on Lake Union and worked on all three of these jobs, and for a little while for the county treasurer, putting out tax records. That was before there were computers; there were keypunch cards. I learned to do that. Actually I learned it before we were married. I worked a little while in Olympia on Washington's first social security records.

Amy: It sounds like you really like to do research.

Rosa: Oh yes. That was my best job ever, my last job, working at PLU in the library---much the best. I like all libraries (laughs).

Amy: So tell me a little bit about that job at PLU.

Rosa: I'd been working as a substitute teacher and it wasn't very rewarding, and so when I saw a note in the paper that they wanted someone at the library there, I just went up to look it over and Mr. Haley said that they'd like to have me at the Reference Desk. I hadn't had the courses that I should have had for that, but they paid for the courses to prepare me not with a Masters in librarianship, but those that you would take if you were going to be a librarian in a high school, to choose the books for reference. I had a wonderful boss, head of the Reference department, Miriam Beckman. She was just wonderful. It was a joy to work for her until she left, and not quite as pleasant to work afterward, but I stayed there about twelve years. By that time, I knew where nearly everything was.

Amy: It seems like from what I've read you've helped Murray out a lot.

Rosa: When he used to review plays, I got up all the background that was available. We had lots of good reference source material at PLU. At one time they had a man in the Reference Department who was odd. Whatever he had in the way of budget he spent on "finding" tools, so

we had the whole British library catalog. People from the UPS faculty and library staff came out from time to time to use it because nobody else around here would spend that much money for [it]. We didn't have as many books as we should have had in the library, but we could always tell you who had them, and we could get them through inter-library loan.

Amy: What specific events do you remember that were especially relevant to Tacoma history or Northwest history that you found interesting at the time?

Rosa: Tacoma got to be very quiet downtown after the mall was built. And one by one all of the department stores where we used to buy everything (clothes, refrigerators, sewing machines, and draperies, all of those things) just disappeared from downtown Tacoma. I think that was kind of a loss because pedestrians on the street are part of the way a city gets its character, but what's nice now is that if you're on Ruston Way you see real human beings loafing along there and that kind of life is what we should have. We used to see that. Murray and I did live [away for] some intervals. We spent about two years in Mexico all together, and then we were in Switzerland for part of a year. So I can't say that I could give a full continuum. Lane missed a lot of school because we took her along every place. But she went to school in Mexico too and in Switzerland. It wasn't the same, but she got a different kind of school experience. She was a very good student. Pretty good paddler too.

Amy: She's your only daughter, right?

Rosa: Yes. I have two grandchildren. [gets up to show me pictures] They're both adopted. I just love these [pictures]. They're older now, but I think they're [at] such a cute stage. (laughs) They're a lot better looking now. They're both great.

Amy: What was it like raising her out in this area?

Rosa: I think she had a good time. They had a horse club and then 4-H. There was a local horse club here on the hill and then she belonged to 4-H too, so we had to haul Chinook around to various shows. School kids had to walk. It's a little less than a mile down to catch the bus. They didn't have the same experiences we did, walking home from school, no place to buy any candy. They stepped on the school bus and got off at their spot. It was approximately seven miles from here to any high school. So she had a five way choice and picked Sumner. We kind of pushed a little because they offered Latin. It was the only one that did. But by the time she got there in the fall they had dropped it. We had a Belgian girl living with us on an American Field Service exchange through Lane's senior year. That was just fine. [Lane] was an only child. She had a lot to learn about sharing (laughs) her room. They became very good friends. I imagine that Lane's roommate at Stanford would have had a much harder time if Lane hadn't spent that year with Martine who was also the only girl in her family. They had a very good senior year, both of them.

Amy: How would you describe your career?

Rosa: I didn't have a career. I just found a little niche wherever we happened to be. I almost had a career in photography. I could have if I hadn't decided that I better get something that offered a monthly check, because Murray was so sick and wasn't expected to recover. Freelancing as a photographer isn't a sure thing.

Amy: Why don't you tell me a little bit about that, if you'd like to, about Murray getting sick.

Rosa: It was just before we started on the trip in 1964 which was to be the twenty-fifth anniversary, repeating the trip down the Danube, taking Lane along. She was fourteen then. We bought two new kayaks. Just before we were to leave, we went to get our shots (for Southeastern Europe you had to have quite a few then) and Murray nearly fainted when he was getting the shot. The man who was head of Public Health in Tacoma then called me and said, "Murray shouldn't make this trip. I've known him a long time, and he's not well. And you must get him to a doctor." That wasn't easy with Murray (laughs), but with the help of a friend we chose one, and I think then I said "You have to go." He was so anemic that if he had lost all that blood suddenly he wouldn't be able to move. Then when they looked, there was a great big tumor in his stomach. They took almost all of his stomach out, but a few months later he was in the kayak (laughs). He shouldn't have been. He got a rupture, but he wouldn't have it any other way. The long slow freighter trip was the perfect convalescence.

Amy: I think it's interesting what you said, how you don't feel that you had a career...

Rosa: No, I didn't because I never focused on anything, just little niches. But I don't mean that I---this is not a case where the little woman was so busy with the diapers that she never had a chance to fulfill her [dreams] (laughs). I never even had an aspiration! I enjoyed photography very much, and I enjoyed it while I did it, but it's not that I feel that it was some obstruction which kept me from being---

Amy: I guess what I mean is [that] lots of people don't have careers and they see their lives as something else.

Rosa: That's right, I see my life as something else.

Amy: Right, so that's what I'm wondering about, is how you've seen your life.

Rosa: I feel that I've been very lucky. I have a splendid daughter, and [I've been] healthy, and I've seen a lot of the world, and got back home safely (laughs), back where I want to be and now in familiar territory. I'm not in perfect health, but I might have another year or so. We wanted to live by the water, and we looked at a few places in the San Juan islands, on Lopez, but the wells would have had to be very deep, and I was just anxious about that, so when we saw this place at Trout Lake, we thought---it's so hard to get to. Murray wanted it not to be like the house on Proctor (laughs).⁶ Nobody could come unless we sent them a map (laughing). That's the way he wanted it. Then we both got jobs going eight to five. I worked at the University of Washington Press for two years up until a month or so before Lane was born, as a copy-editor and

proofreader. There it was mostly copy-editing, and I commuted from here. Murray commuted the other way to UPS, so we hit the road a lot (laughs). That was fairly pleasant, except that I had to be there eight to five everyday.

Amy: You said that you were the leg-man for Bill Speidel?

Rosa: Yes. He had a column then for the *Seattle Star*, but he also put out the *104 Reporter* (this is when the aero-mechanics and the boilermakers had lots of money and big unions and each of them wanted a newspaper), and a civil service journal, and “The Y in Seattle.” So we just went from one to the other. I was his “leg man” (laughs), and I often took pictures for the Star. I was a Guild member at the *Star*. One of my pictures won a feature, won a prize for Bill. I enjoyed that quite a lot. But then Murray’s period in the Aleutian Islands was over and he was transferred to Seward. There your wife could not join you but your sister could (laughs). Murray said that his sister was coming up to visit, but he never remembered to introduce me that way. He introduced me as Rosa Northcutt (laughs). That’s my maiden name.

Amy: Do you remember any specific stories or anything that you have researched that you really enjoyed doing?

Rosa: Murray worked for many years on the sea-otter trade book. In the course of getting authentic material for that we went to Russia. And we went to Madrid and I’m slow, but I can translate the Spanish. It’s not easy in that yellow ink on yellow paper in archaic Spanish, but that

⁶ Rosa and Murray had eaten at the interviewer’s house on Proctor a week before the interview.

was great pleasure. In Leningrad, in the museum there, I photographed the things that they brought back from the areas that Captain Cook and others were in. Everything having to do with that was wonderful. Mostly the time in London and the British museum, two years. Murray had a sabbatical, so we were able to spend about six months there, and another time we had a shorter period, but we spent all of our time in the museum. Those were probably the best, the most exciting---I found things that were small, you know not of major worldwide significance, but things we hadn't known before that put a different light on things that hadn't been printed after they had been in a letter or ship's log. I'm a pretty good researcher, at least I used to be, because I'm patient.

Amy: How do you think lives have changed since the time you were born, especially for women.

Rosa: I'm sure my life has been easier than my mother's, partly because every housewife has so many tools now, things that you just plug in, a lot of things that our mothers used to have to do on their own. I suppose that's it, having time to read, lots of time to read. People travel so much more than they used to, your generation, Lane's, she's older than you by half I guess. After the end of World War II, nearly everybody moves out and has a first hand look at the rest of the world. I think that's just wonderful. I'm sure that that will lead to, eventually some kind of civilized behavior in people. Once you've noticed there's more than one way to do something, and then you come back and make some small changes in your own and other people's lives---that's a big step in the right direction. We weren't in a position to see for ourselves so much before. I was born the day of the False Armistice, November 9, 1918. The war was announced to be over then. My mother said that she thought all those bells and whistles in Portland were for

me. She'd had her first child. She felt that's what they were celebrating. But the second World War, when we were in Seward, we knew what it was like to not be at war. [Murray comes in.]

Murray: I was just going to add, I think that one real difference in perception was in the 30s, if you were coming of age in the 30s, it was a time when there really seemed a chance that the world would change radically. [Rosa: Oh yes.] I mean that there might be a totally different organization of society, and what was somebody's dream, it was just---everything was in ferment. You didn't know what you believed, but you had an awful lot of choices.

Rosa: We all thought that something in the pattern of the socialist government would be a much more fair arrangement than we had. We didn't realize how hard it was (laughs) to make one of those things work.

[Murray leaves.]

Rosa: I think women are much better off now. It just kills me to think that with [Initiative] 200⁷ that we might lose some of that. I don't think people will permit it to go really. Right away the UW president [Richard McCormick] said that it wasn't because they were forced to. Any school wants diversity, and Microsoft, Weyerhaeuser and Boeing have all said they want diversity. Only a fool would not want diversity.

⁷ Initiative 200 was an initiative passed by voters November 1998 banning all public affirmative action programs in the state of Washington.

Amy: It seems like you've been active in community organizations like the League of Women Voters...

why have you wanted to [participate]?

Rosa: I think I was always a joiner. Besides Rainbow Girls, I was a Girl Reserve, I was a Girl Scout, I was a Girl Mariner (laughs). I must have been just a joiner, and my mother must have thought this was all right. I went off to all the camps, and she sent me to have dramatic art lessons, so then we were practicing for plays. She did that because I didn't speak up very well, and she thought maybe I would learn to project more, but I didn't (laughs). That was a big problem when I started to teach. I had to take remedial speech and then take the speech class over again. You have to pass that or you can't have a teacher's certificate. It was a problem, and now I can't hear very well so I want everyone else to speak up. I don't know why I was a joiner, but I was.

Amy: Do you remember the Tacoma Hotel?

Rosa: Oh indeed! Sunday dinners were a family---not a frequent family outing, usually somebody's birthday or something, in the Stone Room. It was very nice. It was a wonderful hotel, just a pity that, with that beautiful harbor, that there isn't a hotel that looks out on the harbor, such a shame. It was so wonderful. And then there was a zig-zag stairway right down to where you could get a launch to the islands and to Seattle. That was a real loss, terrible loss. The burning of that hotel was just terrible.

Amy: You were telling me a little bit about the ferries that went from Seattle to Tacoma. Can you tell me a little bit more?

Rosa: I don't know when they stopped running exactly. There was also, before the ferries stopped, the electric rail line [the Interurban] which used to run just a little bit behind our house. As you were coming up here, you crossed the path of it. It's still terraced, but mostly the tracks are gone now. You could ride between Tacoma and Seattle on that faster than you can drive some days now. Cars drove it out, cars and buses, and the same thing I guess with the ferry. It was so pleasant. You'd get on a ferry and sit---Of course it rains a lot here and you couldn't always sit out on the deck, but when you could---It took about an hour. You came in at Pier 56, I think, so it was easy to get where you were going. Murray usually met me at the other end.

When you asked about how travel influenced my feelings about the Northwest. I think that was probably the biggest thing, that I've seen a lot of the world. You know we spent some time in China and in most of South America, and in each of these places a little bump probably got smoothed out on me---[Murray comes in]

Murray: Oh she was knob-kneed before! [everyone laughs and Murray leaves]

Rosa: (laughing) Well you see how it's been. I'm not allowed to get in very much trouble because I'm closely supervised (laughs). But I think that's the main thing I have to be grateful for. That and the fact that as we only had one child we could take her along. She was a very good traveler.

Amy: Sounds like she had a wonderful childhood.

Rosa: I hope she thinks so. I know she complains that I didn't let her go anyplace in a car with a young driver (laughs). The most exciting moment, I think, was when Lane---she was Valedictorian of her class at Sumner, and when I heard her voice floating out from---when she made her little speech, and it wasn't the one that the valedictorian usually [makes]---kind of thanks the parents, everything I know I owe to my teachers, my parents---she didn't do that (laughs). Her teachers wanted her to, but it was the time of the Vietnamese War, and she had a very serious message and they tried to talk her out of it, but she just gave it and [choking up], I think Murray and I just nearly burst with pleasure and pride. That and the day the war ended. When we got the word in Seward. [starts to tear up] It's still very emotional. It was just the end of---while it was going on, there's a sort of "mustn't grumble" rule, but when it was over [big sigh]. Why am I emotional now? Except it looks as though we could have another war. I hope people have more sense now. But there [were] so many people who had been away from their families a long time. We had been lucky, only a year.

Amy: Did you know a lot of people who were over there?

Rosa: Oh yes and our age. Murray's a little bit old to have gone, but he was actually doing what he does anyway. But the people who were with us, some of them had children they hadn't seen--
- [goes to get tissue; tape is paused].

Amy: Well, I can understand that emotional bit. It just must have been one of those great sighs of relief when it was over.

Rosa: Yes, that's right, it was. It felt like bursting. But then you know what really ended it was the bomb, so then we had to think about that. So it was a brief period of feeling exhilarated and then just [sigh]. We had friends in England whose houses were bombed, and we knew that we had escaped most of it ourselves here. We're so lucky never to have had our country all torn up, except by hurricanes.

Amy: What did you think of Mt. St. Helens when it---

Rosa: Well it was unsettling (laughs) extremely. The second eruption, I was at Hartstin, on the island with my best friend who had the cabin next to us. We were both working on projects to fix up the cabin, and we began to see this white stuff on the---I was putting in a new screen in the screen door on the table and this stuff began piling up, and we wondered, you know, maybe it won't stop. (laughs) But it did.

Amy: How did it feel since you had been down in Mexico with the volcano?⁸

Rosa: I remembered that ash piling up on the porch and on the dog's skin, and spoiling the potter's work. But that stopped after a few days, then other things happened, but the actual build up of it---For awhile people who lived in Eastern Washington would come into the library

bringing piles of this stuff to show us. It feels funny. It's not like other things. Then of course, what's behind all of these things is how little control we have. We can't prevent very many things. What can we do about this El Niño? Why doesn't somebody do something? (laughs)

Amy: Well, can you think of anything else that I haven't asked?

Rosa: (laughing) No, I've told you everything I know. I don't see how this is going to help anybody. [Murray comes in] You know it's as though I was visiting a shrink! Now you tell me why I can't seem to get my house organized! (everyone laughs)

⁸ Rosa and Murray told me before the interview about being in Mexico when Mt. Paracutin was erupting.