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Volume II

BAKERSFIELD REMEMBERS GRACE V. BIRD

Interviews with:

Dorothy Albaugh	Margaret Levinson
Avery Allen	Ruth Maguire
Lorraine Anderson	Hazel McCuen
Glenn Bultman	Theron McCuen
Wofford B. Camp	Thomas Merson
John Collins	Edward Simonsen
Burns Finlinson	Edna Taber
Dia Finlinson	Frank Wattron
Virginia Forker	Bette Wattron
Hugh Jewett	Robert Young

Conducted by  
Ralda Sullivan

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TABLE OF CONTENTS -- Grace V. Bird, Volume II

INTERVIEW HISTORY	i
I RECOLLECTIONS OF GRACE BIRD, ADMINISTRATOR	1
Introduction	1
A Conversation with the Grace Bird Oral History Project Committee	1a
II GRACE BIRD, FRIEND	18a
Introduction	18a
Wofford B. Camp	19
Hugh Jewett	26
III GRACE BIRD IN ACTION: FROM 1920 TO 1950 AT BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE	29a
Introduction	29a
Dorothy Albaugh, Virginia Forker, Margaret (Peg) Levinson, Ruth Maguire	30
Theron McCuen, Hazel McCuen	51
Lorraine Anderson, Edna Taber	63
Margaret (Peg) Levinson	71
Frank Wattron, Bette Wattron	79
Burns Finlinson, Dia Finlinson	89
Edward Simonsen	101
Joining Bakersfield College	101
Being Dean of Men	103
Standards	106
Goals of Students	108
Changing Needs	110
The Nature of Administration	112
Hiring Personnel	115
Learning from Grace Bird	116
Changes	117
Coping	119
Junior Colleges Now	121
Collegial Relationships	124
Executive Ability	126
Student Recollections of Grace Bird: Fragment of a Conversation with Glenn Bultman, Edna Taber, Lorraine Anderson, and Edward Simonsen	132





IV	THE PRESIDENCY OF BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE IN THE 1970s	134a
	Introduction	134a
	John Collins	135
	The Changing Scene	135
	On Well-Laid Foundations	139
	New Pressures on Junior College Presidents	140
	Duties of the Junior College President	144
	Changes in Faculty Organization	145
	Changes in Standards	148
	Teacher Unions, Teacher Attitudes	149
	Relations with the University of California Now	151
	INDEX	155



## INTERVIEW HISTORY

Grace V. Bird's reputation as a leader in junior college education was nationwide; yet it was in Bakersfield that she lived and worked, presiding over Bakersfield College for thirty years and participating in an impressive variety of community activities. It thus seemed desirable to interview members of the Bakersfield community who could augment the self-portrait presented in Volume I, Grace V. Bird, Leader in Junior College Education at Bakersfield and the University of California, by telling about what was so uniquely effective in her interaction with others. Since the people of Bakersfield had been so appreciative of Miss Bird that their response to the fund drive for the Grace V. Bird Oral History Project had been generous, this volume could be undertaken to recall the "golden years" (1920-1950) of Miss Bird's administration and to serve as a further tribute to her.

Working closely in planning the series of interviews with Edward Simonsen, Chancellor of the Kern Community College District, and Lorraine Anderson, his Administrative Assistant, who made the necessary arrangements in Bakersfield, I flew there on Friday, April 22, 1977. My goal was to interview over a four-day weekend a representative group of colleagues and friends who could provide varying perspectives on this remarkable woman.

Dr. Simonsen and Mrs. Anderson had arranged along with a closely packed interview schedule, a full measure of Bakersfield hospitality that was augmented by each of those interviewed. On Friday, April 22, after Dr. Simonsen met me at the airport, interviews with Mr. and Mrs. Theron McCuen, the Grace Bird Oral History Project Committee, and also Lorraine Anderson, Edna Taber, and Glenn Bultman took place. On Saturday, April 23, I interviewed first Hugh Jewett (who with Mrs. Jorgensen, his housekeeper, gave me a tour of the Bakersfield area and took me to lunch) and later, Edward Simonsen in his office. The following day began with Sunday brunch at Margaret Levinson's where Virginia Forker, Dorothy Albaugh, and Ruth Maguire joined us and gave a group interview. That afternoon I interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Frank Wattron, and afterwards, Mr. and Mrs. Burns Finlinson in their homes.

On Monday morning I drove to the Bakersfield College campus on the site Miss Bird had envisioned for it to interview John Collins, its current president, and to visit the Grace V. Bird Library. "Peg" Levinson met me for lunch and afterwards, we went to her apartment where she was interviewed once more, this time solo. She left me at the home of Wofford B. Camp, whose



friendship with Grace Bird dates back to 1917. After an interview that included mirthful recall of otherwise unreported aspects of the young Grace Bird, Mr. and Mrs. Camp escorted me to the airport to catch the evening plane back to the Bay Area.

I returned to Berkeley with a suitcase heavy with cassettes and the sense of having experienced Bakersfield's special blend of integrity, intelligence, and human warmth. Subsequently each interview was transcribed, edited lightly, and returned for corrections to the person interviewed with a request that the conversational quality, which is an integral part of the oral history process, be retained. After the interviews were returned for a final typing, I arranged them in four sections that reflect the varying perspectives from which to view Miss Bird's impact on Bakersfield.

What has emerged in this volume of interviews is a picture not only of a woman who, being unusually intelligent and richly humane, was a superb administrator, but also of a time and place in which a group of individuals of high mental and moral calibre gathered together and built an outstanding institution.

Ralda Sullivan  
Regional Oral History Office

19 April 1978  
Berkeley, California



## I RECOLLECTIONS OF GRACE BIRD, ADMINISTRATOR

### INTRODUCTION

The series of interviews with Grace Bird's Bakersfield friends and colleagues began around the conference table in the Kern Community College District headquarters at 2100 Chester Avenue in Bakersfield on April 22, 1977. Present were those who had led the drive to finance the Grace Bird Oral History Project, people who, having worked with Grace Bird over many years, were in a position to recall her special qualities as a junior college president.

Margaret "Peg" Levinson had been at Bakersfield College since the 1930s, first as an English teacher and later as an outstanding Dean of Women as well as Miss Bird's friend.

Edward Simonsen, the Chancellor of the Kern Community College District, who has taken major responsibility for organizing this project, had come to Bakersfield College as Miss Bird's Dean of Men in 1946.

Edna Taber, the widow of Theron Taber who had been Dean of Men at Bakersfield College just before World War II and Assistant Superintendent of the Kern Union High School and Junior College District until his retirement in 1968, was herself a member of Miss Bird's secretarial staff in the 1930s; she returned later to serve as treasurer of the Bakersfield College student body until her recent retirement.

Robert Young who had taught Economics at Bakersfield College since the thirties had worked closely with Miss Bird as a department chairman.

Thomas Merson came to Bakersfield College in 1938 as a botany-zoology instructor and retired as Dean of Instruction.

As Director of Public Relations for the Kern Union High School and Junior College district, Avery Allen worked with Miss Bird for many years.

Ralda Sullivan  
Interviewer-Editor

6 April 1978  
Regional Oral History Office  
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The Grace Bird Oral History Project Committee  
Meeting with the interviewer, April, 1977  
Left to right: Dr. Edward Simonsen,  
Robert Young, Tom Merson, Peg Levinson,  
Avery Allen, Ralda Sullivan, Edna Taber.



## I RECOLLECTIONS OF GRACE BIRD, ADMINISTRATOR

A Conversation with the Grace Bird Oral History Project Committee:  
Avery Allen, Margaret [Peg] Levinson, Thomas Merson, Edward [Si]  
Simonsen, Edna Taber, Robert Young

[Interview 1: April 22, 1977]

[begin tape 1, side 1]

Sullivan: All of you on the Grace Bird Oral History Project Committee knew Miss Bird during what she calls the "golden years" for being an administrator, but there was something very special about Miss Bird, too, or we wouldn't all be here. I wonder if each of you would talk about how you came to know her, when it was, what capacity you were in, and, perhaps, give your impressions. I'll start with Peg Levinson. Did you come as an English teacher?

Levinson: Yes, I was an English teacher on a one-year basis. And that kind of stretched into thirty-six years. This was the year 1931. I had a nice, shiny, new Master's, I had no teaching credential, and I was looking for a job. This was during the Depression. Times were bad. I had several private school offers but, without a credential, no chance in a public school. One of the book men, a man by the name of Elmer Shirrell, was a very devoted friend of Grace's and had been responsible for her coming here in the first place, way back when.

Sullivan: That's fascinating.

Levinson: Elmer Shirrell was married to a gal who also had been in Bakersfield, Eleanor Jones. At the time I knew her, she was back at Mills and was teaching freshman English, as I was. Elmer had gone to Doubleday Doran, I think it was called then, and he was their school book man; went up and down the valley and everywhere else seeing people. He wrote to his wife Eleanor saying, "There's going to be an opening at Bakersfield Junior College. Tell Peg about it because it would do her good to get down into a public school system; it's the best one in the state, and it would certainly be wonderful for her to work with Grace." So I made inquiries.

Herman Spindt, who was then the superintendent, came up to Berkeley and interviewed me. He said, "There may be an opening; I don't know. If there is, we will offer it to you. It depends on whether Miriam



Levinson: Gatley takes a leave of absence to go to England."

I said, "The only problem there is that I don't have a credential." And he said, "Oh, you don't?" Well, bless his heart, he said, "Look, you're teaching here now. Can't we count that as such and such in the world of education? And you have done so-and-so. Can't we call that practice teaching?" He suggested I apply to my own department at Mills, and I did. And I got various things counted for various other things. You know how you do, when you're looking for a credential. This is par for the course. I finally came up with everything except a course in the Constitution. He said, "You can take that when you get to Bakersfield. I'll let you know if the job opens." He telegraphed that the job would be open, and I accepted it. He said, "You do understand that this is for one year only?" I said I did.

Elmer Shirrell was the one who said to be sure to accept because experience there for one year would be worth five years in a private school. That's how I came to teach English--freshman composition.

Sullivan: He meant that it was just such an extraordinary school--

Levinson: He meant that it was such an extraordinary place and Grace was such an extraordinary gal, that this was the place to be.

Sullivan: Do you have any first impressions of Grace in 1931 that come to mind?

Levinson: She had written, after I was hired, "We'll see you on such and such a day." I came down here, stayed at the Padre Hotel, trekked up to the campus, and met her in the old administration building; I found the cordial, warm, delightful reception that I had been told I would get. I was told where I should try to live in Bakersfield. You didn't live on such and such side of such and such tracks, because that wasn't fittin'. [Laughter] That was in the summer. Then, when I came up for the beginning of school, I went through the regular routine that all the new people did, but that was my first meeting with her during the summer before I came here to work.

Sullivan: Bob Young, do you want to talk about your first meeting with Grace?

Young: Yes, I can top Peg's experience. [Laughter] After I graduated from the university in 1919, I had had thirteen years of business experience, four of which were out in the Orient--Japan and China. I came back from that experience and went in the investment business in San Francisco--at the wrong time, as you can well imagine. It was 1925 and we had quite a boom there for awhile and then the sudden collapse in 1929. So I was out of a job.

I went back to the university to work out a program whereby I could qualify for teaching as quickly as I could. I took my graduate



Young: courses for a credential, and when I was through, Mrs. Cheney at the employment office at Haviland Hall called me and said that Herm Spindt was going to come up to Berkeley to interview candidates for a teaching position in the college, teaching economics. So I went over, and I think there were at least thirty candidates sitting around the room. Herm had gone through a number of them. When it came my turn, I went in. Incidentally, I had known him slightly in college. He was a senior when I was a freshman, which helped a little, I guess. He said, "I think I've made my selection, but in case something turns up, I'll let you know."

So I just crossed it off and went on about my business and was going to enroll for another term at the university. It was the following Wednesday--three or four days later--that his secretary called me and wanted to know if I was still interested in the junior college position. She stated the compensation and then stated that it was to complete only the one semester. I came in February. She said, "Can you get down here on Saturday?" So I said, "I'm sure I can." And I came on down and met Grace in Herm's office.

I knew that I was to teach economics, but when I got here I discovered that I was also to teach geography and commercial law. [Laughter] Eventually, it turned into quite a program. I was quite impressed with both Herm and Grace.

That was a difficult time for me. It was my first teaching experience. I came in mid-semester when they'd had some unfortunate incident here, which I followed and which I didn't know about, fortunately. [Laughter] Anyway, I succeeded a man who had been a very good teacher, I think, from what I had heard about him. I never met him. He left all his books in the cupboard when he left, so you can gather that his departure was unexpected.

This short-term contract extended thirty and a half years. What I wanted to talk about particularly about Grace was how she defended her staff against all comers. I had a rather difficult experience shortly after I came here. Living in Japan for three years as I did during that period from 1921 to 1925, I recognized that Japan was very much impressed with the victory of the Western Allies over Germany in the first World War and they were trying hard to change their whole system to a little more democratic arrangement.

For the first time in centuries, I suppose, their Parliament, the Diet, had gotten control of the purse strings and were cutting off the militarists from continuing to finance the gigantic war machine that Japan had built and was building. Then, all of a sudden, in 1924 an incident happened that I think was very crucial in our relations with Japan. I didn't know that Congress was even debating the question of immigration restrictions on the Japanese specifically;





Young:

I mean, they were debating a revision of our immigration policy to establish a quota system for the various nations. When it came out, it was a restriction totally against Japanese immigration. I went down to the office the following morning and the windows were all posted with placards which I couldn't read. I got one of my employees to come out and translate them. There was a terribly bitter feeling against the United States for having done this sort of thing, and from that time on I could see a complete change in the pattern of Japanese politics. The military again came into control and began to dominate the system and it was no longer even an attempt at democracy.

I came here to teach in the thirties. I understood what was going on out there. Japan's co-prosperity sphere that they were attempting to establish was a desperate attempt to build a standard of living based on no resources at all, except hydro-electric power and manpower. That's all they had. I had a great deal of sympathy for what they were trying to do during the thirties, up until the time they invaded China in 1937.

But I guess it seemed to show in some of the talks I made around town at service clubs and women's organizations and so on. I was trying to explain, as I saw it, the reasons why Japan was going off on a seeming tangent of wanting to control all of East Asia.

I knew of two occasions that it didn't set well with the audience. On one occasion, a man and his wife got up and walked out while I was talking at the Bakersfield Inn to a group. On another occasion I was talking to a group out in Beale Park in that little amphitheater there, and one of the members of the audience heckled me terribly. I didn't know him by name or by reputation. But anyway, I found out later that he went to Grace and insisted that I be relieved of my job.

Sullivan:

What did Grace do?

Young:

Well, I don't know what she said to him, but I can well imagine because she called me in and told me what had happened. I was quite concerned because this man was quite an important person in town. She told me that she agreed with me 100 percent in what I was doing. If I felt that I was giving the right slant on Japan, even though he said I was pro-Japanese, it made no difference to her at all. And I was quite impressed with her for backing me up, although she hadn't heard specifically what I had said.

Sullivan:

That's a very delicate position for an administrator. Many show less backbone than Grace did.

Young:

She told me that she realized that two individuals specifically did



- Young: not represent the community as a whole.
- Sullivan: I'm curious to know if anybody has any idea how Grace did handle such delicate matters.
- Levinson: She reasoned with them.  
[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]
- Sullivan: Si, you were saying that you were also an alumnus of Bakersfield College because you'd taken a course.
- Simonsen: I was considered an old grad because I'd had one class--and, by the way, that's the way it is here at Bakersfield. If you've even taken a class you're eligible to be considered an alumnus. [Laughter] As a matter of fact, Jack Smith from the Los Angeles Times was nominated by John Collins to be one of the honorees for the Community College Alumnus of the Year. Jack Smith is a very well-known journalist and has put out a number of books. When he was approached, Jack said, "Wait a minute. I can't do this. I'm not a graduate." But the point was that he had been here for a couple of semesters and he was definitely an old grad. Anyhow, that's the way we are. A lot of us are old grads. Everybody in the room is an old grad because we used to take First Aid classes. [Laughter]
- But I always felt very close to the college, although it never occurred to me, frankly, that I would ever be part of the staff. When I got back from the service and went back to the university, I was all scheduled to go to East Bakersfield High School. I think that the reason I got in here is that the veterans were beginning to come back. I was in graduate school at Berkeley. The veterans were playing cards and gambling and giving the people here a very bad time.
- Somehow Grace got the idea that if she could get a marine to be the Dean of Men everything would be okay. [Laughter] I was all set to go back to E.B. [East Bakersfield High School] and do some counseling, to teach a little aviation, and to do some testing. It was all set. It was a very good program. Out of the clear blue I got a letter from Mr. [Theron] McCuen asking me if I'd like to be the Dean of Men at Bakersfield College. And I found later that the only reason that she thought it might work was the fact that I'd been a marine.
- Sullivan: After talking to Miss Bird, I wrote down after your name "a firm hand."
- Simonsen: Yes. She didn't realize that I was really a pussycat. Anyhow, that was what started it. Of course, I was delighted.
- Sullivan: I wonder if you want to tell of any incidents that come to mind that indicate what it was like to be Dean of Men with Miss Bird.



Simonsen: I think I can sum it up in a couple of words. It was really a course in educational administration, and a delight. Of course, I look around the table here, and I learned a great deal from everyone here as well. But it was really something with Grace.

I spent a lot of time sitting listening to her as she talked on the telephone to other people and I was able usually to learn something from what she was telling them. This is along the lines of what you're talking about here. I don't think she ever turned down a call. Somebody would call and maybe say, "Why the hell are you letting Bob Young do this?" or "Why is Peg doing this?" or "Why is Jack Frost not using the correct formation as he coaches football?" and that sort of thing. And she would explain.

She had all the time in the world to talk with people. Anyhow, in a nutshell, it was a delight. I feel the same thing about working with Mr. McCuen and Mr. Taber and later with Ralph Prator. But I know that as far as being a college administrator, I feel very fortunate that I had the type of colleagues and superiors that I did. It was really tremendous.

Levinson: I just want to interrupt. Has anybody told you about Grace's going out to football practice almost every night during football season and sitting on the bench and watching the whole procedure?

Sullivan: No. Edna told me that she used to scout the teams that Bakersfield was going to play.

Levinson: Well, not only that but I've seen her dozens of times leave the office about 5:30 and go over there and stay for possibly only half an hour, maybe an hour.

Sullivan: And it was because she just enjoyed watching football?

Levinson: Yes, and she enjoyed what was going on and she had plenty of suggestions to offer the various coaches from Jack on up.

Sullivan: She told me that as athletic commissioner, she was sorely tried. They thought it was a joke that here was this woman pretending to be an athletic commissioner, so they would toss her the hardest problems.

Levinson: And she knew the answers.

Sullivan: She said if she didn't know the answers, she'd figure it out even if it would take all weekend.

Allen: Doors were open to Miss Bird in this community, but there was one that was not. Each fall the men of the faculty had the traditional mountain party. Miss Bird was excluded. But had she been there, she would



Allen: have heard an oboist supreme playing in our faculty band in the person of Dr. Simonsen.

Sullivan: How interesting.

Allen: He is a true artist. In getting back to another side of the thing, I might say that the District Superintendent of the Kern County Union High School and Junior College District as it was known then, had a monthly meeting of the principals, the college director and the key people in the district office. It was called the Superintendent's Advisory Council. I was invited to be secretary of it, and remained secretary of it for over twenty-four years. Miss Bird traditionally sat at one place and I sat next to her. That was one of my great pleasures and it may have tamed down the language because afterward when it was an all-male group it changed a little bit. She was there for five or six years.

Sullivan: This leads into the question I want to get to after we hear from Tom Merson. I want to ask what difference Miss Bird's being a woman made.

Allen: That was one. I think there was a little bit more erudite expression among the members while she was there.

Sullivan: Tom Merson, do you want to tell when you met Miss Bird and what you were doing and what your impressions of her were?

Merson: Yes. After I got my teaching credential I taught two years at Gridley High School and then went back to Berkeley for my Master's in Bacteriology. I was shaking some test tubes, running some virus through to see what made a virus grow in those days, and the phone rang. "There's a Miss Grace Bird here who would like to see you. Would you come over and talk to her?" So all I could do was have somebody time my solutions and run over in my lab coat, mind you. I didn't really know who Miss Bird was except that it was a possible opening at Bakersfield College. In about two seconds we were chattering away at each other and laughing. Miss Bird told of the job and it was a one-year proposition, again. [Laughter] And I said, "Oh, I can do that fine."

She told of the general education emphasis she wanted. That was just at the time that general education was starting. She said, "I know you're a scientist, but I don't want you to give them that depth in science that's so dear to you. I want you to have them look broadly as they can at all of this." I said, "Oh, my goodness, how could I do that?" You don't know how many people I talked to trying to get some advice and, of course, no one had been doing that kind of thing.

Sullivan: What year was this?





- Merson: 1938. I came to Bakersfield and never got a chance to teach bacteriology, but had a grand time learning the flora and fauna of southern California and teaching combination zoology-botany courses for general education.
- Levinson: But isn't this really kind of fabulous, that four of us sitting here came on temporary bases, really, that stretched out.
- Sullivan: Expecting to move on to some place else.
- Levinson: Yes.
- Young: Hoping to stay. [Laughter]
- Merson: I could go on. This was the time that Miss Bird was a tremendous inspiration to me. I have worked with no one--Si, excuse me at this point--that has been so vividly responsible for me wanting to do the kinds of things that I eventually did. If a human can be saintly, Miss Bird was saintly. It's just that way. George Lawrence said to me one day, "I talked to Miss Bird just a few minutes ago and I'll feel like I'm walking on the clouds the rest of the week."
- Levinson: And you remember Leonard McKaig always said that every time any one of us came from her office, we walked taller.
- Simonsen: She's the only one I know that could get away with calling Tom Merson "Tommy". [Laughter] And isn't she the only one, Tom? [Laughter] We never did call Tom "Tommy".
- Merson: Well, now, I'm not going to tell you all the girlfriends I have. [Laughter] She was just that kind of a person--warm and as close to you as one could be. You could talk to her about anything. You didn't have any feeling of reticence about unburdening--if it was a problem or a worry, it was a delightful thing, in either case. And you sought her out first, what's more, to tell her the good news as well as to go to her when you needed a little consolation.
- Taber: In other words, she gave you a lift.
- Merson: She surely did.
- Sullivan: What was it? Was it that she was capable of giving you the idea that she wasn't after anything for herself?
- Levinson: No. I think that was part of it, but I think it was this infinite faith she had in your ability to do the best you could do. She had faith in your doing your best.
- Merson: Miss Bird felt that way about every single individual and it didn't



Merson: matter who they were. It wasn't Tom Merson or Si Simonsen or Peg Levinson or Bob Young or any of these people--it was every one of those students that she wrote personal letters to, and she felt just as warm and concerned about those people as she did about us, and she was able to convey that to the person. She could make you know that, for that moment, you were the top of the world in importance.

Group: That's right.

Sullivan: Was there anybody who got her disapproval?

Levinson: Yes.

Sullivan: And how was that conveyed?

Simonsen: She tied a few cans to people. She belled the cat. I can think of a few people who didn't last.

Levinson: However, when she did tie a can to someone, she was always concerned with that person and the next step. That was one of her cardinal principles. What is the next step?

You're disqualified from Bakersfield College. This isn't the end of the world. Are you going to Lufkin's Business College? Or are you going into the service? Or are you going to enroll in cosmetology over here? That happened all the time.

Merson: I'd like to respond to what Peg has said because Grace Bird was one of those people that had such high standards in every respect. Academic standards was the first thing I noticed, but that was soon put in a secondary position. Her ethical standards, her sensitivity, her respect for individuals and a whole series of things like that were equally as high.

The feeling I got was that it was such a privilege to work with Miss Bird that you would do everything you knew how to do and as much as she hoped you could do. And she let you feel that the sky's the limit and inspire you to go out and do your best.

The feeling we had was that we were letting Miss Bird down if we didn't give it everything we had. And that was the universal feeling in the faculty, I'm sure. It was true inspiration. It isn't that we went in and played up to Miss Bird all the time. We didn't. We didn't annoy Miss Bird. We went in with enthusiasm in knowing that we would be warmly received, but we didn't dog her. I'm sure of that. It's hard to describe how she was inspirational, but she surely was.

Sullivan: Apparently, people also felt it was all right to reveal human



Sullivan: weaknesses. How would she deal with failure? There must have been failures.

Young: I always marvelled that in the thirty years I taught, she never set her foot in my room to hear me teach. Never. And yet she knew what I was doing, and could tell me. I don't know how, but she was alert to everything. A most amazing person.

Merson: In answer to that question, I don't know how she dealt with problem people because I didn't think we had any problems at Bakersfield College. [Laughter] Speaking as a teacher, Miss Bird and her helpers managed it in such a way that we didn't know of those problems. Of course, you've heard testimony as to how she did handle it and protected the teachers and all. But she was positive in her approach.

I remember just before she left she started a faculty improvement program. The project at that time was taking the non-achieving students and doing what you could with them. I remember so vividly a couple of students that I picked out to help that God himself couldn't have helped, I'm sure. [Laughter] How discouraging it was to us! She had us working with those impossible students, really trying to find every way there was that we knew how. Some good ideas and some improvements did come out of that activity.

The project before that, or maybe that year after, was Occupational Outlets of the Subjects You Teach. I recall how I wondered what in the world a botanist would do. [Laughter] How could I teach my students in the field that I was teaching anything about occupational outlets from a general education course? And all the rest of the faculty struggled in the same way. But do you see how she was stretching us there? She gave us the impossible, but there wasn't one of us who was complaining about it although we were baffled.

Levinson: I think you're right on that stretching business.

Merson: To me, that was the thing. I could fill a book with the way she tried to stretch me. I guess she might have seen that I wanted to do something other than teach, maybe. Once she said, "Tom, I can't go up to Fresno to this meeting. Would you go in my place?" And who was I? Just a teacher, you see. She didn't take one of you administrators. You were all busy, probably. So I went.

Lo and behold, Dr. Thomas, President of Fresno State, was conducting the meeting. And right away he said, "Tom, tell us about your Civilian Pilot Training Program." "The what?" [Laughter] I knew a little bit about it, but he knew about it, and he said, "That's the model for the state." And here I was [makes a noise indicating stupidity] unprepared. So I went back to Grace all red and everything, and gee whiz, what could you say in apology for having let her down



Merson: at a time like that? But it got me interested. I didn't contribute anything to the meeting but it sure contributed an awful lot to me.

Sullivan: How did she handle that when you said, "All right, I flubbed this. I didn't know what I should have known?"

Merson: I don't remember what she said. I was so embarrassed that I probably didn't hear what anybody said. I probably didn't hear anything for another week after that. But, then later, she gave me a pile of transcripts and said, "You might like to look these over." She gave no more instructions than that. These were transcripts of teacher training graduates that had gone on to senior institutions.

I was at that time advising the Pre-Teachers Club and the scientist in me got going and I made a bit of an analysis of them, looking at it this way and looking at it that way, and wrote up some stuff and made some tables and that kind of thing. And she was just kind of bubbly on that. I didn't think I'd learned anything from it. She said, "Interesting, isn't it?" So I couldn't wait to get the next batch the next year and was just hoping she would give it to me. You see, then, I had no responsibility of position--I was just the advisor to a club. But she gave me something to do that was stimulating to me, and she knew good and well that it would be stimulating to me, and I was sucker enough to take the bait. She gave you many impossible things like that to do. If anybody had asked you, "Can you do that?", you'd say you couldn't. But she knew you could learn.

I recall a boy who'd come from Italy with a very sophisticated education in science, but it had all been book-learning; he didn't know one thing about a laboratory. She said, "Take him into your class and see what you can do." He could answer any verbal question you posed, but he couldn't dissect anything and he didn't know which end of the microscope to look in. What a thrill it was to work with him for a year. Then, worse than that, she said, "Will you evaluate his transcript in terms of where he stands in collegiate units?" I had no experience in this kind of thing. I was just a little kid, if you please, in this professional world. I always felt that Miss Bird was doing this for me rather than for the student, and I don't know whether I gave the boy the right kind of evaluation or not.

But this is the way she worked with professional people. It was always you wanting to do more as a result of the experience, rather than, "Oh, my god, why do I have to do that?"

I had another boss one time that said, "Tom, here's a big pile of stuff I don't get time to read. Will you go through it and give me a digest of it?"

I said, "Look, you've got as much time to read that as I have. Take





Merson: a course in speed reading." Well, you don't react to Miss Bird this way. [Laughter]

Sullivan: Does that have anything to do with her being a woman?

Merson: No. I never thought of her as a woman. She was just such a grand person. It never entered my mind--and I still can't understand what all this women's lib thing is about. It just never entered any of our heads that Miss Bird was inferior in any way because she was a woman.

Sullivan: She didn't use being a woman in any way?

Levinson: Never!

Merson: Never, never, never. As Peg said, she went out and watched football. I wouldn't be surprised if she caught a pass or two once in a while. [Laughter]

Levinson: Never once did I see her in any circumstance trade upon the fact of her being a woman to gain anything. She had all the charm and all the finesse in the world, but it was not used in the ultra-feminine way.

Allen: I think the scope of her formal training in the university, though, belied some of this. I was amazed to find that she had an architecture major. I think she was ahead of her time. She could do these things and get away with it.

Merson: Along this line, it wasn't long until I learned that Grace had been through calculus. She didn't tell me this. This came out and you began to get respect for it. When a course on how to fly planes came along Grace Bird was one of the first people enrolled in it. I asked Grace, "Why are you taking this course?" I was taking the dumb thing, too.

She said, "Well, it's a new field and I think I ought to know what's going on in the field." In every field, she got into it enough--like with football--so she could talk the language.

Allen: By the way, I was very conscious of her being a woman because of her clothes. Time after time I complimented her on her outfit, and she seemed to like that. [Laughter] But she had excellent taste in dress, and I was one who noticed it.

Levinson: I'd like to figure out the number of textbooks written by various boys on the faculty--Nick Pananides and Norm Harris and Ed Hemmerling--that were dedicated to her, and books on which she frequently read galley proofs. We're talking about astronomy, physics, and math.



- Simonsen: By the way, you know about this business of being comfortable around men--she was also very comfortable around women. But, as I remember, didn't she have a fine relationship with her family--her brothers?
- Levinson: Yes.
- Sullivan: Yes, she grew up with brothers and she grew up playing games with boys. There was a men's tennis team that practiced across the street from her house, and when they needed an extra they would ask her over.
- Simonsen: It's hard to tell which came first--having known a lot of men and been with a lot of men, or whether it was a natural thing. But it never seemed to bother her that she was the only one in a meeting. I think almost the entire time Grace was Dean of the college she was the only woman.
- Levinson: There was a woman at Pasadena, Katherine Robbins.
- Simonsen: That was later, though. Katherine was a dean.
- Merson: But she became president later and she became the second woman in California after Grace.
- Simonsen: And then, of course, Marie [Mills]. But during most of Grace's career, on all the committees and in all the conference meetings, she was the only one. Absolutely. She was a pioneer.
- Sullivan: I think she's comfortable around interesting people and often they are men.
- Simonsen: Mention was made of her academic interests, like architecture. And she also had either a French minor or a double major in French. She also knew literature inside-out and music and, of course, art. She is broadly educated.
- Sullivan: How did all of those interests come into her life as an administrator? How was it that she made you aware that she had all of these dimensions?
- Levinson: Inviting you to her home, giving you a particular book or a particular print.
- [end tape 1, side 2; begin tape 2, side 1]
- Sullivan: I was wondering how much entertaining of the faculty she did do at her home. She was closely in touch with all of you at work. How about away from the college?
- Levinson: In small groups, many dinners. Never bridge. Parties where there



- Levinson: were games--the most ingenious games that she thought up. I remember where prizes were given for what were in those days called "handies," when you did things with your hands.
- Sullivan: Shadows on the wall?
- Levinson: No. Like left-handed-Indian-looking-for-buffalo. That kind of thing. [Laughter] Or the blimp-coming-out-of-the-hangar. Anyway, they were phrases done by hand. It was sort of a predecessor of knock-knock and all those things. So these games, many of them word games, many of them little faddy things, were the kinds of entertainment. They would stimulate you. There were some plain old charades, even.
- Sullivan: Did she do all the cooking when she had you to dinner? How did she manage?
- Levinson: It depends on where it was. If it was when she and Robbie [Ethel Robinson] were living together, Robbie did most of the cooking.
- Allen: One night she was hostess for the Advisory Council that I mentioned a while ago. It was an exquisite dinner, as you might imagine. I guess there were about sixteen or seventeen of us.
- Sullivan: At her home?
- Allen: Yes. Incidentally, referring to this group, she did something I've always appreciated. I was secretary of the group, at the superintendent's invitation. But after about three or four years, it was Miss Bird who said, "I think Avery should be a member of this group." And, henceforth, I was a member. It made a little difference psychologically to me. I didn't work for her but I had this close liaison contact with her. So, unlike some of the people here--I felt free to joke with her and comment about her clothes, in a complimentary fashion in this case. We also had these little asides that I don't know whether they would have been appropriate for those employed by her or not. But we had fun.
- Sullivan: You had a joking relationship.
- Allen: Yes.
- Sullivan: We're on the subject of her sense of humor.
- Young: Peg, do you remember when we put on a faculty vaudeville in Harvey Auditorium, and Grace got down there and led the orchestra?
- Levinson: Yes, I remember that. Faculty Follies.
- Levinson: That's right. She just had the time of her life down there directing



Young: the orchestra.

Levinson: And the picnics out at the school farm. She was a very great one for doing what she called--and I'd never heard the word before--stunts, only she had a special name for them.

Sullivan: Spoofs?

Levinson: Spoofs, that's what they were. This was really a great joy to her. These little spoofs would be satirical skits on any current topic.

Simonsen: Peg, were you the one who mentioned that she would call off the names of the graduates without referring to any list.

Levinson: Somebody did.

Simonsen: I had gone to a few graduations prior to joining the college because of my friendships with the teachers at the high school and also at the college, and that really amazed me that she could do this. I often wondered how she could do it. I'd been working with the college after the war for about six or eight months before I realized how she did it. I was wondering if any of the rest of you knew how she did it. Because she spent an awful lot of time in her office and she was available to people and she went to the special events; but by that time we had eight hundred or nine hundred or a thousand students and I don't know how many graduates--a couple of hundred, I guess. And she knew them all. But how could she know them all?

Allen: Is there a secret?

Simonsen: There's a secret.

Sullivan: What's the secret?

Simonsen: In the first place, she knew all their names. But this is where she did a little cheating. Out in the main office, near the door to her office, in the counter were two drawers. *A* through *M* was in one drawer and *N* through *Z* was in the other drawer, and it was a permanent record card with all the grades and a photograph taken from the person's high school yearbook.

Taber: I worked on that.

Simonsen: And there it was. The *A*'s--Mary Anderson. Then the *B*'s and right on through. She didn't go through the business of memorizing. She never memorized anything. But she knew everybody. And there would be reinforcement. When she'd see Mary Anderson, for example, she'd say, "Hello, Mary." And back and forth, all year long, she was fumbling through those files, and I don't think it had anything





Simonsen: to do with graduation. But by the time the end of the year was there, she knew them all.

And the funny part about it is that I found it to be a pretty good technique, too. I never used it for graduation, but I knew a lot of people by that method. One of the sad things, it seems to me-- first of all, there was a period of time after Grace Bird's time here, when you weren't supposed to have any pictures on transcripts; then, later, thanks to computers and data processing, we never saw a permanent record card. In other words, in our sophistication, as we became larger, the records became absolutely protected records. They were very meticulously kept. As someone said, registrars are people who keep accurate records of inaccurate judgments.

The way we ran it in Grace Bird's time was to pull that drawer out and look for the names. The office situation was interesting. Grace was over here; there was the Dean of Men. Theron Taber was in my office first, then Leonard McKaig, and then I was there. In Peg's office, Florence McKinley was there and then Peg was there. Anyway, there was this whole arrangement. Then there were two girls in the office. Everything was very simple and we had all the records. This was the nerve center of the college.

Levinson: And remember this? If you go back into those old, old permanent records, you'll find that the entries are made in Grace's handwriting.

Simonsen: That's right.

Sullivan: She felt there was no level of work that she was too good for--that's one of the things I learned about her from Edna.

Levinson: Absolutely.

Merson: Not only were they in her handwriting, but when the first week of classes arrived you'd get a note in your box: "Will you tell student so-and-so to change this class to that one and that class to the other one."

The rearrangement to avoid a conflict was done through the teacher in Grace Bird's handwriting; and you'd get a whole page like this that she'd done the night before. How many hours she spent on that, I don't know.

Levinson: And she'd have us down there working with her.

Merson: And it was done just that quickly, but it was Grace's handwriting.

Levinson: Paul Gordon was mentioning that just the other day. It was his birthday party. He said, "You remember those wonderful days when



- Levinson: we all knew what we were doing and what we were supposed to be doing and we did it." Really, those were wonderful times when you'd get a note in your box telling you to transfer these fifteen students to so-and-so and accept ten more to build up your class in such and such. If ever a benevolent despotism worked, this is it.
- Merson: It worked.
- Levinson: It worked.
- Simonsen: Now, from an administrator's point of view, this you "can't do no more." [Laughter] And the point is that it takes so long and the computers foul up--it wasn't like that at all then. It was Grace Bird in her own handwriting, and believe me, it was done correctly, too.
- Levinson: That's right. And we're not talking about a tiny institution. We're talking about twelve hundred or thirteen hundred people, which is a fair number.
- Simonsen: Those files we were talking about--it was only one file at one point, and the next thing you knew it was two or three. By the time Grace left, it was at least two files.
- Taber: I'd like to add one thing. During her time she was so interested in the students that had left that many, many students came back and talked before the Patrons Club. She had, I don't know how many former students come back and speak to the Patrons Club to let them know what they got out of Bakersfield College. I've had so many students tell me that.
- Sullivan: And it was Miss Bird's sense that this was a useful thing to do.
- Taber: She knew where they were and she contacted them, and they came back and spoke.
- Merson: She encouraged us, as teachers, to do that, too. I've had so many students return to my classes and spend some time. "You better listen when he says this, because that's what it's going to be" kind of thing. When the students dropped in to Grace's office she'd say, "Why don't you go over before you leave and talk to some of your teachers." It was not prescriptive at all.
- Allen: I think some of us should remember her last graduation talk. She came back after she went to the University of California, and the subject of her talk was A Soliloquy. She explained it as just a talk, back and forth, and she did it beautifully, of course. There was more of an exchange, without the audience participating, but she talked about things that she thought were important. Not the



Allen: formalized type of commencement address, but she did a beautiful job.

Sullivan: Si mentioned earlier the many ways in which he had a course in educational administration from Grace Bird, and you've all talked about this. I wonder if we can go back to that and see whether anybody has other things to add as examples of the ways you learned from her.

Levinson: I didn't ever have a course in counseling before I began counseling because we were not set up that way. I, apparently, was doing a lot of counseling by guess and by gosh, earnestly, but not very professionally.

Grace didn't ever say anything to me about that. But, as Si described our offices, she was over here, and this was my office, and here was the Dean of Men's office. One day she said to me, "I saw you counseling Jenny Doaks or Joe Doaks or somebody, and you were so intense that you had your chin right down on the table. You were really, really giving it to him or her."

I was smart enough to figure out that she was saying, "That isn't the way you counsel, dear." [Laughter] You don't do the talking when you counsel. That's what I mean about giving a course in whatever.

Allen: I remember she brought a little present over for our children on a Christmas afternoon. She was in very much of a rush, but she was so considerate about things like that. She'd work in little extra things even though she was on a tight schedule.

Sullivan: She made the extra effort.

Levinson: Always.

[end tape 2, side 1]





Presenting the resolution of the Board of Trustees to Grace V. Bird that the library of the new building would be named for her. Left to right: Theron McCuen, Grace Bird, William Van Ewert, and H.E. Woodward.



Presentation of the portrait that is hung in the Grace V. Bird Library. Left to right: Grace Bird, Hugh Jewett, Edna Keough, and Ralph Prator.





## II GRACE BIRD, FRIEND

## INTRODUCTION

Grace Bird has a talent for making and keeping friends. Wofford B. Camp, cotton pioneer and agricultural leader, is among her staunchest admirers. His first wife, Georgia App Camp (deceased), was Grace Bird's friend from 1917 on. Mr. Camp, who has kept in close touch with Miss Bird, not only urged that the memoir be done but offered to share a substantial portion of the cost. He received me in his office on the grounds of his beautiful home on Oleander Street in Bakersfield and after showing me pictures and various memorabilia of Grace Bird, gave the following interview.

Hugh Jewett, agricultural and community leader in Bakersfield, also has known Grace Bird from her earliest days in Bakersfield. After he gave me a tour of the antiques brought from his family home in Vermont and tastefully arranged in his elegant home, we settled down to tape recording his perspective on Grace Bird. When we were finished he invited me to join him for lunch at the Rio Bravo country club. The Rio Bravo is a project developed on land which once belonged to the Jewett family. On the way out, Mr. Jewett gave me a view of Bakersfield and an account of its history that I could have obtained in no other way.

Ralda Sullivan  
Interviewer-Editor

6 April 1978  
Regional Oral History Office  
486 The Bancroft Library  
University of California at Berkeley



II GRACE BIRD, FRIEND

[Interview 1: April 25, 1977]  
[begin tape 1, side 1]

Wofford B. Camp

Sullivan: Mr. Camp, I'd like to start right off by saying, that you have known Grace Bird longer than almost anyone else living now in Bakersfield has.

Camp: I think that's right.

Sullivan: I wonder if you would like to start by telling about when it was and how it was that you first came to know her.

Camp: I would have to give you a little of my background and what brought me here in order to do that.

Sullivan: Please do. We, of course, have your memoirs in the oral history office.\*

Camp: I was sent out here by the government, the army and the Department of Agriculture, twenty-two years old, just out of school. I hadn't been to high school at all, but I finished college. I took an examination.

Came out alone. In Washington, the day before I left, the official said cotton wouldn't grow. So I got on a train next morning without saying a word, but I knew how it was ringing up here. When I got to California I stopped at Yuma, Arizona and Bard, California for a

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\*See interview with Wofford B. Camp, Cotton, Irrigation, and the AAA, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1971.



Camp: couple of days and came on to Bakersfield two days later in early March 1917. I got there late in the afternoon, went to the hotel, went to bed.

Right across the street was the biggest company in California at that time, Kern County Land Company, and Mr. [H.A.] Jastro was the head of it. He was chairman of the State Board of Agriculture and everything else almost. He was a very close friend of Grace Bird's. I remember so well Grace saying one day to us that--this was years later--laughing, saying, "Here came Mr. Jastro one morning with a cake for me. He knocked on the door--" [Voice tapers off]

Anyway--through friends I made then I got to know Grace Bird, and Grace Bird to me, from the time I met her, was a fireball.

Sullivan: [Laughing] A fireball!

Camp: [Laughing a little too] Well, maybe that's not a good term.

Sullivan: Oh, it's wonderful!

Camp: But I like those kind of people. I didn't get to know her so intimately those first years. I didn't get to know her so intimately until Georgia and I were married. But I heard an awful lot about her through Georgia.

Sullivan: Did you know Georgia first?

Camp: No. I knew Grace first, but as I said, not intimately. But I knew all about her and I had heard her make speeches and I was for her in a big way. She was my kind of person. And then as soon as Georgia and I got married which wasn't but a few days, very shortly, after we met, we each thought we were right and it turned out that way, we saw a lot of Grace.

Sullivan: I read your memoir and I remember reading that you met Georgia at a barn dance.

Camp: That's right. I took another very pretty girl to the barn dance [laughs], neighbor and a schoolmate of Georgia's. I wasn't engaged or in love with anybody. I was just a youngster out here and my job was all over the West. I wasn't in any one place. I was everywhere.

Sullivan: But this was your base of operation.

Camp: Yes. Well actually I made Fresno my base, but I came here more because I found more people willing to experiment with cotton here and see if it would grow. Well anyway, I'm not trying to tell you about myself, but I had to tell you about that in order to lead up



Camp: to this. That's how come I came to be here. And it was through Jastro, the first man I met that I inquired about a lot of the things in the schools and so on, naturally, just as you're asking me. Then I heard Grace make some speeches.

Sullivan: Was she making them in the school or in the community? Do you remember where it was that you heard her?

Camp: Right over here in the high school.

Another time I attended a special meeting given for Grace. I had as my guest Harry Umphrey, a man from the tip-top of Maine--he and I had just arrived the day before from a trip to South America and through the Canal. And I took him over--his wife was here, I had her come out--and we went over and heard Grace. And she made a speech and I had it written out. Over the years he kept telling people, "The most inspiring speech I ever heard in my life was that evening in Bakersfield when we heard Grace Bird. She would take us up in the air just like other birds; then she would level out before going back up many times before landing."

[Going through papers on desk] I've got her speech somewhere, but I don't know where.

Sullivan: Here's a statement that says, "In aeronautical terms I think she's what is, or could be called, a 'hot job'!" [Laughs]

Camp: I think that's quite appropriate.

Sullivan: Can you think of any examples or recollections of Grace in those early days, in the twenties.

Camp: Yes. Let me tell you one. No, this wasn't the early twenties though. This was a little later. She was sick abed and her roommate was off at school, teaching. Miss Robinson.

Sullivan: Ethel Robinson.

Camp: Grace had been pretty sick I guess, and it's only about three blocks down there to where she lived, and so I took down a whole big jar, pitcher, of freshly squeezed orange juice and some oranges, a big bucket of oranges, apples, and sort of left them there.

I just walked into her bedroom. Of course, there was nobody else there. I knocked [he knocks to demonstrate] and hollered and she said, "Who's there!" and I said, "Bill!" and I just walked in. And I said, "Here's some orange juice for you and some fruit," and so on.

She said, "Get out of my bedroom! I never had a man in my bedroom!"





Camp: Get out of here!"

Sullivan: [Laughing] Oh, that's wonderful!

Camp: So I told her afterwards, and I told lots of people, that's the first time I've ever got run out of--the only time I've ever run out--of a woman's bedroom. [Both laugh with enjoyment]

Sullivan: That's a wonderful story!

Oh, I count on you for more of these! Have you got any more recollections? [Laughs]

Camp: [Laughing too] She was full of fun everywhere.

Sullivan: She had a great sense of humor.

Camp: Oh Lord, yes. Oh yes.

Sullivan: Can you recall any of her clowning, or any of her use of drama, dressing up in costumes?

Camp: Dressing up? You mean, clothes? No.

Sullivan: Well, I was thinking she used to get dressed up for parties in costumes and that sort of thing.

Camp: Oh, yes. Well, I've got a letter and one of these tells about a party I gave for her here. Well anyway, we gave her a big, big Christmas party. We put on quite a show for Grace, because everybody loved Grace.

Sullivan: So I gather.

Camp: All of my close friends did.

Sullivan: Well the way people have gotten together and just raised the money to do this memoir indicates that.

Camp: Well, Grace is the one who did so much for my boys' mother, Georgia.

Sullivan: She has said some lovely things about Georgia.

Camp: I better tell you this. The women's club of San Joaquin Valley had--my wife wasn't a clubber. She didn't like to go. She wanted to be home, but they made her go to some of them and she enjoyed it, but she just wasn't a clubber--got up to Modesto and had a big meeting. All the valley was meeting and they were having a speaker from every town. And the speaker from Bakersfield didn't show up. So Georgia



Camp: was sitting with the Bakersfield crowd and they wondered what they were going to do. And they said, "Georgia, you'll have to represent Kern County."

So she got up, reluctantly, nothing prepared, and I don't know how long it was but anyway, shortly after that when they started home, I got a wire from the president of the valley organization. Says, "We're so happy. We're so happy. Georgia won the valley speaking contest this afternoon! Next week we have to go--and she must go--to San Diego and do the same thing." Lord, she never had thought of such things. Grace taught her all these things.

Sullivan: What did Grace teach her?

Camp: Well, what I mean, she learned from Grace. She loved Grace.

Sullivan: How to speak?

Camp: Well, she loved Grace, and Grace had everything. Georgia had a lot too.

Sullivan: Was Grace Georgia's teacher?

Camp: Well, yes. Says so in one of these letters, teacher and so on, advisor and so on.

So then she went to San Diego the next week and about six o'clock I got a wire. Says, "Georgia has won the contest down here." Didn't prepare a note. Didn't prepare it.

Sullivan: That's Grace's teaching for you.

Camp: They said, "Next week we have to go to San Antonio for the national." And they went and they wired me that she had won and one of the contestants there was a brilliant lawyer from Chicago, and my little girl had never had any speaking training, except Grace.

Sullivan: Oh, that was a wonderful story!

Camp: And that wasn't just telling her how to speak, but that's where she learned it.

Sullivan: Do you remember parties with Grace or Christmas celebrations or any special occasions back then.

Camp: She was there quite often.

Sullivan: She came to your home quite often. For Christmas or dinner parties?

Camp: Dinner parties, lots of them, lots of them. I don't know as I can



Camp: say Christmas. We tried to get our families together at Christmas. But just lots of times.

I know one evening I came home. My youngest son and I, Don. He was then in high school. Georgia was not home and it was about sundown. We waited and we waited and we waited and it got almost dark and I was about to go crazy. And I got in the car. I said, "Don, let's get in the car and see if we can find your Mama." So, we drove up every street, every street. We went down to Grace's house and we were going in. We met Grace and Georgia coming walking this way. [Chuckles]

Sullivan: What had happened? [Laughs]

Camp: Just visiting, just visiting, just visiting. [Laughs]

Sullivan: Just visiting. Just got carried away.

Camp: Chattered away. That's all.

Sullivan: They had a lot to talk about.

Camp: Ya, ya-- This was several years ago--see, Don, the youngest boy, was in high school then.

Sullivan: Now, Grace has shown me pictures of Don and Bill, Jr.

Camp: I hope she has a good picture of Georgia.

Sullivan: I've seen pictures of Georgia. She has pictures of Georgia.

Camp: Well, she would have.

Sullivan: Do you want to go over the years and recall things? You knew Grace in the twenties and you knew her through the depression.

Camp: I was called by Giannini and asked to leave the Experiment Station out here. I started cotton in California you know.

Sullivan: I know that.

Camp: So Giannini persuaded me to come with them and I was with them the five years during the depression.

Sullivan: You were with the Bank of America, weren't you?

Camp: In charge of all their agriculture and loans and so on, state-wide. That's why we had to move to Fresno.

Sullivan: But you kept in touch with Grace Bird during that period I would



Sullivan: assume.

Camp: Two times. One time in Fresno I had her--and I'll bet she'll forget this. She'll remember the one in San Francisco. I had her at both places. There was a men's organization. I was chairman of it. Agricultural Committee of the Fresno Chamber of Commerce. These others wondered why a girl was there. I introduced her later and told them that she was a pretty good farmer and truck driver herself. So, she made some remarks that were very touching and very, very effective there. And particularly in San Francisco because there they were from all over the state.

Sullivan: She had just the right touch, didn't she?

Camp: She had the right touch. And more.

Sullivan: Grace remembers you as just a very generous giver and helper of people in the community. Do you recall any of the times when you helped out at the college?

Camp: Well, Grace called me one night, one afternoon. She says, "Bill, we're going to honor--" They were in session. She stepped out to a phone. They were the board of trustees. She said, "We are going to honor one boy and one girl, and Georgia has been selected. Will you be willing, you and the boys, to--" They were still in school, but anyway--"Would you give half if the alumni raised the other half?"

And I said, "Well, there's more than one thing to think about there, Grace. Let me call you tomorrow morning." I knew the answer was yes right then.

The next morning I called her and told her that we wouldn't think of having our name having given an organ if we hadn't given it all. That's the way I feel about things. So we did. And, by the way, Fox is the one who dedicated it. The great pianist, Virgil Fox.

Virgil Fox is the best in the world.

Sullivan: Now, I understand that he picked out just the right kind of organ. Was that right?

Camp: No, no.

Sullivan: There was somebody who consulted.

Camp: No. I had nothing to do with the organ except pay for it. The organ here was done by the school, the music department, and Grace had a big hand in it.

Sullivan: They picked it out very carefully to be just right.





- Camp: Yes, but Grace had to approve it. I had nothing to do with it, because I didn't know one organ from another. But they were almost three years in building it, only because they were building the building and they were building it right into it, see?
- Sullivan: They were honoring one boy student who had graduated and one former girl student?
- Camp: Yes, and I don't know who the boy was.
- Sullivan: But they were honoring Georgia. This was after her death?
- Camp: Yes.
- Sullivan: What year was that?
- Camp: Georgia died on September 3, 1943.
- Sullivan: I'm afraid we have to stop here because it's time to go to the airport if I'm to catch that plane back to San Francisco. Thank you so much for your recollections of Grace Bird.  
[end tape 1, side 1]

Hugh Jewett

[Interview 1: April 23, 1977]  
[begin tape 1, side 1]

- Sullivan: Grace Bird could reach people of many ages. You have some examples in mind, and I wonder if you could tell about those?
- Jewett: Yes, that's very true. Grace touched many people. She touched people from the very young to the very old during all of her life. During her meeting with various people, both close friends as well as those that were not so close, she could be, at times, very intimate and informal and still, at times, far away. There could be light and intimate contacts and chats with a friend to be followed by moments of remarks deep, serious, and almost spiritual in nature.
- For me it was a great experience to be at those committee meetings of people of Bakersfield who interviewed and made awards to students of the high schools who were desirous of going to the universities such as the University of California, Stanford, Southern California, Mills, and other schools of higher learning. At that time I came to really know Grace Bird. She had an understanding and an influence with young people which showed her great affection and concern for



Jewett: the younger generation.

I can remember an instance when we had a meeting at the old high school building and interviewed, at that time, many young people who were candidates for scholarships for the University of California. I remember one occasion particularly. After quite a long delay, a young person was ushered into our presence. We all could see that she was very frightened and very ill at ease. At this point, Grace Bird took over the situation. With a cheery "Hi" to this young person and some questions that were irrelevant to the purpose of our meeting, Grace and this girl were in a conversation and on subjects entirely foreign to the purpose of the meeting of that evening. After a short time we noticed the applicant was fully at ease, and at that time Grace cleverly turned the questioning back to those of us on the committee.

So the committee and the applicant were relaxed, and after an exchange of questions and answers it was clear to see that the student was fully qualified for an award and was unanimously selected as one of the recipients of a scholarship to the University of California.

Sullivan: That shows Grace as a very sensitive and generous-spirited person. Your Aunt Kate was very fond of Grace, you've said.

Jewett: It was not only those of my generation who evidenced a great respect and understanding of Grace. Also I might include a wonderment, an appreciation, and a loving respect for her. I've also made remarks about my own contacts and resulting feelings covering Grace, and now I wish to give the opinion of my Aunt Kate Farnham [Mrs. John Farnham]. My Aunt Kate Farnham, a person of education which she received at the Laurel Hall School in San Mateo and years in Europe, was an ardent admirer of Grace. She once made the remark, "It is difficult to understand how such a small body could contain such a great soul." Have we mentioned Josephine yet?

Sullivan: Not on this tape.

Jewett: And now to complete the three generations, may I mention Josephine di Giorgio, a graduate of the Kern County High School--and, by the way, the editor of her class's annual yearbook. [Pause]

Before going any further, it should be mentioned that Josephine was Josephine Jewett, my daughter. She is now Mrs. J.S. Di Giorgio. Recently, Josephine gave me her own analysis of Grace Bird which, after a discussion, she said she would put down in writing for me. I shall read these remarks of Josephine's:

Reminiscence of Grace Bird as Dean of Bakersfield Junior College brings to mind treasured remembrances of a visit



- Jewett: with her in her office on the campus. She sat behind her orderly desk, petite and impeccably neat, giving her full attention to this ordinary student. There was a beautiful and timeless Oriental print on the wall. I remember feeling humble yet supported before her gentility, her intellect, her achievements and authority. Miss Bird was sharing both her vitality and her serenity. In retrospect, I think she has always been exemplary in the qualities needed now by women as they make more prominent roles and contribute increasingly to society.
- Sullivan: I think that's an excellent summary of Grace Bird's unique value.
- Jewett: This is how three generations of one family have been affected by Grace Bird. That was the idea.
- Sullivan: I wonder if you'd be willing to talk a bit more about your first impressions of Grace Bird when you first came to know her in Bakersfield.
- Jewett: What year did Grace come to Bakersfield?
- Sullivan: 1914.
- Jewett: It was not long after Grace came to Bakersfield in 1914 as a member of the faculty of Bakersfield High that she was recognized as a leader and a great contributor to the cultural life of this town. It happened that a large number of high school teachers lived at one residence, the home of Mrs. Dr. Mitchell [widow of Dr. Frank W. Mitchell]. These young people had unusual close relationships amongst themselves as well as with other members of the group which were not residents of the Mitchell home.
- Sullivan: Grace Bird was one of these young women teachers?
- Jewett: Yes, she lived there for a short period.
- Sullivan: And these were her friends?
- Jewett: Yes, these were her friends. And having the good fortune of knowing these young women, and myself then being a young man, it was natural that I absorbed and was affected by their thoughts and relationships with Grace. I can truthfully say that I never remember an adverse comment toward her, but instead always remarks of affection and appreciation.
- Sullivan: Isn't that amazing?
- Jewett: Yes. There's no doubt in my mind that Grace stimulated all these



Jewett: young women and upgraded their abilities as teachers in a high school of considerable size.

[end tape 1, side 1]





### III GRACE BIRD IN ACTION: FROM 1920 TO 1950 AT BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE

#### INTRODUCTION

Margaret "Peg" Levinson, Dean of Women during Miss Bird's administration, invited me to join her and three friends and colleagues of Miss Bird's at Sunday brunch in her apartment. There I met Virginia Forker, a former Kern High School teacher who knew Miss Bird in the twenties and could recall her talents as a party-giver. Grace Bird had been famous for her parties and it was good to find someone who could talk about that. Dorothy Albaugh had worked at Bakersfield College with Miss Bird, coming originally as a Business English teacher and eventually teaching psychology until she retired as department chairman. Dr. Ruth Maguire came to Bakersfield College as a counselor in 1948 because she wanted to work with Miss Bird. Although she came only two years before Miss Bird left, they have continued to see each other socially and Dr. Maguire could speak appreciatively of Miss Bird's pioneering support of pupil services in the junior college.

After a delicious brunch, we settled down with the microphone and tape recorder to carry on a wide-ranging conversation. An edited version follows.

Theron McCuen has worked with Grace Bird since he came to Kern County in 1929. As a teacher, as a fellow administrator and as the superintendent of the Kern Union High School and Junior College District, he thus has had a variety of perspectives from which to appreciate her as a colleague. At the end of the interview, Mrs. McCuen who had worked with Miss Bird in the Bakersfield chapter of the American Association of University Women joined us and contributed her impressions of Grace Bird.

Lorraine Anderson was Miss Bird's secretary from 1927 to 1945. As Dr. Simonsen's administrative assistant, she efficiently ran the Bakersfield end of the Grace Bird Oral History Project.

Because Edna Taber and Lorraine Anderson had assisted Miss Bird as members of the office staff, they could provide a view of Miss Bird behind the scenes as she oversaw the routines and special events involved in the administration of a growing and changing institution. We made the following recording



after they had treated the interviewer to a delicious lunch upon her arrival in Bakersfield on Friday, April 22, 1977, just before the conversation with the committee was recorded.

Because Frank Wattron has known Grace Bird since the thirties as a student, a colleague on the Bakersfield College faculty, and as a friend of the household she shared with her colleague Ethel Robinson, he provides a unique perspective. The interview took place on April 24, 1977, shortly before his retirement from Bakersfield College as Associate Dean of Instruction; he is an artist in metal sculpture as well as a man of the theatre and educator. Surrounded by pieces of his metal sculpture, we sat in his living room and talked. I coveted a statue of a dancing figure that stood on the piano and learned that it had been Miss Bird's favorite. His wife, Bette, who teaches piano, joined us while the interview was in progress.

Burns Finlinson who has retired after serving as President of Bakersfield College from 1968-1972, was hired after World War II by Miss Bird to work with returning veterans. He was interviewed in the garden of his home under the arbor he has constructed. Part way through, his wife, Dia, who is herself an artist, joined us with a bountiful tea tray containing home-grown nuts and homemade persimmon cookies. She also contributed a characterizing anecdote about Miss Bird.

Edward Simonsen came to Bakersfield College in 1946 as Dean of Men because his having been a marine encouraged Miss Bird to think he would wield a firm hand. He now is Chancellor of the Kern Community College district. We met in his office for the following interview.

The hospitable Marvine and Edward Simonsen arranged for me to meet with several other people who knew Grace Bird at dinner at their home. Among those present was Glenn Bultman, now a prominent attorney and civic leader as well as a member of the Bakersfield College Board of Trustees. President of the student body when he attended the college in the early 1930s, he was able to provide a charming view of the young Miss Bird relating to students.

Ralda Sullivan  
Interviewer-Editor

6 April 1978  
Regional Oral History Office  
486 The Bancroft Library  
University of California at Berkeley





Frank Wattron



Ruth Maguire



John Collins



M. Glenn Bultman





Edward Simonsen



Lorraine Anderson



Virginia Forker



Dia and Burns Finlinson





III GRACE BIRD IN ACTION: FROM 1920 TO 1950 AT BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE

[Interview 1: April 24, 1977]  
[begin tape 1, side 1]

Dorothy Albaugh, Virginia Forker, Margaret [Peg] Levinson, Ruth Maguire

Sullivan: Shall we just start by talking about how you first came to know Grace, when it was, what you were doing and what your first impressions of her were? Shall we start with Ruth Maguire?

Maguire: Well, the first time I saw Grace was about 1938; I was secretary to the president of San Bernardino Junior College, which is Valley College now. That was Dr. Ricciardi; that year, 1939, he was president of California Junior College Association. Two or three of their state meetings were held at San Bernardino Junior College. And those in attendance were the giants of the junior college at that time: San Bernardino, San Mateo, Fullerton, Bakersfield, Sacramento, Los Angeles City College.

Needless to say, all of the presidents were men and I remember how surprised I was to see this tiny woman come into the first meeting and see her sit down with all of these men around the table. She was full of vim and vigor and so pleasant with all the men saying, "Hello, Grace!" and hugging her. And I wondered where in the world she was from, and I found out Bakersfield, of course.

It was all just fun and games to start out with. Then, when they proceeded into their business for the day, I noticed how often they would defer to Grace--I mean, ask for her opinion. That was rather odd to me. I really had never seen a woman in such a position before. Never did she ever play up her femininity. She was down to business and she had opinions and those men respected her.

Sullivan: Ruth, do you want to talk about how she managed to win this respect?

Maguire: Preparation. There's the word. She came to the meeting prepared,



- Maguire: and the men recognized it. And they were some pretty sharp men too, but you never felt that she was giving in to any person. And yet, she was diplomatic. I saw her compromise with great tact.
- Sullivan: Do you remember whether there were any sharp divisions about policies and issues? I'm wondering how Grace Bird operated when she had a point she wanted to put across.
- Albaugh. I know of one thing that Peg and I both have heard her say.
- Sullivan: What's that, Dorothy?
- Albaugh: When you're pressing a point, when you want something, never put a person into a position where he has to say no. Leave the door open so that if you can't get it now, you can try again. She was a diplomat. You think about that in any relationship.
- Sullivan: In the Bay Area there's a lot of emphasis on "letting it all hang out" and people can end up saying destructive things to one another.
- Dorothy, can you recall your first impressions of Grace? When did you meet her and what were you doing?
- Albaugh: Well, I met her first in 1930. I was teaching in the high school and she was vice principal of the high school as well as director of the junior college. That was the position, the title, at the time. She had charge of scheduling and things of that sort so I had a little to do with her and I soon found out that she was interested in the junior college.
- I was getting my master's which I did obtain in '31 in psychology, so I had an interview with her to give her my qualifications and to state my hope to be able to teach psychology. At that time they had a very fine man here; even so she listened. I didn't see her take any notes, but she listened to what I had to say and she said that the psychology that they needed was taught by Mr. McDaniel.
- I let it go at that. I had already had experience being somewhat discouraged from getting a degree in psychology which I obtained from the University of Washington, because the department said women didn't have much opportunity in that field at that time, and true, they didn't. But I had a good deal of support from some members of the staff. Dr. Guthrie, who was the gold medal winner from A.P.A., was director of my graduate work. Anyway, I went ahead and took it. But at Bakersfield, for two or three years, I knew her more just as a person who did scheduling. But I also knew her somewhat socially. After all, Bakersfield was a very small town at that time.
- Sullivan: Do you remember the population?



Albaugh: About 26,000 and that was counting some of the outlying district! [Laughter] And cats and dogs. That was Greater Bakersfield. I came here because I had been away from home for so long and my parents had moved here. So I thought it would be pleasant to be at home for a year and renew my acquaintance with my mother and father. And I thought it would be for just a short time, because, I admit I had lived nowhere like Bakersfield and I didn't think I would ever want to stay here. But I grew to like it.

But then later I entered the junior college--I guess I'm what they call a utility teacher--through the Business English Department.

Sullivan: Yes. Grace Bird told me that.

Albaugh: That was very unexpected. Then there was an opportunity to enter psychology and, of course, Mr. McDaniel was just wonderful to me. He helped me learn a good deal about how to teach at the junior college level.

I remember so much about Grace's, not demanding, but encouraging a person to have a plan, to have continued education.

Sullivan: You mean, in encouraging students?

Albaugh: No, I mean encouraging teachers. I'm thinking of her relationship to instructors. There were few enough instructors so that she could have interviews--and she did--not perhaps on a formal basis at all, but just as you'd pass through the office and she'd say "And what are you thinking of doing this summer?"

I think this is the thing I remember. If you were going to take a vacation all summer she would say, "What a wonderful opportunity for you to get to know what the people in that area think!" Which of course I'd never thought of, but once she suggested it to me, then I would try to do this. [Laughter] But that is one of the things I remember most particularly about her. She had a way of making you more aware of how you could learn something without making you feel inferior that you hadn't thought of it yourself.

Sullivan: Can you talk a little bit about that gift? How did it show itself?

Albaugh: Oh, I remember thinking this one time: When I was a youngster I think I never went anywhere that my mother didn't say to me, "Now be a good girl!" I didn't exactly know what being a good girl really consisted of except to stay out of trouble. But, for instance, if I was going to a conference, and Miss Bird would say, "Be sure to get to know Mr. Jones," or "Notice what they're doing about this. I think you'll be interested." She had this ability to stimulate.



Albaugh: I will admit, when I went to conferences the first few times I went because I thought I should and not with any idea whatsoever of learning anything, but she instilled in me this capacity to make this count for more than just credit for going to a conference. That's one way.

She would say, when I would report something that had happened in class--maybe a little disciplinary problem which I wanted her to know from me--she would say, "What a professional way to handle it!" Mercy! I didn't know it was professional! But I learned from that.

Sullivan: By just getting feedback on what you had done well.

Albaugh: By her identifying what conduct was professional.

Sullivan: The accent on the positive.

Albaugh: And she was much more likely to develop feelings that you had done well than any reproach for not having handled it the best way. She might say, "Have you every thought of trying--" but I don't recall her ever making me feel inferior. Ever!

Sullivan: I wonder if you, or anyone here, can recall incidents where some reprimand was in order, some correction, something negative had to be said or dealt with that you witnessed Grace Bird handling.

Albaugh: You're talking about faculty people?

Sullivan: Faculty people or also students.

Levinson: Well, this is a little tiny thing: There was a lad, about six feet two inches, weighing 220 pounds, playing halfback, red-haired, and heaven only knows how, he had got from his parents the name, Marion. He wanted to go to Stanford. He was just an average student. Oh, a C student. He applied and, because of his football prowess had a pretty good chance of getting in. But unfortunately, he began getting letters, rush letters, from sororities at Stanford. [Laughs]

And he came into Grace [mimics voice quality of big adolescent boy], "I don't want to go to Stanford if they think I'm a girl."

And I remember her saying to him, "Oh Red, don't be a fool! Now you sit down and get the rest of your papers ready and write to them and tell them in just so many words, 'Marion is my first name and I am a male and I'm applying for entrance.' Now don't be--"

"Oh, I won't do it!" Well he fiddled around for a long time, 'til it was almost too late and she finally kidded him into submitting the supporting papers that were required and of course he got in and





Levinson: he went to Stanford and he graduated. Well now, that was not a reprimand. It was a building up of the boy's confidence in himself which had been torn down by his sorority letters. [Laughter]

Sullivan: She could be very direct though and say, "Now don't be a fool."

Albaugh: Oh very! Yes! Yes, she certainly could.

[Addressing another interviewee] Do you remember the time that the students wanted--I don't remember now what it was precisely--but they wanted something about their ceremony of graduation to be different from the way it had been and this had developed into a cause with them. And I remember Grace's calling a meeting of the students and the faculty. She had a number of announcements to make. Then she said, "I wish to remind you that the graduation ceremony is a function of the board." That's all. Of course, you couldn't do that now, but at that time, it was indeed a function of the administration.

Sullivan: And it was not open for discussion.

Albaugh: No. That's right.

Sullivan: I wonder how she would handle that now. She might make that announcement, but she'd have the "yes, buts--"

Albaugh: I don't know. She was an administrator in a period when there was a definite function for the board and a function for the faculty and a function for the administration.

Oh, she would have developed with it.

Sullivan: Virginia, do you want to talk about your first acquaintance with Grace?

Forker: Well, mine of course, was very much earlier than these girls because I came here in 1924, and Grace, of course, as Dorothy said, was vice principal of the high school at that time.

Sullivan: She was also director of the junior college.

Forker: Oh, yes, the junior college and we were all together. We were all mixed up there together on the campus, high school campus really then.

Sullivan: Were you one of the young women teachers who were boarding with Mrs. Dr. Mitchell?

Forker: No, I wasn't. I had a friend from Mills who was here. She was a music supervisor. She and two other women and I had a house together



Forker: that first year.

And of course, I remember Grace mostly as the vice principal of the high school.

Albaugh: And socially.

Forker: And socially, of course. As time went on much more socially than in any other way. I had more dealings with her that way than any other way. And of course, Grace just loved parties.

Sullivan: Oh, can you talk about this? [Laughter] It's great to get recollections of Grace during the twenties.

Forker: Well, our faculty of course was not nearly so large as it grew to be later on. But she enjoyed parties and she would have faculty parties. And she also enjoyed dress-up parties where we wore different costumes or whatever pleased us.

Sullivan: Now, would Grace organize them? Was Grace the organizer?

Albaugh: You bet!

Forker: Yes. Anything she had anything to do with was organized and she did it, and did it well. We had lots of fun at those things.

Sullivan: Can you recall some of the parties?

Forker: I don't really recall any particular one or anything that happened especially, but there were performances from difference ones who could do things like playing the piano or singing or anything of that kind. But she brought in, tried to bring in, anyone's talent that she knew of.

Sullivan: Well now, would she give the parties at her home?

Forker: No. She did give many parties at her home. That was another thing. But she did organize these faculty parties and we had a good time at those.

Sullivan: In the auditorium?

Forker: Or the gym. Usually that was used 'cause there was space there. But she got everybody to cooperate with her and we just had a good time--together. And we got to know other members of the faculty well that way too.

Sullivan: And if they had talents you'd see so-and-so could play an instrument.



Forker: Yes, what they were able to do. Yes.

Sullivan: And that's a way of getting to know people.

Forker: Yes, and she would sometimes beforehand give names to people. For instance, she would mix them up and have, say, an English teacher be a football coach, play the part of that throughout the party.

Sullivan: That's a skillful educational device.

Forker: Well it was her desire, I think, to mix us all up and to get us to know each other, socially as we might not otherwise.

Sullivan: Well that's really a trick, to bring a disparate group of people together and really get them mixing. Can you recall parties at her home? Were they dinner parties?

Forker: Oh yes. Yes. Or evening parties where something was served. Oh yes. She enjoyed that too. Very much. And in that way she brought in a great many of the people in the community and they became interested in the school, the junior college as it was then, through her, and through these get togethers. [Laughs]

Sullivan: Now one of the things I'm wondering is how she avoided hurt feelings in the invitations. She certainly couldn't have the whole faculty all at once with community people.

Forker: Oh no, I don't think they even expected to be invited.

Levinson: I used to be invited there for bridge with, oh, the McNamaras and the Moores and all those people and I'd maybe be the only person on the faculty but she would bring people together who she thought would enjoy one another. She had a sense of what this person would like and what another person would like.

Albaugh: She loved all kinds of games--pencil and paper games.

Forker: Yes. Word games.

Albaugh: And I remember one where you'd make up a hotel reservation sort of like this: Mr. and Mrs. Pasto and Auntie Pasto. [All laugh heartily]

Sullivan: Did you have to bring one such hotel reservation?

Albaugh: This was sprung on you at the party and then everybody made up a registration and that was fun. I remember another party where all the people that were there were members of the faculty. And each person drew a name and then he was to compose a brief description and then see if people could guess the name.



Sullivan: Would it be the name of somebody who was there?

Albaugh: The name of someone there, or on the faculty at least.

Sullivan: Did it have to be a funny description?

Albaugh: No. It could be poetic, but the idea was to have it good enough in the seven words you were allowed so that people would guess who it was.

Forker: Yes, so as not to last too long. [Chuckles]

Charades was one of the--good ice breakers. She had endless devices to bring people together, I think.

[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]

Levinson: For instance, they'd have a Sadie Hawkins party and Grace would come in costume of somebody in Dogpatch and encourage other women on the faculty to come all gussied up in some sort of way.

I remember one--I think those pictures are up in the office--where she was done up in evening dress and, you know, feathers and long gloves and what not, a very extreme evening dress. I went as somebody in a wheelchair and Hazel Aldrich pushed me, all of us assuming roles completely different from what we normally were. This was a student party but the faculty women were all invited to come and came in costume because Grace said, "Let's all dress up." And so we all dressed up.

Sullivan: And would the students dress up?

Levinson: Oh yes, the students would be dressed up.

Sullivan: Do you have any idea of where she got all these devices? Did she make them up?

Forker: Yes. I think she did. Take charades for instance, she would add something to it or put something into a game she already knew that would make it different and make it more interesting.

Albaugh: She had known--can't think of his name.

Levinson: Porter Garnett.

Albaugh: Apparently the Garnetts were devoted to various rather elaborate spoof parties and I'm sure she brought some of the ideas from that.

Forker: I remember one party. Do you remember Louise and Stod Atwood moved here from Los Angeles and they had been neighbors of the Lawrence





- Forker: Tibbetts? They knew them very well and they came up here to visit them one time. Lawrence was not there, but his wife and some other relatives of the family were at this party here. We all went over to Grace's house. She had a party that included them. There was nothing special about it except it was lively and fun. We always had good times at her parties.
- Sullivan: One of the things that occurred to me is that a lot of this was going on during prohibition, wasn't it?
- Forker: Yes. This was during prohibition.
- Sullivan: Grace has talked to me about when the cocktail became part of the social scene and I wonder whether Grace's wit and games were not another kind of ice breaker.
- Forker: I think her real ingenuity took the place of cocktails. You wouldn't think of them. I mean, it wasn't necessary. [Laughs]
- Sullivan: You'd get high on just having fun. She had a great sense of fun, didn't she?
- Forker: Yes.
- Levinson: Fun as well as wit. There was a marvelous sense of fun, a marvelous sense of appreciation of the ridiculous. To this day, she hardly writes that she doesn't include a little clipping from Herb Caen's column or from something else that's hilariously funny. Just the whole clutch of them. And she was the kind of person to whom you went with things that were funny.
- Albaugh: Oh yes. That's true.
- Levinson: You told jokes to her when you heard them; whenever you got these incredible boners on papers, no matter what they were, you couldn't wait to heat a trail to her office and tell her and the next time you heard it, she'd be telling it to somebody else. You know, this was fuel to that mind of hers and she made up better stories than you ever started.
- Albaugh: She improved upon them! [Laughter all around]
- Sullivan: We talked a little bit about how she began to bring in people from the community through these parties. One of the things that Grace was known for was building community relations. Do you want to talk about your recollections of Grace as a liaison person between the college and the community?
- Albaugh: I do remember the many social events and I also remember this, that



- Albaugh: occasionally--this was in no way to impress me with the students-- but she would, perhaps, be looking over a class list and she would say, "This young man comes from the Lebec area where his family has lived for a number of years," or she would identify students for me which, of course, meant that she knew a great deal about the development of the community.
- Forker: Well your thinking of her bringing people from the community, being interested in them and having them interested in the college I think was largely through her participation in the events, the social events, I mean the cultural events, in the town.
- Sullivan: Oh, will you talk about that?
- Forker: Well, I don't know that there's much to say about it; however, she was always interested in what we then called The Music Association. It's now Community Concerts; she'd go to those and discuss the things that were produced with others and she was very much interested in dramatics.
- Sullivan: How was she involved in drama? There was a community theatre organized here?
- Forker: Yes, and of course Robbie [Ethel Robinson], with whom she lived for many years here, was the dramatics instructor here.
- Levinson: For instance, when they put on plays she would always go down with Robbie the night of the performance and help make up the kids.
- Sullivan: Somebody talked about that, having Grace make her up, the other day.
- Levinson: Yes. And she would go to rehearsals and offer suggestions to Robbie and she was just very much part of it.
- Forker: And Robbie respected her opinion.
- Sullivan: And she herself acted in plays, didn't she?
- Albaugh: I think she had done some before she came, but I will say that I'm sure Robbie contributed to this. She was a really talented person. I am not devoted to amateur productions. [Laughter]
- They were not amateur shows. They were beautifully done.
- Forker: "Alice In Wonderland" she did here and it was really very fine. Lots of other things she did too.
- Sullivan: Virginia, do you remember Grace clowning?
- Forker: Oh, clowning, at a party, yes.



Sullivan: But I get the impression that her clowning was at a level of rather high wit.

Levinson: It was intellectual.

Sullivan: One of the things I wonder is whether Grace Bird, set down in New York City, wouldn't have been part of the Algonquin luncheon crowd-- a Dorothy Parker.

Levinson: Yes. She liked Dorothy Parker for one thing, and Ogden Nash; and FPA was one of her very favorites, for sure. Of course, Ogden Nash was not part of that, but I'm thinking of the kinds of people that she had fun with. She was always writing jingles, too. Always. Sometimes they were acrostics, sometimes they were limericks, sometimes they were some other verse form. She does that to this day. When Edna Taber retired, which was three years ago, something like that, there was a great big, fancy, snake wrestle, and Grace was not able to be here. She wrote a little thing and asked me to read it for her, and it was in verse and it was funny and just darling.

At the Student Executive Counsel banquets, one of which was held with every change of officers, she always had a game plan before she went. And instead of just getting up and saying, "You are the hope of tomorrow," and so forth and so forth, she had cute things to say, more often than not in verse.

Individual comments about students; I know this is the way we all picked up things from her, because I found some of my own stuff that I said in the executive counsels that sounded just like the kind of thing Grace would have done, and I had to learn that from her, because that didn't occur to me. I wouldn't have thought of that.

She'd go to a football banquet and if she didn't know who was playing defensive end, she'd find out before she got there so she could say something about this guy.

Forker: And in the early days too, we had quite a football reputation here.

Sullivan: In the high school particularly, I understand.

Forker: They just won game after game. Of course, she associated herself with the boys and knew them well and participated in that.

Sullivan: This is very unusual for a woman at any time, but I would think particularly then.

Albaugh: She could talk with a mathematics person, man, woman, teacher or she could go over and talk to the football coach equally.

Sullivan: One of the things I wonder about when I hear all of these things



Sullivan: that Grace did. You, who knew her so well, were there moments when she just collapsed and withdrew?

Levinson: You didn't see it. I'm sure there must have been. Robbie might have. And I think she did. Once in a while Robbie would indicate that Grace would just fold.

Albaugh: She's always reminded me of a Renaissance woman, with this broad interest. You can see in the names of the organizations at the junior college, the influence of her French, the Renegades, and the Renegades Knights and the Lance and Shield. She really knew--I don't think I ever saw Grace pretend she knew something.

Sullivan: That's really saying something. Such a bright person, with such a fount of information must have done a lot of reading. And in order to read, you've got to withdraw a little. I know she does say she had to get alone to do her work and that must have been at night when no one was around. But did she ever say, "I'm sorry, I've just got to be alone for a few hours," or anything like that.

Albaugh: Not that I know of, but I do know at the beginning of the school semester, there were always so many things and I will say she might be a little short. She'd never lose her temper and she would, of course, take care of anything that was necessary, but you didn't go there with your joke those days. You waited 'til the pressure was off.

Very seldom, but occasionally, she would shut the door to her office. Most of the time it was open.

Levinson: I'd forgotten that. It was open, which meant that everybody else left the door open.

Sullivan: Did you come as a counselor, Ruth?

Maguire: Yes. Miss Bird was only here about two years after I came in 1948. I came here to work under her.

I think this is an interesting point: After I had seen her as a person dealing with the men administrators of the junior colleges, I didn't see Miss Bird again for some years. In the meantime, I was working in the admissions office at UCLA. I became secretary to the director of admissions, Merton Hill. Also, I was an evaluator of records and things like that at UCLA. And I can remember to this day when we'd get transcripts from Bakersfield Junior College we were always so glad because we could depend on them. We knew that the grades that were listed meant something.

Sullivan: You knew there was substance behind the grades.





Maguire: Yes. Very much. And so Bakersfield College came again into my thinking, you see. What a firm junior college this must be. And being a southern California person, you know, we didn't ordinarily think much of north of the Tehachapi.

And then, I didn't hear anything more about Miss Bird or Bakersfield. I went back to Syracuse and I did a study on junior college transfers to Syracuse University. And I had to go to different junior colleges in the East. But the name of Miss Bird would come up among administrators of these different schools and at Syracuse Miss Bird was regarded as the dean of the junior colleges in California.

Sullivan: And wouldn't they have met her at meetings of national organizations?

Maguire: Yes. I remember one said, "Well if you want to learn anything about the junior college you better go out to California and get acquainted with Grace Bird. She is the dean of the junior colleges. I didn't know I was going to be coming back to California but I did. And I wanted to work under Miss Bird.

So I've know Miss Bird not quite the way that these girls have known her. I've known her just kind of--

Sullivan: By reputation?

Maguire: Yes, by reputation. Also, Bakersfield College was a little bigger by the time I came. So, I didn't work as closely with Miss Bird as did Miss Levinson or Miss Albaugh. Also, counseling was a comparatively new field, and I was responsible to the director of counseling and guidance. However, it was Miss Bird who envisioned the future value of counseling in the junior college.

Sullivan: It was not taken seriously really until when? When did counseling become established?

Maguire: Well, we're still working at it. Probably not until late fifties. Anyway, I had heard that Miss Bird was very interested in this new movement in personnel work. Of course, I was interested that there could be an administrator who knew the worth of counseling for students in higher education. And so, naturally, I became very interested in this woman and certainly she had the "personnel point of view" as we used to call it. I discussed counseling with her. I remember doing that one or two times.

Sullivan: Well I know that she relied a lot on her counselors and believed in their value.

Maguire: She believed in the counseling process. She believed that counselors were an important branch of the junior college staff.



- Sullivan: Do you want to say anything about her ideas about counseling or your experience as a counselor working with her?
- Maguire: Well, I am sure that she recognized that students had other sides and needs as well as the academic and that one must consider the person as a whole--including the out-of-school experiences and the effect on academic performance. I think that would be one of her great gifts to me, that she felt the total person was very important and that it was the business of the counselor to put the pieces together.
- Sullivan: How about encouraging you to talk with teachers of the students? This is an area that needs a certain amount of fostering, doesn't it, by the administration.
- Maguire: It certainly does. Of course, my mentors are right here [laughter], Peg and Dorothy.
- Sullivan: There's a chain here I think. People passing a light along.
- Maguire: To learn more about the junior college and its students, I sat in one of Dorothy's courses so I could learn what the two-year student or terminal student could expect out of the psychology course. And, of course, to me that was just a marvelous experience that a professor would let a counselor come into the classroom. Counselors were not invited in other places. I had worked in the University of California and I'd worked in Syracuse University and counselors were never invited into the classroom. We were just sort of over here and the faculty was over there on the university campuses. Bakersfield College was just an amazing place when I met people like Peg and Dorothy and other teachers and administrators who thought that counseling was important. Needless to say, this was quite an experience and I thought this was a lovely place to work. And to this day I've always been pleased they paid me for my kind of work-- [Laughter]
- Sullivan: That's the best thing you can say about work. If you feel lucky to be paid for doing what you enjoy.
- Maguire: I feel I was one of these people who fell into the right niche. And Grace Bird, of course, fostered it. Miss Bird was far ahead of her time in utilizing counseling skills to augment instructional skills.
- Sullivan: Can you go into any detail about how the counselor was incorporated into the teaching program.
- Maguire: We had academic status.
- Sullivan: Were counselors paid more than faculty?



Maguire: No.

Sullivan: In other words, what's unique about teaching, or counseling, or administering at a junior college?

Levinson: Oh, I think there's a big difference in the teaching. For one thing the emphasis at the junior college level has always been on teaching rather than on publishing or on research. The emphasis has been on the student and what one, as a member of the teaching faculty, can give him. And to that end the whole administrative process was geared!

[end tape 1, side 2; begin tape 2, side 1]

Levinson: Students come back and say, "Well I don't get the kind of teaching at the university that I got at Bakersfield College. I don't have the same relationship with my instructors. I'm lucky if I have a T.A. that knows me."

Sullivan: And that's very hard on them.

Levinson: Oh sure it's hard on them! And then when the students went into upper division--well of course we don't make that distinction, I know, anymore--but when they had graduated from here and gone on into upper division work they'd come back simply aghast at the difference in the presentation of material to them when in many cases professors could sit and read from something they were writing, some study they themselves were doing. They were not concerned with transmitting knowledge or understanding to a group. So there is that difference I'm sure. As for the difference between high school and college, I've never taught at the high school level, but I do know that students coming up learn at the junior college, and very gratefully, what the difference is between supervised education and independent education. And that the junior college has always stood as a wonderful way of making a transition into independent work.

Sullivan: That's one of the great arguments for the junior college, isn't it? That developmentally it makes sense.

Albaugh: That's right.

Maguire: And this is a period where some students who have not even thought about learning. They're slow bloomers we call them, the later bloomers, where we work with them and all of a sudden turn on. They couldn't get into the university to begin with and then you see them begin to develop and go on to the university. At the junior college, you're working with a person and whether he's going to the university or whether he is going to be a mechanic, you respect the person or you should or you shouldn't be in junior college work.



- Levinson: I don't know whether anybody has mentioned this anywhere along the line. I'm thinking of another thing about this slow learner business, the tremendous influence that the junior college had, and Bakersfield College in particular, on the returning veterans after World War II.
- Sullivan: We touched on it, but this is an important area.
- Levinson: Well, Grace was very active in the ACE at that time, in setting up and--
- Sullivan: What's ACE?
- Levinson: American Council of Education--setting up and implementing credit-giving devices so that a man having served so many months in such and such a branch of a military service was automatically granted so many college units. There was a regular, fancy scale of transfer units there and Grace was particularly concerned with these young men who might at one time have been in junior college and absolutely bombed out! Who after two or three or four years of service came back and were ready to pick up and go. And we saw that over and over and over again. That was the time that the "normal" junior college student called the veterans the DARs, the damned average raisers, because here they were, motivated like everything, to work--and work they did! We never had really a more exciting time educationally I think! Wouldn't you say, Dorothy?
- Albaugh: Oh, never!
- Levinson: Than when those young men came back. Such as the kid who would come in with, having been in junior college for a semester, sixteen good, solid units of *F*! [Laughter] But bright as anything! Had gone into officers training. Had come out probably a first lieutenant or a captain, had in the meantime married and had got the word. The process of watching what happened to him--I'm thinking of one lad in particular who wiped out the *F*s in nothing flat--but went on to complete not only a fine lower division program, but went on to Cal and was a Phi Beta. That kind of thing is pretty exciting.
- And Grace was very active in that. And she was absolutely intent on the entire faculty's uniting in giving these people the chance that for some reason they'd muffed before.
- Sullivan: It you really believe in democracy, you believe in the potential of the individual and you work for means to release that.
- Levinson: And, of course, incidentally that's a great big difference for kids who return from Vietnam. They never had that.





Sullivan: Never had what, Peg? Now this is interesting, the difference between the two groups of veterans.

Levinson: Well, I can't put my finger on that because, again, I was not there when they came back, but I do know there was not the motivation, there was not the sense of pride in what they'd been doing for one thing. They weren't proud to have returned from the wars with their heads up. These kids came back slinking, a lot of them.

Sullivan: And on the defensive.

Levinson: And on the defensive like everything!

Maguire: Give me everything because you owe it to me. I mean that was the attitude.

Levinson: And that's part of the world. That isn't just part of the junior college.

Sullivan: Are they a less bright group of young men?

Maguire: No.

Sullivan: No. That's very interesting. There's a social change. Before we run out of tape I want to ask a question about standards. Ruth, you said earlier that when you saw Bakersfield transcripts you knew that every grade meant what it was purported to be and somebody was there maintaining standards and seeing that the whole system worked so that the standards were very clear. How were they established and maintained?

Levinson: I attribute it to the leadership at Bakersfield College.

Albaugh: There was the technique too.

Sullivan: What was the technique, Dorothy?

Albaugh: The universities provided the junior college, on request, with the grade records of the transferred students. I don't know that that could be done now, but it was then. Then you, as a faculty member, had access to this so you could see how your students did in advanced work in the field that you thought you had prepared them for.

Levinson: If you'd given him a *B* in Psych 1A-1B and he continued to do *B* in upper division work, or even a strong *C+* you knew you were on pretty sound ground. If he began flunking out you knew that somehow something had happened. You didn't know whether it was to him or whether this was a question of your grading. You had something tangible to judge on.



- Albaugh: We also used a good many of the standardized tests and we had the national means and the norms for those.
- Levinson: And Grace used to conduct faculty meetings and say, "Our record was such and such in such and such semester, shows that we have a differential of only so many--" We were informed.
- Sullivan: Grace kept you aware.
- Levinson: Oh, you bet she did!
- Sullivan: It seems to me that you had an informal way of all working together, but obviously there was an organizational chart and everybody had a role. But the key thing about an organization is it has a life of its own and yours certainly did. Can you tell about how you communicated?
- Maguire: Well, that was the thing that I saw here. When I came here the faculty and the administration--you'd meet them in the hall. There was no feeling that you were over here and the administration was over there. They were all working toward a common purpose. They seemed to be interested in what they were doing. You could talk with these people. I'll say that the tone is set by your top leaders in that kind of thing.
- Sullivan: Grace set the tone and her sensitivity in reaching out was crucial.
- Levinson: It was an amazing experience.
- Maguire: It was so different.
- Sullivan: I have the impression that what was going on in Bakersfield was education the way we all had in mind education ought to be carried on when we first set out looking for jobs.
- Levinson: It was pretty utopian. It wasn't just faculty and administration. The students were involved in it. Very active student government.
- Albaugh: I remember one great "to do" over, I can't remember what it was about now, but something about the paper. And there was a faculty group and a student group.
- Levinson: Oh, the Activities group! They had a representative of each activity and the advisor for that activity and we all met regularly. Any student that felt he had a complaint could come to that meeting and indicate what he felt.
- Sullivan: How was it dealt with?
- Levinson: We talked it out, usually. It, more often than not, had to do with



- Levinson: budget allocations. There wasn't any money to do this or the paper was getting too much and social affairs getting too little or something. And that could be ironed out usually.
- Albaugh: And once in a while it was a legal point. I remember one time a group, seems to me they were far right but I'm not sure, wanted to put out a little paper and did. And they were being supported by outside people and this, at that time, was illegal. So after the students really understood that they couldn't accept money from the outside and distribute it as a school production they were quite satisfied.
- Levinson: I just thought of something else. Grace regularly met with the president of the student body, whoever it was. I don't know how often.
- Sullivan: Just the two of them?
- Levinson: Yes. Just the two of them. And she would imbue that person somehow with her ideas of what a student body was, what it could do, what it might not do legally, the student problems. This was a tremendous thing.
- Sullivan: What a good idea. Did the size of the place have anything to do with the fact that you all worked so well together?
- Levinson: I think so. And I think too--remember, Bakersfield at that time was really much more isolated than it is now. The road from here to Los Angeles was about two hours longer.
- Sullivan: You're talking about the period before World War II? Or through the fifties?
- Levinson: Well even during, up to the fifties?
- Sullivan: It was after Grace left that Bakersfield began to change, would you say?
- Albaugh: Well, when we separated from the high school in '56.
- Maguire: That was a big advantage in some ways and not so much in others.
- Sullivan: One of the things that occurs to me is how much time each one of you and Grace spent on the job and I wonder if people are less willing to spend that kind of time teaching or administering or counseling now.
- Albaugh: Well I can say in my own department, yes, there's a big change. The younger people work their required hours and that's it. If they do



- Albaugh: anything more they want extra pay and certainly I don't think that ever occurred to us--maybe it should have.
- Sullivan: Well I was just wondering how much of Bakersfield College in Grace Bird's years is not perhaps rooted in very different attitudes toward work, towards spending more time and energy on the job than we're seeing now.
- Levinson: There was a pride in working.
- Albaugh: We were working for the junior college and there was pride in the community too for their junior college.
- Sullivan: What has changed? Is there some disillusionment in what education can do, even in Bakersfield?
- Albaugh: Yes. Oh, yes.
- Sullivan: Do you want to talk about those changes?
- Albaugh: Well they began a long time before, because we had a faculty meeting I remember upon one occasion and there was a proposal that the grade-- this was early on-- of *F*, except for withdrawal after the permissible time, be abandoned. And one of the arguments for it was that in a way students interpreted an *F* as if they were a failure instead of its meaning merely that they didn't learn enough in that course to be given credit for it. And I remember the chairman of the social science division who was Van Ewert at that time giving an impassioned plea for the right of the person to know that he had not succeeded, that he had failed in this particular.
- Sullivan: When was this, Dorothy?
- Albaugh: Forty-eight, forty-nine, something like that. That was the beginning of the questioning of any competitive grading. Now I think there's a little reversal that's already set in, but for a while you were getting 60 percent of the grades *A* and *B* and that doesn't leave much meaning for either of them.
- Sullivan: No. Then a *C* is about equivalent to an *F*.
- Maguire: This is all throughout the country.
- Albaugh: This is right down from the university. I am disappointed in the university!
- Sullivan: How have they negatively influenced what you try to do in the junior college?





- Albaugh: Of course there is their own grade inflation and secondly, there was a time when you knew exactly where you stood with the university and if the student had all of these requirements completed you'd know he was going to get into the university. If he didn't you could say, "Now I think you'd better stay another semester and get this cleaned up because you will not be eligible for the university." Today, That is not so. There are so many loopholes.
- Sullivan: And you could now say, "I don't think you'll get into the university, you have to work on this," but the university will say, "Come on in."
- Albaugh: That's how it is now. State colleges also. It's not just the university.
- Sullivan: Is this a result of what we call "affirmative action?" Trying to make special admissions procedures for disadvantaged people?
- Albaugh: Partly. I think there's another aspect and that is the belief that everyone is equal in every facet. I believe every human being is important. I believe in equal opportunity, but if I studied violin from now to doomsday I could never be a Heifetz. I think there's a need to recognize there is not complete equality in all talents. But this is a belief that's all over the country I think.
- Maguire: That's true and I will say though, I think now we have rounded the thing out a little bit because the University of California and state colleges are beginning to realize that this is not working out so well, this grade inflation. I'm sorry I'm leaving right now because the last ten years have been rough.
- Sullivan: Our time is running out. Does anyone have a last Grace Bird story to tell?
- Maguire: I can tell you about going with Grace to an art gallery in London and that she almost tired me out. [Laughter]
- Sullivan: Describe that, Ruth.
- Maguire: Her knowledge and her boundless energy were so clearly exhibited in an afternoon spent in the National Portrait Gallery. We had been tramping all over London in the early morning, we visited the art gallery in the afternoon, and then we had a dinner party that night, and Grace was just as bright and chipper and telling stories and I was just out!
- Sullivan: What is it? Her metabolism? [Laughter]
- [end tape 2, side 1]



Theron McCuen, Hazel McCuen

[Interview 1: April 22, 1977]  
[begin tape 1, side 1]

Sullivan: Mr. McCuen, Grace Bird told me that she first met you when you were a teacher. When was that, and I wonder if you would talk about what you were doing as a teacher and what your first impressions of Miss Bird as an administrator were.

T. McCuen: I came to Bakersfield and the district in 1929. My assignment was full time in the high school at Bakersfield High School (at that time it was called Kern County High School). The junior college had need for some special classes in engineering--engineering drawing, and I was assigned such a class to teach in the evening. So I met Grace in connection with that assignment.

Because of the assignment, I also attended the college faculty meetings, and my earliest recollections go back to the faculty meetings that Grace had. Of course, being a new teacher, I wasn't in a position to compare her faculty meetings with other faculty meetings, and I've found over the years that faculty meetings can differ a great deal. But in retrospect, as I look back on her meetings, I can say that they were significant meetings; they were well-organized; there was no waste time--the content was always directed toward the improvement of instruction, the improvement of the instructional process itself, and toward a discussion of curriculum.

I think she was one of the leaders in the development of the counseling movement in junior colleges, because the junior colleges were moving at that time from their earlier purpose, which was primarily lower division, toward a more comprehensive institution. This was a natural for Grace because she was student-oriented. I would say that was one of her prime assets as an administrator. The student was first, and you just knew the student was first; there was no question about it.

She knew the students. It was amazing! You may have heard somebody say how at graduation time, she didn't have a list; she'd call the students' names as they came by. There were, I guess, over a hundred, a hundred and fifty graduates. People marvelled at her that she would know them. That's just indicative of her care for the students.

Another indication was the correspondence she carried on with the young men in the service during the war.



Sullivan: She's talked about that.

T. McCuen: But going back to the point, her concern for students; the student was the reason for the school being in existence. So she was shaping the courses of study, the curricula, to meet the needs of a cross section of students, not only for the lower division transfer type, but the terminal students.

During this same period--well, during her whole tenure here--she was very active in the California Junior College Association. I could see, as a faculty person attending association conferences here, and later as an administrator attending meetings over the state, that when Grace spoke, everybody listened. Her papers that she presented at those conferences were thorough, they were significant, and were a contribution to the junior college movement.

Sullivan: This was at the junior college association conferences.

T. McCuen: At the conferences I'm talking about now, yes. And at the same time, in her own activities.

I'm moving on now from the earlier years. We had in the district what was called an advisory council made up of the district staff people--two or three staff people at that time and the principal of each high school, plus Grace in the junior college. A wonderful opportunity for coordination between high schools and junior colleges. In those meetings, when Grace spoke, everybody listened. She was a good contributor. She knew when not to speak and when to speak, and she was a tremendous asset to, I think, the level to which we aspired in the direction of the meeting and in our total goals for education, because we had such great respect for her.

Going further into the counseling aspect and curricula, in the middle forties, after World War II, with the returning service men, the community college idea began to develop--and it just blossomed. We realized that in preparing graduates for terminal education, we needed greater knowledge of the outlets in the district and opportunities.

So, we determined--this was the superintendent's office and Grace--that we needed an occupational survey. We selected a physics teacher. He was an academically oriented individual, but he had an interest in applied technology. His name was Norman Harris. Have you heard of him?

Sullivan: Yes.

T. McCuen: He was in the service, in the navy, an officer in World War II. As a result of this activity, which he carried on successfully--it was



- T. McCuen: sort of a monumental thing, it was a new thing, the occupational survey--he was called for consulting assignments over the state and over the country. He directed ou terminal-education occupational courses for a while. But, as often happens with somebody of that caliber, you lose them.
- Sullivan: He was hired out of the district, wasn't he?
- T. McCuen: He went to the University of Michigan.
- Sullivan: But he did this occupational survey for the district.
- T. McCuen: That's right.
- Sullivan: Was this an idea that Miss Bird came up with?
- T. McCuen: I can't tell you. I'm sure she had an important part in it.
- Sullivan: She was very keen on finding out who were the students in the district and what were their backgrounds, isn't that right?
- T. McCuen: That's right; there's no question about it. That's so important in any level of education, but particularly in the junior college.
- Sullivan: Do you think that she was an influence, a force, for getting more of this done in the district than might have been done otherwise?
- T. McCuen: I think she was. She had great vision. At the district level we were concerned, by necessity, with rapid growth in enrollments.
- For example, when I became superintendent in 1945, we had around five thousand students in the high schools and the junior college. When I retired in 1968--of course, this was some years after Grace left--we had 28,000 students and we were opening a new high school every four years.
- Sullivan: Did a big rise in the student population come in the thirties with the in-migration from other parts of the country?
- T. McCuen: No, not a big rise, but we did have some growth in the thirties. This caused considerable difficulty because of the laws of the state governing financing schools; you were limited on raising your tax rate, and also it was very difficult to pass bond elections.
- For example, the district couldn't even pass a \$200,000 bond issue then. In 1945, after the war was over--a lot of people left during the war and the junior college enrollment dropped significantly and they had to reduce faculty and so on--but immediately after the war, the enrollment just really started up.





T. McCuen: In 1947, we developed a program--this is mainly high school, but it affected Bakersfield College because then it was resident of the campus with Bakersfield High school--we had to give that campus relief, and so the district proposed a six-million dollar bond issue. Most people thought we were rather foolish and that we were embarking on something that was unattainable. But we carried it. It was a six-to-one margin or something like that; people really voted it.

Sullivan: Did Miss Bird have anything to do with the enthusiasm for that?

T. McCuen: I'm sure she participated in the decision on the bond issue. I don't recall that she gave talks on it. As I recall, she left around 1949 or '50?

Sullivan: March of 1950. She left in the middle of the year.

T. McCuen: And Theron Taber was the acting president for a while, while we were making a search for her replacement. At the time I became superintendent in 1945, the board had a policy established to move toward a four-year junior college, grades eleven through fourteen. They were talking about some overlapping with four year high schools which would still have grades nine through twelve; some youngsters would go to East High, for example, two years and then transfer. This had been recommended by the previous superintendent, Dr. Nelson, who was a very thorough man. He was influenced, I'm sure, by Drs. Hart and Peterson from UC, who had made a survey here.

At that time, the four-year junior college was--I wouldn't say in its heyday, but people were still interested in it. Pasadena had one, and Napa, and Stockton, and some thought that it might be the solution here. I supported the idea, although I wasn't enthusiastic about it. When I became superintendent in 1945, my major task, I felt, in addition to keeping pace with housing, was a determination of the direction of the structure of the district--high school and junior college. (It was a high school district operating a junior college.)

With the principals of the high schools, and mainly Grace Bird, we conducted a study of structure throughout the state, and visited other junior colleges. One of the real key people in the junior college movement then was a man named John Morris. He's long since deceased. He was at the junior college when the first junior college district was established, about 1921. He was in San Mateo at the time of our study. We talked to him about their type of operation, which was the two-year junior college. We visited Pasadena and talked to those people about their four year junior college.

We came up with a recommendation that we abandon the plan of going toward a four-year junior college; that we establish a two-year



T. McCuen: junior college on a separate campus. I have a copy of the study that I can give you if you would like it.

Sullivan: It would be interesting for the archives.

T. McCuen: As background, yes. The study was the work of several staff people, including Grace. In it is a quotation from John Harbison, former president of Pasadena College, something like this: What is best, isn't either-or; it's what fits the situation best. We felt that here the two-year college on a separate campus was the answer. So the die was cast before Grace left.

Sullivan: What was there about the situation that made you decide that a two-year college would fit best?

T. McCuen: Better than the four? Well, we felt that youngsters--and we found this when people moved from one part of the district to another--youngsters don't want to transfer. We felt that youngsters at a high school at the end of two years would be reluctant to leave that school and, even though it's a four-year junior college, move over to the eleventh grade. They've established their relationships there, and they'll be reluctant to move. We felt that it would not be a practical situation. The youngsters in the city would find it easier to move maybe than those from the high schools in outlying areas like Shafter and McFarland. The four-year junior colleges had been set up in unified districts which include grades kindergarten through fourteen and are, by their nature, more homogeneous than our district

There was another factor. I'd better go on with the history, because it bears out. We were wiser than we knew, really. I can't claim any wisdom on what finally happened. But we did have this wisdom, I think: we knew we'd be in a more flexible position to adapt to conditions by retaining our two-year set up. So the die was cast in this direction.

I don't think we had selected a college site at the time, but we finally ended up with a site that Grace Bird envisaged--up on the hill, on the bluffs.

Sullivan: Yes, she has spoken about being very partial to that site.

T. McCuen: Oh, she was. We looked at sites there and on the southeast part of town. Of course it's a beautiful site, just outstanding.

During this period, the state of California was pushing districts toward unification--elementary, high schools, all the way through. It isn't settled here yet, really. The county committee on school district organization, which was a legal entity established by state



T. McCuen: law, one night was ready to chop the district up (this was the high school district, and that would be junior college too). I spoke to them that night. I remember the meeting so well, out in the Arvin area. One of their advisers was from the University of California, Ed Morphet, who was a very good friend of mine.

I pointed out that, in my judgment, in making this proposal they hadn't given real consideration to the effect on the junior college of cutting up the district in that way, limiting the geographical boundaries. They realized that. So I asked them to delay it so that we might move toward creating a junior college district with boundaries co-terminus with the high school district so that if the high school district were affected by the unification, reduced in size, it would not affect the junior college district.

Sullivan: What year was this?

T. McCuen: This must have been in the late fifties, '58 or '59.

Sullivan: Did Grace Bird ever come back and consult on any of these matters?

T. McCuen: No. We'd see her occasionally and in just a casual conversation, tell her about it. I might mention just a couple other steps, just to complete the history. What happened then was--we thought it might happen, but it happened sooner than we realized--other high school districts and unified districts--Delano, Wasco, Tehachapi Unified, and even Muroc Unified--petitioned to join the junior college district. Then, the most surprising thing happened one day. We had a contact from the superintendent of Porterville High School, which operated a junior college, asking if we would entertain the idea of Porterville annexing to the junior college district and we take over Porterville College. Of course, they knew it would be a financial help, but also they had great respect for the operation of Bakersfield College. So Porterville is now in the district.

The thing that I want to emphasize is this: the respect that people all over the state had for Bakersfield College wasn't something that developed after I became superintendent; it was there before. It developed under the direction of Grace Bird. An institution of quality, of integrity, of compassion--that was Grace Bird. Our job was just to try to keep it, and we worked hard to keep it. I'm sure they still have it; people still recognize it as an outstanding junior college.

Sullivan: What was it that she had as an administrator that enabled her to build that kind of a college?

T. McCuen: First, she had a real interest in people, whether it was the faculty or the student. She was a sensitive person. She was enthusiastic;



T. McCuen: come to her with an idea, and she'd be full of enthusiasm about it.

We mentioned her being multi-faceted. She was at home with the people in the community, the leaders of the community, with the students and their families. Her interest and understanding of athletics was unusual.

Then, she had a delightful sense of humor. We had an activity here-- a spring picnic on the school farm. Different schools and different groups would put on skits. I remember on one occasion Grace, put on a skit wearing a hat that was out of this world! I don't know whether it had birds coming out of it or what--

Sullivan: Probably birds.

T. McCuen: No, it didn't seem to. I think back now, over our relations with Grace, and now of the concern of people, about women; it was a matter of course. If you had what it took, you were there. Peg Levinson had a significant spot at the college, and Grace. Women's Lib just wasn't in the picture. You didn't give any special deference; she didn't ask for it. She was just there as another school person. But she was vital--no question about it.

Sullivan: How could she be the leader that she was without ruffling some feathers? She must have had ideas and she must have had to give orders. How did she handle such delicate matters?

T. McCuen: Of course, she would have planned very carefully ahead of time, and she would have her facts. She could on occasion be extremely firm. I didn't happen to be in her office watching her discipline people, but I know that certain faculty members were separated from the district if they didn't produce at the quality level that she expected. She'd recommend their dismissal.

It's hard to put your finger on the particular key. You can only talk about her understanding of the problem, which relates to her intelligence and her experience, and her empathy. I believe the person probably would have felt by the time they were separated that Grace had given them the second mile and had carefully evaluated them.

Sullivan: One of the things she said she believed an administrator should do for a teacher is to free the teacher to teach, and she said she believed that you should hire good teachers. By that she meant that they should not only have good records but what she described as having a happy heart.

T. McCuen: Yes, there was an air of freedom in the district. You could go in with a proposal and talk about your ideas. I remember I was going





- T. McCuen: in to Mr. Spindt--it would be the same with Grace--with an idea and he said, "I don't know. It sounds like a good idea. Why don't you try it?" So you had an opportunity to fly off here and fall down if you didn't produce.
- Sullivan: It's important to try new approaches.
- T. McCuen: I remember one year while I was still teaching, there was special emphasis on improvement of reading. This was high school and junior college. Faculty members were asked to submit proposals, how we were going to do it in our particular instructional activity.
- Sullivan: How could she mobilize a whole faculty behind an idea like that?
- T. McCuen: She could get ideas from different faculty people and her own too, and she would come in thoroughly prepared. It wasn't as if she had an idea just on the top of her head when she brought it to a faculty meeting, but she would have discussed it with certain people and bring it in as a comprehensive idea, with enthusiasm. You'd have such respect for her that you were going to do your best to put it through.
- Sullivan: Sounds as if she had that quality that so many successful school teachers have of making you want to do your best.
- T. McCuen: That's right. That's what it takes. She had it.
- Sullivan: As her fellow-administrator on the same level, and as a teacher supervised by her, and as a superintendent at a higher level than Miss Bird, do you have any observations you want to make comparing what you saw of Miss Bird from those three vantage points?
- T. McCuen: Well, it's hard to do it. I don't think I deferred to her particularly after I was superintendent. It might have been more because of what she did.
- Sullivan: What do you mean by that?
- T. McCuen: She respected my role, and that she didn't relate to me as she had before.
- [end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]
- Sullivan: You were saying that Miss Bird, in a way, was aware of the change in your position and made it easy for you.
- T. McCuen: Yes. I didn't have the feeling that there was any noticeable awareness, except she didn't react to me as, "I'm still supervising you." She had respect for the position of superintendent, and the greatest evidence was in the role she played. She played the role of a



- T. McCuen: principal or dean. (Now they call them presidents. At that time, the education code didn't prescribe the title of president. Otherwise, she'd have been president.) She operated in the role; she knew the role of the head of the college as opposed to the role of the chief executive officer of the district.
- Sullivan: Can you give me any specific instances of how she showed that?
- T. McCuen: Just in her manner and relationship, and not stepping over the bounds of propriety in policy, and that sort of thing.
- Sullivan: What you're describing is just a thoroughly intelligent woman.
- T. McCuen: Oh, you bet, you bet. There's no question about that.
- Sullivan: Did the fact that she is a great reader and a highly cultivated person in the arts show through in the way she did her job?
- T. McCuen: Of course, in her writing; her materials that she developed and wrote, and reports and this sort of thing were beautifully written. I always enjoyed reading the Chinese poems framed on her walls; there was physical evidence around. To answer your question, I don't remember specific things except the interest she showed in the arts and in musical programs and so on.
- Sullivan: You mentioned that her friendship and Herman Spindt's with Dr. Sproul, had a lot to do with Sproul's interest in the junior colleges.
- T. McCuen: I think so; I've always felt that.
- Sullivan: I just wondered if you wanted to talk about the development of the junior college movement in relationship to encouragement from the University of California or in terms of what Dr. Sproul did?
- T. McCuen: In the early years of the junior college, it was easy for some of the colleges and for some people in the junior college movement itself maybe to consider themselves as second-class citizens. Dr. Sproul, in his pronouncements, would speak of the transfer records of the students from the junior colleges and the success that they made, and also compare them with the native students. The university records gave definite evidence of the successes of the junior college.
- In the speech he gave here in 1956 (you can read the document I'll give you), he talks about the place of the junior college in meeting the expanding enrollments in higher education.
- I had a personal experience, not with Dr. Sproul but with his successor, Clark Kerr, in the development of the master plan for higher education. Dr. Kerr was wise enough, in setting up a committee to give the impetus to the master plan, a committee represented



T. McCuen: by people from junior colleges, the state colleges, the University of California, and private colleges; he set the committee up jointly with the then state superintendent of public instruction, Roy Simpson. I'm sure that was an outgrowth of Dr. Sproul's concern for the junior college. This was in about '58 or '59, I guess.

We met. There were about three or four people from junior college systems and three chancellors from the university campuses and state colleges and so on. This committee became the technical advisory committee that recommended the master plan committee be established through legislation and supplied with adequate funds. Then we continued on as a technical advisory committee to the full committee.

In those meetings, we got to see the attitude reflected by the university chancellors. We got to see, in our discussions, their respect for the junior college and its place. So, I trace this back to Dr. Sproul's empathy and understanding for the place of the junior college.

I had felt that the junior college was one of the most misunderstood institutions by so many people. People didn't realize its flexibility and its great value. I personally have felt that it probably is the greatest contribution, certainly in the first fifty years of this country, to education.

Sullivan: Do you want to expand on that? One of the things that I would like to hear you talk about is its role in the community and its relationship to the community.

T. McCuen: It can serve so many in a diverse population. For example, just people who want short-term courses, a few months--it's flexible. It can adapt a program to meet the needs in a community. The first great value I noticed was for people who went off to the service and came back and had a second chance; we learned an awful lot about late bloomers in that process. The people in higher education not familiar with the junior college felt that it was really a terminal institution, and they didn't realize the quality of instruction. I've felt that the junior college faculties are tremendously competent.

Sullivan: You don't feel that Bakersfield is an exception?

T. McCuen: At one time I would have thought so--at that time--but I think there are many good junior colleges now.

Sullivan: Do you want to say anything about financing junior college programs? You were so intimately involved with that. Or anything about Miss Bird's way of dealing with financial matters.

T. McCuen: She wasn't so close to the financial end of it. She was concerned



T. McCuen: about it and certainly recognized an awareness of the needs and limitations in budgets, and so on. In the early thirties, when I first became business manager, we were very limited, as all districts were, because of the Depression. The state gradually increased the tax allowed for the junior colleges, and we felt that we were on a pretty adequate basis for our operational expenses.

Sullivan; I want to interrupt to ask what year you became business manager.

T. McCuen: '36. They didn't have a business office then; they just had some clerks. My assignment was to establish the business office.

Sullivan: That's very interesting.

T. McCuen: It was. I had so many lucky roles to fill, it seems like--such fortunate experiences I had. Speaking of finance, I want to get into capital expense.

We decided to move the junior college to the separate campus. Of course, we had to have money to build buildings. We had a fortunate experience: in 1952, we had an earthquake that shattered some buildings and, instead of a modest \$7 or \$8 million bond issue, we decided we needed \$17 million. This was to provide funds for high schools and to rehabilitate some buildings damaged by the earthquake and to build Bakersfield College on a new campus. We were concerned what the attitude of the people would be toward, first, a \$17 million bond issue--that's a lot of money--and [using] a major part of it--\$10 million or so--for the junior college.

In the campaign--this was shortly after Grace had gone; we had the election in '53. Ralph Prator, Grace's successor, was president then. It was very interesting in the campaign and the election that the junior college aspect was the most popular part; it seems to me we carried the election about seven to one. I've always felt that it was the great reservoir of good will in the district for the junior college that carried the bond election. So, we had a lot of money and we went out and built the campus.

In the planning, Dr. Prator was president of the college and worked with faculty in developing the educational specifications. But a person who had a great role in translating, with the architects, the educational specifications to the facility, was Ed Simonsen.

Sullivan: Who had been Grace Bird's dean of men until that time.

T. McCuen: Yes. I remember that after the war they were looking for a dean of men. The reason was because I became superintendent and Theron Taber who had been dean of men, was recommended to take my position and be assistant superintendent. He was in the navy back in Colorado





- T. McCuen: at that time. He got the word that I was appointed superintendent, and I got a phone call; he wanted to know what I was going to do about filling my job. I said, "Well, there's a letter in the mail to you." [Laughter]
- Sullivan: Two great minds and a single thought. [Laughter]
- T. McCuen: "You'll get it tomorrow." Grace was--we were talking over the successor for dean of men. The name of Ed Simonsen, who was getting out of the marines, came up. He had been at the high school level really, but I told her I thought he was somebody I would take a second look at, and that I thought would make a good dean of men. He did.
- [Hazel McCuen comes into the room]
- Sullivan: Mrs. McCuen, you mentioned that there was one particular job you did for Grace Bird in the AAUW when you were vice president and she was president.
- H. McCuen: Yes. I was in charge of a mini-convention of AAUW people here, and it was a fun thing to do because of working for her, I think.
- Sullivan: What was it like to work for Grace Bird? What was there about working for her that made it fun?
- H. McCuen: Her mind made it more interesting, and then she did give the people who worked for her a feeling of confidence and that she expected them to do well.
- Sullivan: Was she demanding?
- H. McCuen: No, not at all.
- Sullivan: Was it a spiritual power?
- H. McCuen: Yes, I think so. And one other thing about her that seems interesting to me. I came down here while I was still a college student at College of the Pacific to debate with a junior college team (this was before I came here to teach), and I distinctly remember meeting her in the office at that time.
- Sullivan: Oh, what do you remember?
- H. McCuen: Well, that she was so tiny and quick and bright and I thought, bird-like. [Laughter]
- [end tape 1, side 2]



Lorraine Anderson, Edna Taber

[Interview 1: April 22, 1977]  
[begin tape 1, side 1]

Sullivan: I wonder if you want to start with any recollections of Miss Bird in regard to the athletic program, because we know that she was a supporter of athletics.

Taber: Well, the first that I heard about Miss Bird's athletic interest was when they told me that she scouted the high school for the high school games. She did all the scouting reports from that.

Sullivan: She would go to neighboring towns and watch the games--

Taber: And come back and check in with the coach on what she had learned about their team. Now I don't really know how long she did this, but she did do some of it.

And then, the next I remember about tickets is that when I came back from being in the navy with my husband [Theron Taber], she called and said, "Edna, these tickets are in a mess! Would you come and straighten them out?" Which I did on a half-time basis. That was in 1945, I think. And then, from then on I worked on tickets. Maybe every year I'd work another hour and the next year another hour until I was on full time with tickets and then as Dr. Simonsen's secretary.

Sullivan: But your acquaintance with her goes back beyond that, doesn't it? What do you remember about her in the late '20s?

Taber: I remember her when I was working even part time for Mr. [Herman] Spindt. She was in the same office, or in the same area.

Sullivan: Wasn't Mr. Spindt then superintendent of schools and Miss Bird the dean of the college?

Taber: That's right.

Sullivan: Do you have any recollections of her at that time?

Taber: Well, I have a very funny incident. [Chuckling] I can't exactly remember the date except that it was during registration and everything was hectic, because we did everything by hand. We had no computers or anything like that. And Miss Bird came dashing out of her office wanting to get in touch with a teacher right away and saw this young gentleman standing at the counter and she said, "Take this note to room so-and-so and wait for an answer and return



Taber: immediately!" And without anything further said, why this gentleman took off with the message.

And when he left I said, "Miss Bird, that was one of our new faculty!" [Laughter] Jack Frost. He did look like a junior college student. But he was very congenial and he got a big kick out of it.

Sullivan: But he did run the errand.

Taber: Oh yes.

Sullivan: And she apparently had the capacity to get people to do things for her without making them resentful.

Taber: That's right. She did it in a tactful way. Well, she was a very tactful person anyway. No one that I know could ever get mad at her for asking the impossible. You just wanted to do it.

Sullivan: But she did ask the impossible?

Taber: Sometimes, yes. But you were thrilled to do it and gratified to know that you could do it, because you wanted to please her.

Sullivan: What was that magic that she had? What was she like to work for?

Taber: Well, actually I didn't work very closely with her because I worked for Mr. Spindt at that time, but anything she asked me to do I was just more than happy to do it. She was pleasant to have around. She never really got upset as far as I know.

And she was very cooperative. If you wanted something of her, she was most cooperative in giving it to you. And not only that, but going beyond that in helping you in other ways.

Sullivan: Now there must have been times though when there was a lot of pressure.

Taber: There was a lot of pressure during registration. Remember those schedules, Lorraine, that we had to do by hand? We'd put the enrollment of each class on these huge schedules. And there must have been eight or ten of us sitting around the table and Miss Bird would read the enrollment and you kept up. You didn't ask her to go back and read them over! [Laughter] But that was because she was in a hurry and needed those at a certain hour and she was a little impatient with the girls that couldn't keep up.

Sullivan: She was? Well, Lorraine Anderson, while we're on this question, it's very interesting to me to hear both of you talk about



- Sullivan: what it was like when Miss Bird was under pressure.
- Anderson: Well I think, as Edna said, she just expected us to measure up to her standard--but if she saw we were having difficulty with an assignment, she would pitch right in and help us.
- Sullivan: She'd even do the clerical work?
- Anderson: Yes! She'd just sit down and do it right with us.
- Sullivan: Then she didn't convey to you the sense that there was a hierarchy, that she was too good for any jobs?
- Taber: No.
- Anderson: No.
- Taber: No. Definitely not. Even after she quit reading those figures and I read them, I remember I used to read them just as fast as Miss Bird! [Laughter]
- Anderson: We'd spend weekends at graduation time and between semesters and all the rest, but she was always there.
- Sullivan: Was this all overtime?
- Anderson: All overtime.
- Sullivan: Unpaid overtime.
- Taber: Oh yes.
- Anderson: But she was always right there with us. She worked right along with us and she knew everything that was going on. And if we had a question, she had the answer.
- Sullivan: Did she ever lose her temper?
- Anderson: Not with me.
- Taber: I don't remember her ever losing her temper with me or anybody in front of me.
- Anderson: There may have been sessions behind close doors among the administration that we were not aware of.
- Taber: You knew when she was busy and you didn't bother her unnecessarily, but I don't remember her ever losing her temper.
- Anderson: She was always very aware of her employees. She knew their history,





- Anderson: their husbands or children and all about them, and showed this interest; she would be very concerned about a sick child or a busy husband or something of that kind. So all the girls who worked in the office loved her because they felt that she understood them.
- Sullivan: She must have had a gift for knowing people very quickly. How did she get to know so many people so quickly?
- Anderson: That's true because she knew everybody, the whole student body.
- Taber: I used to go into her office and she'd talk to me about other things rather than business. You didn't tarry too long, but she never was too busy to talk to you about your personal matters.
- Sullivan: Was she the sort of person that people would come to and confide in and ask her advice about personal matters?
- Taber: Her former students would come back and as far as I know she never refused to see anyone.
- Anderson: I think she was the greatest counselor that Bakersfield College ever had.
- Taber: Yes. I think so too.
- Anderson: And this, I think, she loved doing.
- Taber: She was never too busy to talk to anyone.
- Anderson: To help people
- Taber: Anyone who was a former student or any friend of hers or a teacher--anybody.
- Anderson: She was a great believer in the open door--anybody who came into her office was made to feel welcome.
- Taber: That's right. I think that's one reason she did a lot of her work at home, so that she could free herself to talk to people.
- Sullivan: She could do a lot of her work at home, at night?
- Taber: Oh yes. She wrote a lot of her letters at night.
- Sullivan: Would you tell about that, Edna?
- Taber: Well, I remember she would leave in the evening with her hands full of work and in the morning she would have all these letters written, handwritten, for somebody to type.



- Sullivan: She would leave at five, or six? What time?
- Taber: She worked late, but even if she left early, she always had work to do at home. If she had a meeting at four, she would leave for the day. But when she came back in the morning she had work for us to do.
- Anderson: But I know she worked in the office many nights until six or seven.
- Taber: She didn't go home at five o'clock. None of us did really, at that time.
- Sullivan: Times have changed, haven't they? I wonder if you could talk a little about that period of time.
- Taber: [Chuckles] Well, there's one thing I would like to say. I know that the way Miss Bird handled her girls and her office, like she was never too busy to talk to them and talk over their problems, is the way I run my office.
- Sullivan: You learned something from her.
- Taber: I learned.
- Sullivan: I wanted to ask you what you learned.
- Taber: She was so organized.
- Sullivan: All right. She was so organized.
- Taber: She was so organized and I took work home. [Laughs]
- Sullivan: What is the secret then? Taking work home?
- Taber: I don't know that that's the secret, but that's one way to free yourself during the day for emergencies that come up and I think that's what she did.
- Sullivan: She was well-prepared, wasn't she?
- Anderson: I think that was the whole thing. She was always well-prepared.
- Taber: Well-prepared. She didn't feel any push because she hadn't prepared the work that she wanted to do for that day. Done at home. Of course, it was hard on her probably physically, but it released her time for the following day.
- Sullivan: Are you aware of what she did for recreation? To restore herself from this constant round of work?



- Taber: The only thing that I know is that I talked to several former students and they were telling me how she used to play ping-pong with them during her noon hour.
- Sullivan: Oh! Tell about that.
- Taber: Well, every noon hour they would go out--she would come out and play ping-pong with them, or talk to them.
- Sullivan: She didn't take a regular lunch hour.
- Taber: I don't know where she ate. [They all laugh]
- Anderson: Well, I know she went home for lunch occasionally, because she'd take me home with her now and then--which was very nice for me.
- Taber: But that was later. When she played ping-pong it was earlier.
- Sullivan: Was it in the 1920s?
- Taber: It was probably in the late 1920s.
- Anderson: As I remember she was very interested in gardening. She had a lovely garden. Always a beautiful garden. Flowers.
- Sullivan: Now, when did she garden?
- Taber: She must have done that on the weekend. [Taber and Anderson laugh] I'm sure she did. Robbie helped her though, the girl that lived with her.
- Anderson: [Addressing Sullivan] I was going to ask you, have you met Miss Ethel Robinson [drama teacher at Bakersfield College]?
- Sullivan: I have not met Miss Robinson, but I understand that they lived together for many years.
- Taber: And Miss Robinson was very interested in gardening and I do think that they probably did it on the weekends.
- Anderson: And probably Miss Robinson did a good deal of it.
- Taber: They had a lovely little home.
- Anderson: In fact, friends of my son have bought that home and live there now. A young couple. They're just the kind of people Miss Bird would be happy to have in her old home.
- Taber: You know, Miss Bird was quite a matchmaker. [Laughter]



Sullivan: Oh, let's hear about that.

Taber: My sister-in-law, who married my husband's brother, Harold Taber, worked, after she left the junior college, at the Valley Office. And there was a young bachelor, co-owner of the Valley Office, and Dorothy told me that several times Miss Bird said to her, "You should set your cap for him!" [Laughs]

Sullivan: Oh, wonderful! Now the Valley Office is--

Taber: A stationery store.

Anderson: It doesn't exist anymore.

Taber: But Dorothy, at the time, was very interested in Harold Taber, Theron's brother and couldn't see this co-owner at all. [Chuckles] She married Chubby. Chubby, or Harold, we called him.

Anderson: Well, tell about your own experiences.

Taber: Well, that's kind of a--I don't know. [Anderson laughs] Anyway, my husband came down from Stanford to teach and Mr. Spindt told me at the time that he had hired a very handsome man from Texas that had just graduated from Stanford and that he intended to get rid of one of his girls. By marriage. And I said, "Oh, I'll take him." [Anderson laughs]

Then he came back a few days later and he said, "I'm sorry, but he's married." And I said, "Well, I'll take him anyway!" You might want to delete this. [Laughter] Well, then his wife didn't appear or something happened to her. I don't know what happened, but he kept asking me for a date and I wouldn't go out with him, but I went in and talked to Miss Bird.

Sullivan: This was Theron Taber?

Taber: Yes. And I said, "I just don't really want to go out with him and then have him go back to her. I don't know what the status quo is of that situation." Miss Bird said, "I'll find out." [Laughter] And she did!

So when he asked me out to the Rose Bowl one year I went down, and that was the beginning. [More laughter] But, she found out that there wasn't anything that would make him go back.

Sullivan: Well that just shows, she's really interested in people.

Taber: She's very interested. Yes.

Sullivan: And she cares.





- Taber: And she was interested in our lives from then on.
- Anderson: And she went out of her way to help wherever she could.
- Sullivan: But what's interesting is it sounds as if she was able to be interested and involve herself in people's lives without being a manipulator.
- Taber: That's right.
- Sullivan: So often people like that interfere and do damage.
- Taber: That's very true.
- Sullivan: And yet, my impression is that she was able to do it in a helpful way.
- Taber: Yes. Very.
- Sullivan: Lorraine, would you like to talk about what you learned from Miss Bird, in conclusion?
- Anderson: Well, you know I came from a foreign background. I was the first one in my family that even got through two years of college. So my background was a little--rough. Miss Bird took me under her wing and I learned a great deal from her. She tried to give me an appreciation for the finer things in life--art, music, drama. She really did help me a lot.
- Sullivan: Well, she told me she thought it was very important that somebody as bright as you should study the humanities. [Laughter]
- Anderson: Well, she was always disappointed that I didn't go on to a senior college and complete my education.
- Sullivan: Are there any specific things you learned from her about dealing with people, how to run an office, anything like that?
- Anderson: I feel Miss Bird made my life richer. I was deeply influenced by her values, her warmth and compassion. She was the kind of individual all of us should have the privilege of coming in contact with during our formative years.

[end tape 1, side 1]



Margaret [Peg] Levinson

[Interview 1: April 25, 1977]  
[begin tape 1, side 1]

- Sullivan: Peg, you've participated in a couple of group sessions and now I want to be sure you fill in anything you particularly want to say about Grace Bird or junior college administration or the history of Bakersfield. There was something you particularly wanted to say about Grace.
- Levinson: That was the great, genuine, compassionate understanding she had for members of her faculty. She knew something about their lives. She knew something about their problems. She knew something about their triumphs. She was the first person to congratulate a faculty member on any distinction which he had achieved. She was the first person to know that there was trouble, and to try to do something about it. Sometimes it was just a matter of listening. Sometimes it was a matter of doing something.
- She was the first person to come to the rescue if there was illness, if there were a bereavement or any one of the dozens of things that human beings go through. You were not just a member of the faculty with your professional life over yonder and your personal life somewhere else. You were a person with three dimensions, and she was just as aware of the three dimensions as anyone could be. I recall that at the death of a very close friend of mine, she was the first person to arrive at my house.
- Sullivan: She seemed to have time and energy for everything.
- Levinson: I don't know whether she had the time. She had the energy and the desire, and she made the time. That's the thing.
- Sullivan: Now the thing about a lot of executives is they say to themselves, "Well, this is too bad, but I can't get into it. I don't have the time."
- Levinson: That's right. And Grace made the time. She had no more than any executive has. She had more demands on her twenty-four hours than any human being could possibly meet.
- Sullivan: It sounds as if she didn't make any kinds of allowances for herself.
- Levinson: She didn't make any allowances for herself. She didn't save Grace. Not at all.
- I'm thinking of things she did at Christmas time. For every member



- Levinson: of her faculty at the Christmas season, there was a personal--not just "Merry Christmas and all good wishes to you and your family--" but a personal note of some length and a great deal of substance that said what she wanted to say. Possibly it was an expression of appreciation for something you had done or that she thought you had done. Possibly it was an expression of her concern for some member of your family that had recently been elected to Phi Beta Kappa. Possibly it was something about an upcoming vacation that you were going to have or a leave that you were going to take. Possibly it was something about your own health, if you'd been suffering from the plague! It was a personal thing, something that was directed to you that wouldn't mean anything to anybody else.
- Sullivan: Would you find this in your box?
- Levinson: In our boxes, yes. And, of course, those were written in the middle--not of the night--but in the middle of the morning. I know that she would work until one and two and three o'clock.
- Sullivan: She must not have needed much sleep.
- Levinson: She didn't get much!
- Sullivan: How did she look? Did she look worn out?
- Levinson: She looked amazingly well. I don't know where this vitality and drive came from. Some inner strength, some inner concern that made her spend herself lavishly.
- Sullivan: As if she believed thoroughly, that you lose your life to find it.
- Levinson: That's right. I'm thinking of something that she did one year. There was always some gracious gesture to members of the classified staff, the non-certificated employees, the secretaries.
- One year, at Christmas time, she had in every office--there weren't an awful lot of offices, but there were a number of them--in every office, a lovely Christmas candle, a big, fat, glowing Christmas candle on some kind of colored base--I don't know what it was, probably construction paper or something--with a note. And that candle was lighted and shone through the Christmas season. There were other more personal things, but this was in each office. This was a glowing symbol of her Merry Christmas to everybody. Now I think those kinds of things are so rich and so precious that they become treasures of your experience with Grace.
- Sullivan: I understand she gave a Christmas party every year that was memorable.
- Levinson: The Christmas parties in the office? Well, I can tell you how those



Levinson: started. During the war, and I can't tell you which year it was, most servicemen had a Christmas leave of some kind; and particularly the young men who had been in junior college at the time they entered service would come back to the campus. All right, this had been the last adult center of their experience before they had gone. They had their homes and their friends, but they gravitated to college. This is where they'd played football, or debated, or written for the weekly, or done something.

Grace picked up the idea that this was kind of special, and so she thought, Let's have coffee and donuts for them. And so we had coffee and donuts going, usually the Friday before the Christmas holidays began. And that then expanded into quite a party. I'm sure Lorraine [Anderson] has mentioned this to you. I have some marvelous pictures of these things that we did. All of us in the offices would make the affair go in some way. Somebody would make cookies. Somebody would bring a five-pound box of Dewar's candy. Dewar's is a famous center here, by the way. Somebody would make spiced cider. Somebody would be responsible for coffee. We would do this in the office, not in another room. We blew out more fuses and put in more extensions for hot plates than you can imagine! Electrically, we were perfectly fiendish!

Anyhow, we had this kind of thing going. It expanded. Other faculty members would then say, "I'd like to bring so-and-so to the party!" For example, Nick Pananides, who taught astronomy, was Greek. His wife, Ethel, always made a great tray of these gorgeous Greek pastries for Nick to bring as part of his contribution to the Christmas party.

Then, I can think of Adelaide Schafer, always making her fancy, little, German lace cookies to bring. People would glory in bringing for everyone to enjoy, something of their own lives. Anyway, we continued this party for a long time, and after Grace left Bakersfield she always--oh, this was for many years--sent a box of goodies for the Christmas party, because this was something that everybody participated in. Tom Merson used to do it too, after he left, when he was in Washington, D.C.

Sullivan: He would send goodies?

Levinson: Yes. He'd send a box of candy and a card with his "Merry Christmas," and that would be on the table. Oh, we got fancy as all get out, putting up decorations and so on. That was when we were still in the old junior college building at California and F. Then when we were shaken out by the earthquake and moved over to the Hayward Lumber Company corner, we did our party there in a makeshift office. We kept it going, and it continues to this day. It's been sponsored by different people. It's now sometimes handled by the faculty





- Levinson: Club, sometimes by the Home Ec department. I think it is back now to the administration, but it's not in the offices.
- Sullivan: For all the faculty and all the staff.
- Levinson: For all the faculty and staff and any students who might come in.
- Sullivan: Students too?
- Levinson: If they wanted to come, they were most welcome, particularly graduates. Of course, the day before Christmas is pretty much a holiday for the regular students; there weren't too many of them around.
- Sullivan: Now Christmas was the great party of the year, I assume.
- Levinson: Well, in that sense it was, yes. There was usually a party, the punch and cookies kind, at the opening faculty meeting and sometimes something of that sort at the end of the year, but nothing quite so elaborate as the Christmas one. Sometimes it got to be really very fancy with all kinds of hors d'oeuvres and one thing and another done by food services. But it had its genesis, certainly, in that very informal thing done in the office by the administrative staff, sparked by Grace.
- Sullivan: Did Grace ever share with you any of her ideas about bringing people together, or how you make a party go or anything of that sort?
- Levinson: I think she did. I know she did. And I think the technique was bringing together people who had like interest. So she would gather people who would love to look at old prints, find books. Did anybody talk about the Fine Books Room there on the campus?
- Sullivan: It has been mentioned and I just visited it this morning.\*
- Levinson: So, you know what it is.
- Sullivan: Now, she's talked a lot about the Porter Garnetts and you are the only person I have spoken to, I think, who has met the Garnetts.

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\*For discussion of Grace Bird's contribution of her collection of fine books to the Bakersfield College Library see interview with Grace V. Bird, Leader in Junior College Education at Bakersfield and the University of California, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1978.



Levinson: Do you want me to tell you about them and how I happened to visit them?

Sullivan: Yes, I wish you would.

Levinson: I was at Cal [University of California, Berkeley], going to summer school, taking three courses in graduate administration, to make myself legal when I was doing more than half administrative work. One course was in California school law, one was in junior college administration, a seminar with Dr. Peterson. And one was a course in junior college curriculum. The school law was a big, big, big class, and this curriculum thing was pretty big. The seminar was not so large.

The young man who was the reader for the school law course and for one of the other courses, was also enrolled as a student in the seminar.

Sullivan: Was he a graduate student?

Levinson: Yes. He was a very personable young man. We used to drink coffee together at the breaks, and we enjoyed seeing each other a little bit. He invited me to go to San Francisco with him some Saturday night. Would I like it? Well, I said yes. A day or two later, he said, "Bring your notes from such and such a course with you. I have a copy of the examination that's going to be given, and we might make beautiful music together."

I was absolutely floored! I was just staggered and kind of sick, and I didn't know what to do. I was living at the Durant Hotel at the time, and I was baffled. As I say, he was a reader for two courses I was in, and a fellow student in this other one. That was not good. As Burns Finlinson would say, the matter of "enlightened self-interest" came into this too: how could I maintain my honor and not jeopardize my units of credit in two courses? Just how do you do this?

Sullivan: Where he was going to be reading your paper.

Levinson: Yes. So I turned to Grace (she was then living in Berkeley), told her the circumstances, and said, "I don't know what to do."

Sullivan: Was this after 1950?

Levinson: Yes. She said, "Let's go up to the Garnetts' for the weekend."

Sullivan: This would have been on the ranch?

Levinson: Yes, in St. Helena. She said, "They'd love to have you, and I'd



Levinson: love to take you up. Let's do that." And that's what we did. So of course I had my beautiful "out" and could tell the young man, "I have been invited out of town for the weekend. I won't be here." Talk about solving a problem!

Sullivan: No confrontation, just avoidance.

Levinson: And I didn't have to lie. That was the solution. That weekend stands out in my mind as one of the real landmarks in my educational life (I quote educational).

Anyway, it was a glorious, glorious weekend and I loved it. I had met both Porter and Edna down here, but I'd never been in their home before--this great, lovely, rambling, gracious home out in the middle of the most gorgeous country in the world (I love that valley anyway). Delightful companionship, delightful food, delightful atmosphere of acceptance and joy.

Between Porter and Grace there was this bond of warmth and long association; between Edna and Grace, a bond of love that we don't find very often in the world. The whole thing was a joy, a celebration of human friendship. I was just taken in and made part of it, and of course that is a very rare thing these days.

Incidentally, I've got to tell you one thing that Edna Garnett said. She said, "You know, all my life I have dreamt of having a beautiful bedroom with a lacy counterpane and all the lovely frills, and I've always had dogs [laughter] who are not compatible with lace and ruffles, so I just gave up that idea and I have the dogs," which is marvelous.

Sullivan: Just lovely. Would you give your impressions of the Garnetts--any anecdotes you remember or anything that struck you.

Levinson: I'm sorry, I don't think of specific anecdotes. Much of the time, I'm sure, was given to remembrance of things that they had done together that they could all laugh about and that they could share with an outsider, which I was. "Do you remember when--"

I know that Porter talked about a number of the Bohemian Grove activities, but I can't tell you the specifics of them. These performances, of course, got to be classics, and he was such a motivating force in them. They were very rare.

Sullivan: They had a great sense of fun, didn't they?

Levinson: Oh, such a sense of fun!

Sullivan: Did Porter strike you as being at all precious?



- Levinson: No, not at all. Just very, very active mentally. A word or a phrase might touch off a whole series of things. They might be very good puns or even very bad puns, which he recognized as bad. But things that were stimulated by just ordinary conversation and would become little asides. I suppose, the kind of thing we see in the New Yorker--the little comments, the little fillers that are used. By the way, did you ever know I got paid twice for sending in items? Those were the most precious dollars I ever earned.
- Sullivan: And they pay well?
- Levinson: No--terribly.
- Sullivan: But to get them in! You're the first person I've ever met who's gotten some in.
- Levinson: Well, two. One of them isn't so funny anymore. It was the first time, though, that I had seen this particular usage: An ad for a very fancy sandwich, which was a French roll and Smithfield ham together with au jus. [Laughter] I sent that and I got five dollars for it, and they printed it! But anyway, that's the kind of thing that we would roar over--the strange misuses of words or the mixed metaphor or the department of beautiful prose--all these little things that we become so accustomed to in the New Yorker. That was the kind of thing that was funny, and of course I think it is the funniest thing in the world.
- Sullivan: You worked closely with Grace when you were Dean of Women and as and English teacher. We've gone over this a bit, but do we want to go back and talk about anything you observed her do in administration, any tricks of the trade?
- Levinson: I don't think this was a trick at all, but she always knew what you were teaching, partly from what you might say to her, but also through course outlines.
- Sullivan: Did she require course outlines?
- Levinson: Indeed, course outlines were submitted, together with the name of the textbook and so on. So she was aware of the materials you were using, basically.
- Sullivan: And she read the course outline pretty thoroughly.
- Levinson: I'm sure she did. So that when a new instructor came onto the faculty, he could look at the course outline of the person who preceded him and know what had been done; then he could make modifications, certainly changes, could do something entirely





Levinson: different. But she was aware of what was being done.

I'm thinking of one summer when she and I were both enrolled in some courses at UCLA with Merton Hill. I might add that being a student with Grace Bird in a class was something of a challenge!

One of the young men whom we met had just done an anthology of readings for Freshman English. We both enjoyed meeting him and talking to him and so on, and I used his text for a while. I remember Grace's referring to it many times after that, and she would talk about some particular selection in it. So she knew what I was teaching, in general, without ever coming into a classroom at all; she knew what I was starting out to do, at any rate. She did this with everybody.

Sullivan: Do you know how she knew what kind of a job you were doing?

Levinson: Yes. I think one reason was she talked to students. Students had access to her. So here comes a student with a *D*. What's the matter with English IA? Well, "She is, or he is, demanding too much," or "I can't do so-and-so," or "He or she expects too much of me," or "I'm just not up to it."

She would get from students reactions to instructors and what they were teaching. "How're you getting along in psychology?" "Well, at first I was scared to death of Miss Albaugh, till I finally found out that she is one of the funniest deadpan humorists in the world, and I realized that the things she was saying were meant to be funny. Now I'm having a wonderful time." All right. That is one measure that Grace used to evaluate an instructor.

"Do you like astronomy? How're you getting along in physics?" "I really wasn't prepared for that course." What was the matter? "I didn't have enough math." "Maybe we should make such and such course in math prerequisite to it."

This is an evaluative technique that is awfully good.

She also found out problems that might exist with an instructor. "So-and-so demands too much" or "I can never please so-and-so. I always used to get *A*'s in high school, and I can't do better than a *C* in college." Why not? All right. Then she is getting to the heart of the instructional program.

Sullivan: And how would she deal with the faculty members?

Levinson: She would possibly say, "Might your students be better able to handle the material in Physics IA if Math (I've forgotten what numbers these were) such and such were made a prerequisite?"



Sullivan: How about in a field like English? Did she ever suggest things to you or to other English teachers? Did she ever have changes that she wanted to see put in?

Levinson: I don't recall, but I did recall something else just now. A lad was in my "bonehead" English class, a young man from New York City whose great claim to distinction was that he had worked on the Chrysler Building. [Laughter] He was somewhat older, and a very fine football player; he wanted to go to Stanford to play under Pop Warner, and Bakersfield was a step on his way.

He was a personable, smart guy, but he had some execrable habits in English. He was articulate, he had a wide background of experience and so forth. For some reason, he was very, very, very unhappy about being in "bonehead" English. So the plan was devised that through the semester he would hand in a paper to me every week--a five-hundred-word paper or something--which I would return to him with the appropriate comments and criticisms, and he'd be absolved from class attendance, because he was working so hard and was out for football; this was all with administrative approval.

That was just dandy, except for the fact that he didn't do it. He would cross a street rather than meet me face to face.

Sullivan: Besides, even if he did do it, he would have had to do a lot of work with a handbook and checking things out and all that.

Levinson: Sure, that's right. But he didn't do it. Well, that was a little bit of a problem, and of course I wasn't quite sure how to handle it. I went to Miss Bird and asked, "What do I do?" She said, "This just becomes an automatic *F*. You have made a compromise, the adjustment to suit his convenience. He did not live up to his share of the agreement." So that's the way that was handled.

[end tape 1, side 1]

Frank Wattron, Bette Wattron

[Interview 1: April 24, 1977]  
[begin tape 1, side 1]

Wattron: My earliest recollection of Grace had to do with the theatre, but even before I went into the drama classes as a student, earlier, not too much earlier, I had a job delivering eggs, if you will, for one of the "Ag" teachers for whom I worked. Most of the customers were school people.



Sullivan: What year was this, Frank?

Wattron: This would be 1934, I guess, which is really not all that long ago. And all I remember is that Grace and Robbie [Ethel Robinson] were customers and I would deliver eggs there on a Saturday. She was very gracious. That was Robbie. I think back now on the very first occasions and, of course, you never know what's in the future and how deeply you'll become involved with the people.

When I started in the drama classes at BC [Bakersfield College], that would have been in 1936, shortly after my first encounter with Grace and Robbie, I was totally taken by the theatre. I guess it represented a complete world for me that I was lacking. This is common to a lot of people who become deeply committed to a passion of sorts.

Sullivan: I know. I was that way. I was planning to be an actress in the theatre when I went to college.

Wattron: Mostly the people who get involved in theatre are wretched in their own lives or are very unhappy without knowing it even in their own lives and this world that they can involve themselves in is a great release and a compensation and all of that.

Sullivan: It's an alternative world.

Wattron: Yes. But I became--what shall I say?--I had a lot to do. Robbie liked what I did and I became one of her favorites. I guess you would call it that. At least, I was referred to as her favorite, rather jealously by some people later on.

Sullivan: Was this because you got the best parts?

Wattron: Yes. I've been in situations where I was not the leading actor, when I was at Pasadena Playhouse. But anyway, Grace would assist Robbie in getting a production together, not in rehearsals but in the dress rehearsals with makeup. And this was really where I first got to know her, but only as a student. She was always there, always very encouraging and knew her way around the theatre very well.

Sullivan: Oh, good.

Wattron: She was, of course, director of Bakersfield Junior College. There was no presidency at that time. I was working backstage on some job or other. There was a college revue and they were rehearsing at night and it was one of these typical college shows with little scenes here and there. And Peg Levinson--who by the way I have many fond memories of as a marvelous, marvelous teacher of English



Wattron: who is interested in drama--she seemed to be directing it.

Peg wanted the students, in order to keep the show moving, to make use of a door down in the pit area and there was an argument. And the thing that I remember was Grace's final word, because she was in charge of the whole thing. After some rather heated exchange but no shouting, she said, "You may not open that door!" [delivered in a very commanding tone] and she said it 'n just about that tone.

Sullivan: How interesting! To whom did she say that?

Wattron: Peg.

Sullivan: And in front of the students?

Wattron: Oh, yes. She's a "take charge" person. One reason why I admire her, there's no question about who's in charge when Grace is around.

Sullivan: She's able to do it though without arousing resentment. That's the amazing thing.

Wattron: Oh, yes. It may at the moment. But I think it was the only time I heard her raise her voice in a meeting in anything like peremptory terms.

Later on, when I became a director, I'm not sure that I patterned my style after Grace. [Laughs] But this is what a director has to do. Or at least my style of directing was, when necessary, to issue very commanding orders, so to speak. It's all part of it, because when you're in charge of something that you're going to present to the public, you're responsible for it. By George, it's going to be the best you can do! [Chuckles]

Sullivan: Do you think administering is similar to directing a play?

Wattron: Yes. I'm getting back to Grace's style as an administrator. She sought perfection always and I'm sure she always realized that it was impossible, but never, ever would she accept second rate. She had loved and was imbued by the qualities of what is fine in living and in art and in education.

In the theatre then, when I was a student in the theatre, she was there helping with the makeup and she and Robbie would critique the plays after the dress rehearsal and after the performances.

Sullivan: With the students sitting around, or the actors?

Wattron: No, no. With individual people. As I say, I was fortunate in being someone special to Robbie. In fact, I don't know whether





Wattron: you know this or not, but Robbie became the godmother of our children and she's like our mother, so to speak.

Sullivan: Grace told me just before I came to Bakersfield.

Wattron: In fact, Betty writes to her very frequently and we're going up to see her as soon as we can.

So, Grace would comment and helpfully, she never praised too much in my recollection. It was always, "Yes, this.." or "Did you think of trying that?"

Sullivan: That seems to have been her way of criticising.

Wattron: Yes. That's the best type of criticism. Well, to make a long story short, I, through Robbie's urging, tried out for a scholarship at Pasadena Playhouse and was accepted.

I remember one other thing though, as a student, that stayed in my mind and it's very important. You know, the student body was small. I don't think there were more than a couple or three hundred students there in the late thirties at BC. And Grace, of course, knew everyone personally, knew everyone by first name and the legend is, all of the problems and so forth. And she took a personal charge of the curriculum.

She even gave the orientation class which everybody had to take. That disintegrated, has been almost meaningless for several years because it's gotten into these things such as how to study and so forth. With Grace it was a real orientation to the possibilities of education. It was a broad cultural experience in itself. I remember at one session she brought in an opera, recordings of Edna St. Vincent Millay's The King's Henchman. And, believe it or not, I can still remember some of the things she said about it and also some of the music. Lawrence Tibbet, by the way, was a Bakersfield product, played, sang a role.

Sullivan: That was perhaps why she chose that.

Wattron: Well, she brought it because it was in English, one of the few operas in English. Anyway, I remember that and her talking about it and then other things she would arrange for our orientation. She brought in the best teachers to give, I realize now, their model lectures. So we had this wonderful lecture in geology that Paul Vandereike gave and it was intensely interesting to me. How old was I then? Eighteen, I guess--nineteen.

Sullivan: She seems to have provided a sampler of the academic offerings of Bakersfield College.



Wattrou: Right. That's a good way of putting it. So it was orientation then to education, in the best sense. That is to me an important indication of her concern for the liberal arts, by the way, the idea of culture that we were talking about earlier.

Well anyway, I came back to teach at Bakersfield in a paternalistic way because Robbie was taking a leave of absence and needed a replacement. So in a sense, I never sought a job. They asked me to come and interview for the job, shall we say. It wasn't as simple as I'm suggesting, because after all, I did have to get hired by the district. [Chuckles]

Sullivan: But at some point you were a stage manager for Robbie.

Wattrou: Oh, well now this was back, when I was a student. I not only acted in the plays, but I also worked on the stage as the stage manager. It was a combination.

Sullivan: And you were the stage manager in play after play.

Wattrou: Yes, play after play.

Sullivan: What a unique opportunity to have that much experience.

Wattrou: Oh, my god, yes! As I look back on it now, it was a wonderfully rich kind of experience for me to have and certainly stayed with me as I went into educational theatre as such. I am not really dwelling on my school theatre experiences here except as Grace Bird enters into it. I could tell you many a story of the plays themselves and the stage. Jerry Smith, the teacher of stagecraft and the real stage manager, wonderful fellow--

Ethel Robinson asked me to come to talk to Grace about replacing her when she went on leave, as a teacher. By the way, when I was in Pasadena, and I left here in '37 and came back to teach in '46, so there was a period of almost ten years where I got married in that interim, our two children were born and we visited Bakersfield frequently. Always saw Robbie, always saw Grace there because, by this time they had a larger house. They lived on Oleander and had a commodious home there. My impression of Grace and Robbie in their way of life together was that Robbie did a lot of sacrificing for Grace.

Sullivan: Can you think of examples, or tell in what ways?

Wattrou: Yes. Grace was director of the college. Grace was a big name. Grace was an important person, not only in the community but she had grown in prominence in terms of the whole junior college movement.



- Sullivan: And she had state-wide and national obligations.
- Wattron: She had a national office, yes. And Robbie and she were firm and fast friends, and of course they still are. I won't say Robbie "protected" Grace. I think it was a fair arrangement that they had. Put it this way: Grace's schedule was the important schedule.
- Sullivan: And Robbie would defer and adjust.
- Wattron: Yes, yes.
- Sullivan: Well this is one of the things I'm looking for because Grace was an amazing woman, but we know she was human and Grace would be the first one to say it's impossible to accomplish so much without good support and good back-up.
- Wattron: Well Robbie did much for her in this way. There are many scenes that come to my mind of those times. I did spend a lot of time at their home. I can see Grace doing her ironing at the ironing board and I can recall that she said she slept on a board which means that she probably had a back problem.
- Sullivan: Yes. She had a back problem.
- Wattron: Along with this, Grace and Robbie too, but to a much less extent, were very private persons, not given to talking about personal problems perhaps. But I do remember the board. [Laughs]
- Sullivan: I get the impression that Grace was very extroverted.
- Wattron: She was extroverted in the sense that she had to be for her job which is not a fair use of the word extroverted. When you're a college administrator, and let's face it, when you are a woman in what was then and still is a male dominated situation, you had to put on a show, so to speak. You had to be acting, it seems to me, and Grace was one who was always, not only alert, but on top of the scene. I don't think she ever took second place to any of the men. They would defer to her.
- Sullivan: The impression I get is that she held her own and was listened to with respectful attention.
- Wattron: Yes, she held her own, but why shouldn't she. Sharp! My God! The woman's mind, like a proverbial whip! Probably a helluva lot smarter than a lot of the men with whom she associated, not to denigrate their talents either.

Her circle when she was very young was that highly artistic, intellectual, bright young group which would be pre-World War I



- Wattron: really, or just post-World War I.
- Sullivan: Yes, in the twenties. The Berkeley group right around the early twenties
- Wattron: And she, I know, wrote a good deal of poetry. Still does. Her cards usually contain a poem.
- Sullivan: You're suggesting not that she was putting on an act, but that her presence and some of the qualities that have to do with playing a role were part of her success.
- Wattron: Yes. But I don't want to suggest that she was artificial about it.
- Sullivan: No. That's not the impression I get.
- Wattron: In fact, her days of acting, if she had had any, these were in her past. She was so sure of herself by the time I knew her that she didn't need to put on anything at all. All I'm suggesting is that she knew what she did need to do. Again, when you're the head of the college you have got to be in front, you've got to put on whatever the occasion calls for.
- Sullivan: She had a clear sense of projecting the inner qualities of her role, is what you're saying, then?
- Wattron: Yes, I hope so. And during the first year of teaching--there's quite a different role that you play when you come back and somebody is your boss who is at the same time your coileague; because there's a very, to use a term, collegiate feeling among faculty. I had a hard time, in a word, to address my former teachers--you know, I was the student who came back to teach--to address them by their first names for instance.
- Sullivan: Oh yes! I wish you'd talk about that. That's a unique and interesting situation.
- Wattron: It was a long time before I called Grace, Grace.
- Sullivan: Yes, just things like that. The question of when do you start using the first name?
- Wattron: In fact, I looked at my contemporaries with some amazement that they would dare refer to her, that they would call her, Grace. And then as time went by it didn't take very long, why I began to call her Grace too. Robbie, of course, was always Robbie, but it was Miss Bird.
- Sullivan: Even when Robbie was your teacher?
- Wattron: Oh yes. Always Robbie.





Sullivan: And to the other students? Was she Robbie?

Wattron: Miss Robbie.

Sullivan: Miss Robbie. Were there any pet names for Grace?

Wattron: No, not that I can recall. She was always Miss Bird.

Sullivan: Nothing behind her back?

Wattron: No, and always Miss Bird with a great deal of respect and maybe some awe. Always with the feeling of "gee, she's a great gal." Never that she was hard to approach or anything like that. She was always approachable.

Sullivan: This would have been in the thirties, between about '34 and '37.

Wattron: Right. And my vision is clouded in the sense that to project myself back there takes quite a metamorphosis.

Anyway, her relationships with the faculty were, I think, always first rate; I think the faculty, generally speaking, had the same kind of respect for her that students had. And she was, again, a "no nonsense" administrator. You always knew where you stood with her.

Anyway, she would write out our schedule. You got your assignment by the handwritten note from Grace Bird: "Ycur schedule will be Speech I, Drama I, whatever and whatever."

Sullivan: Did that have psychological value, the handwritten note from Grace Bird?

Wattron: Well, I'd never had any other kind! [Laughs] I thought nothing of it at the time, but looking back, it tells me that, by George, she took that schedule home with her, to bed, and she lived the college. Put it that way. She lived the college. And why not? I've often thought about this and how Robbie could do as many plays as she did and do them so well. They had nothing else.

Sullivan: They absolutely devoted themselves.

Wattron: I don't mean their lives were barren, but they had no family, no immediate family, no children. They were not married. What a wonderful and delightful way of involving oneself in a career that is so productive. I'm speaking both of Robbie and of Grace, you see. And this is why they could indulge themselves, and did, in the fullness of doing the job.



Wattron: So, Grace, as I again say, did everything. When the deluge of students came along with an awful lot more staff, myself among them, in 1946, she had to delegate more. Ed Simonsen, whom of course you well know, and I came in the same year.

[I can tell you about] a couple of other instances where Grace was peremptory.

Sullivan: What were they?

Wattron: I don't think that could happen now because of all of the faculty privileges that teachers now enjoy in terms of protection and grievance and that sort of thing. But there were a couple of instances where Grace got rid of people "right now!"

One was the journalism director. I can't remember the circumstance, but it had to do with students and his demeaning of students. And Grace told him off. I was not there, but I heard from him afterwards and she told him right now what it was and he was out.

The other one had to do with a lush, an older fellow who came from the faculty. Wonderful, humane person but he couldn't make it to school frequently.

Sullivan: [Laughs] On time and all that.

Wattron: And I'm sure that Grace was compassionate with him too, but all I'm saying is that she wouldn't take this stuff. I mean, they were out.

Sullivan: She maintained standards and this was one of the ways in which she maintained standards, I assume.

Bette: [This is Bette Wattron, Frank's wife who entered the room earlier in the discussion]

Well, she had so much power. No one could possibly criticize Grace.

Sullivan: Well, that's interesting. It was personal power I gather you're referring to, Betty?

Bette: Personal, but mainly administrative power. I mean, she was in charge of that school and that was it.

Wattron: That's really it. It was her thing. Bakersfield College was hers, so to speak. She might not like anyone saying that in the sense that, of course, it was not hers.

[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 2, side 1]



- Wattron: Talking of Grace's power as an administrator, I think this was all very natural because she had built the college, grown up with it and administered it in a very personal way. Take commencement where nowadays--this is probably true in all colleges--the faculty just doesn't bother to participate. By George, everyone participated. Not only that, they each had their assignment.
- Sullivan: How did she achieve this?
- Wattron: We were small for one thing. There were only--what?--thirty, forty faculty maybe at that time. Well, she achieved it by writing it out; Paul Gordon was reminding me of this when they had a birthday party for him a couple of weeks ago, and with awe in his voice still! [Laughs] You always knew where you stood then. His assignment was on such and such an aisle in the grandstand and that's where he was and he never thought twice about it. You see?
- Sullivan: There must have been something about the way she conducted herself that kept people from questioning. If one person gives orders, you're going to get a mutiny. Somebody else does, and they're accepted.
- Wattron: This picture will always be with me and I don't know why I didn't think of it earlier--it's so typical. It is Grace. We had a faculty assembly for a couple of years. This is just before Grace left us. There were a lot of veterans back, older students. Assemblies were big things, every Friday. And the faculty was asked to put on an assembly, and, by George, we did. Again, Grace was in charge. There were many serious things like poetry readings and the finale was the orchestra. And who do you suppose led the orchestra?
- Sullivan: Grace?
- Wattron: Grace! And I can see her there directing the faculty orchestra having the time of her life.
- Sullivan: Was it an act to bring together the faculty members who could perform?
- Wattron: Yes, who could perform.
- Sullivan: Grace chose to make herself conductor.
- Wattron: Grace chose to direct the orchestra. That symbolizes the whole thing.
- Sullivan: The amazing thing to me is she carried it off without it being a nervy thing?
- Wattron: Right. And with humor.



- Sullivan: Most people have to get their courage up to give orders, to lead.
- Wattron: But it wasn't as though she came in and applied for the job and had to acclimate herself and become adjusted and make this concession and that concession. She was Bakersfield College from practically the time that it started. Paul Vandereike was the first director. Then Grace took over in the early 1920s and that was it.
- Sullivan: But everyone who has followed her in that job and everyone who comes into administration, comes into a pre-established situation.
- Wattron: To some extent. To a considerable extent. The last sort of passing of the standard, so to speak, was when John Collins took over as president. This was five years ago. Grace came down from Berkeley and there was a meeting in the president's office with Grace. Peg was there and Burns Finlinson, who was the retiring president. Ed Simonsen came in. Ralph Prator--I don't think he made it. This was a private thing. There was nothing but the heads of state so to speak. I remember passing by when they were going in and thinking about all of the things they must have been thinking about.
- Sullivan: Did they have a conference and talk about the nature of the job? Was it a ceremony?
- Wattron: I don't know. I don't know. Ask Burns. One of the things that Burns told me one time was that when Grace left, she gave him certain records and he still has them. This shows you the personal nature of the--what shall I say?--the relationships that people had with Grace, how they regarded her legacy. And I think Burns, as you'll find, felt that probably more keenly than anyone because that's the type of person he is, a most genuine and--what shall I say?--deeply traditional person in terms of everything that is excellent. In the most serious moments during his administration he would sometimes invoke the name of Grace Bird. [Laughter]
- [end tape 2, side 1]

Burns Finlinson

[Interview 1: April 24, 1977]  
[begin tape 1, side 1]

- Sullivan: There is something about Bakersfield that takes your heart. It makes you feel that you are welcome, but also that this is a community of interesting people.





Finlinson: And I would say that if there's a key factor in this observation that you have made, it is Grace Bird's influence.

Sullivan: What is it that is special about Grace Bird?

Finlinson: There are many ingredients in Grace's being: her intellect, an intellect that's sharp; it's well-honed and has great curiosity. She is knowledgeable in many areas; and in addition, she has a heart. And there is a fusing of the intellect and the heart. It's blended in a special way; I've never quite seen such a wit in anyone else. It's a unique combination.

Dia [Mrs. Finlinson] and I have spoken about Miss Bird a great deal for we feel close to her and it's difficult to state the formula which best describes her. At times I wonder if there isn't a magic or a mystique about Grace Bird that moves her away from the ordinary characterizations that you and I might make about people.

Sullivan: You're almost suggesting that there's another dimension to Grace Bird.

Finlinson: Yes, it's a dimension that is constant or the same with me all the time. It's like a sunrise or a sunset--it depends upon the moment I become conscious of it. And then another characteristic of hers which is wonderful is that she has just the right touch.

Sullivan: With people, you mean?

Finlinson: With people. She knows when to write special notes or send a newspaper clipping or picture that would please. Would you like to see a picture with a short sentence? It's a good example.

With a newspaper picture of our three wives, she wrote, "Burns, in case any of you want a spare." This is Dia, and here's Ed Simonsen's wife, Marvine, and Norma Heffernan [Mrs. William Heffernan]. And here she is, director of the school, sending us this clipping from the Californian. A friendly thing to do. Doing a thoughtful thing at the right time.

Sullivan: With a sense of timing and wit and humor.

Finlinson: That's right. Another example: Here's a note from way back when Dave was born.

Sullivan: [Reading] "Hurrah! I have just learned the happy news, the Finlinson's son's arrival. How happy you must all be. We are happy for you, too. Grace Bird." And then a little heart at the bottom. It's a simple note, but it's thoughtful.



- Finlinson: And I musn't give you the idea that we're exceptions. This must have been done for numerous friends and colleagues. It was thoughtful. Well, to say the right thing at the suitable moment, the appropriate statement, is a special gift indeed. I like to think she gathered rather special people about her at Bakersfield College, many students, teachers and administrators.
- Sullivan: Yes. That's apparent.
- Finlinson: All of these people that you've been interviewing, you have noticed that they are substantial people.
- Sullivan: Yes. They're consequential people and they're first-rate people.
- Finlinson: They are substantial people with their own standards, sense of excellence, sense of rightness, sense of quality, and a sense of self-esteem.
- Sullivan: I just realized something. She was not threatened by the competence of other people because she must have had a real sense of her own competence and ability.
- Finlinson: I think she did. She was not threatened at all. Yet, Miss Bird's recognition of our endeavors and our accomplishments gave, I'm sure, much personal satisfaction to each of us. I think each one of us was rather pleased with what we were doing. She had an ability to inspire. Have people used this word when you have interviewed them?
- Sullivan: Yes.
- Finlinson: She inspired and encouraged you. Again, I think this is the evidence of the right touch. She would do it at a moment or at a time when it was so very appropriate. That's the reason that I sometimes feel that you must almost use that term 'mystique'. Of course, I use the work in the most complimentary way.
- Sullivan: Not as if she were putting something over.
- Finlinson: Yes.
- Sullivan: She once said to me that her friends who were wives took making a happy home as their goal and it just crossed my mind that in a certain sense her goal was to make Bakersfield College a happy place, and she did.
- Finlinson: She did. I am sure all of us in administration enjoyed working with, Miss Bird.



- Sullivan: Each one had a sense from Miss Bird that you gave what you could and that was of value.
- Finlinson: And what you gave was something special.
- Sullivan: Where did you come from to join the staff?
- Finlinson: From Cedar City, Utah. I came down and started the Veterans Guidance Center.
- Sullivan: Was your position Dean of Records at that point?
- Finlinson: No, not at that time. When the guidance center closed, as the veteran load decreased, then I became the Dean of Records.
- Sullivan: Peg Levinson was then Dean of Women?
- Finlinson: Yes, and she knew Miss Bird, of course, much better than anyone in administration.
- Sullivan: Peg had then been here several years.
- Finlinson: Likely so. Edward Simonsen, Dean of Men, had worked at East High School.
- I mentioned the satisfactions that I am sure all have had from doing our best and working with Grace. She could lead without evidencing administrative pressure.
- Sullivan: Can you say anything about that? She could lead without overreaching and without being overbearing?
- Finlinson: She was not overbearing; I think we all felt that we wanted to do our own thing and do it well for our own satisfaction. But I think in the background there was a feeling, "Miss Bird has confidence in us, and we are going to do our best."
- Sullivan: Do you want to make any observations at this point, or later, about what you learned from her about being an administrator, or tell specific incidents that you remember?
- Finlinson: I guess maybe this is a sample. I remember when I came down to Bakersfield in August of '46 to be interviewed by Miss Bird and Mr. McCuen. Of course she was most gracious and made me feel very much at ease. It's hard to think that the interview would go along as well as this one did; she made me think that it was a good one and I felt good about it.
- Sullivan: Can you talk about the interview? Nobody has talked about being



Sullivan: interviewed by Grace Bird. Was she searching for certain information or attitudes?

Finlinson: These are some things which I remember. She put me at ease, I thought, by telling me that she was acquainted with Salt Lake City. Then she told me her story of living as a young girl in that city. I venture she made an effort to establish what the interviewee would consider a basic and significant connection with her and her interests and values. If you would mention music, she would make interesting observations. The same if you spoke of the theatre. If you mentioned art, she would come to Oriental art, but nonetheless it would be a relationship and comment which was relevant. I think that was an excellent way of doing two things: of relating to the person, and also probing for the person's interests and imperatives. I think that before you ever arrived, Grace had pretty much established what sort of a student you were, your college record and so on. We did not spend much time on the academics, but I think Grace Bird was really probing to learn what sort of a person I was, my values.

Sullivan: And how was she finding this out?

Finlinson: "What are your interests?" She didn't say it that way, of course. "Any interest in the arts?" in so many words. "In music? History? In people? In causes or developments?" She was so adept at it I think, frankly, many would think, "Gosh, this is a sure-fire interview." [Laughter]

Sullivan: It sounds as if you felt like such a success, she just brought you out. You just sat and chatted about what you were interested in.

Finlinson: Yes. But it was much more than passing the time of day! She was in control. Anyway, after Grace made the decision that she was interested in me, she wanted Superintendent McCuen to come and have a look. So he came over quickly. Grace didn't have me say a great deal; she presented my case to a degree.

Sullivan: She was presenting you, but she was also making a case for you.

Finlinson: Yes. It was no strain at all for me. In fact it was pleasant.

Sullivan: Then did Theron McCuen have some questions for you?

Finlinson: Yes, about my academic background and experience. He was made acquainted with my professional experience. He too was kindly. My appointment shortly followed this interview.

Sullivan: Would you speak about the Kern County Music Association and your involvement in it, and Grace Bird's involvement in it.





Finlinson: This organization brought to Bakersfield some of the fine performing artists of the day. It must have been established in the twenties perhaps a little before Grace came.

[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]

Finlinson: Of course, I didn't participate until the early sixties when I became its president. By that time she had moved to Berkeley.

Sullivan: Were there other musical activities going on that she participated in?

Finlinson: I'm sure she encouraged the musical groups on campus, and she certainly encouraged the theatre. And her interest in opera continues to this day. She's likely now a member of the San Francisco Opera Association.

Sullivan: Anything that you would have to say about Grace's involvement in the community or her way of involving the community in the college would be interesting.

Finlinson: I wouldn't say those things were extraneous, by any means, but her basic concern was this compelling desire and conviction to have Bakersfield College mean something to the young people of this community and to give them a sense of accomplishment and well-being in cultural affairs. I believe there were times when booklets were gotten out showing the creative accomplishments of students who wrote and had artistic interests and were accomplished in those particular areas.

Another item of interest about Grace, I'm sure she got obstreperous young men in her office, and made the issues clear.

Sullivan: Can you be more specific about that? Students?

Finlinson: It wouldn't be good taste for me to name this man. I had recently seen Grace at Berkeley and mentioned her to him. He said, "Oh, I sure remember Grace Bird. I wasn't doing much in school, fooling around, and she got fed up with me and called me in her office and she really told me off and told me I just ought to get out of here." She said, "Get out of here until you can get your senses back together again, and then we can do business." He left, and he did come back. He's a rather prominent man in town.

Sullivan: It's a story that shows her real involvement with people. She was not indifferent.

Finlinson: Oh, no. Peg Levinson could give you more such examples. But I'm sure there was student after student who was in her office and she,



- Finlinson: in her way, would counsel them according to their needs. Many of them, I'm sure, were good students and she encouraged them. In those days, many went to Berkeley. We were sort of an adjunct to the university at Berkeley.
- Sullivan: A real transfer institution.
- Finlinson: Yes, very much so.
- Sullivan: Can I interject and ask whether the nature of the college as a transfer institution had changed considerably by the time you became president in the late sixties?
- Finlinson: It was undergoing change, very definitely. I think that the concept of vocational education, the concept of a community college with its tentacles out in every direction has been an important development. Ralph Prator gave encouragement and leadership in this trend. The idea has developed in many directions in the areas of vocational training.
- Sullivan: Would you talk about that--the administrative pattern? One of the things we talked about this morning was that it is one thing to look at an organizational chart, but my impression of Bakersfield College is that people work together and there was a particular kind of flow of communication that an organizational chart could not convey.
- Finlinson: For many years Miss Bird did most of the administration tasks. Financial matters were handled in the district office. Miss Levinson was, by 1946, well established in administration with Miss Bird. In 1946, Ed Simonsen became Dean of Men. I did not function in central administration until 1948, then becoming Dean of Records. Prior to that I was director of the Veterans Guidance Center.
- Mrs. Esther Sargent also assisted Miss Bird and Miss Levinson. To say the least, Miss Bird was very much involved. I would think that 1948 marked the time of a basic administrative change.
- Sullivan: At that point, she started delegating?
- Finlinson: Yes, at least there was a noticeable extension. Perhaps this story is appropriate: In 1951 the student records were voluminous, having started in 1913. We were convinced that student records should be put on microfilm. This was in 1954-55. A project was developed and Board approval was secured. We started to collect and arrange the various student records. The first student records were in one of those old fashioned notebooks stitched together with string. This record was, I believe, in Mr. Vandereike's hand. Students' names were listed according to class. These were the



Finlinson: When Miss Bird took over, here were lists of the students in Grace Bird's hand. At first she did not delegate this work. Shortly, she adapted regular forms, eight by eleven cardboard. She made up the form, and sure enough, all of those were in her handwriting for many years.

Sullivan: All of those records? She wrote them down and entered the grades?

Finlinson: She entered the grades and she completed permanent records, and there were hundreds.

Sullivan: Wasn't that an unheard of thing that the dean of the college should be doing that kind of work?

Finlinson: Well, keep in mind that it was a small school, but nonetheless it was unusual. This likely helped her to know the students so well.

Sullivan: But still, wouldn't almost anyone else have had a clerical worker take care of that?

Finlinson: Likely so. She took materials home by the briefcase. She was a prodigious worker. Wherever she worked, as in the junior college association, she made the same effort. There she associated with "Jumbo" Morris and tall Basil Peterson and others. What a contrast, this petite lady sitting among these men, and many were large men. It was a real contrast. Nonetheless Grace had the same sparkle, the same command of herself, the same influence over her colleagues there as she had on her own campus. They were charmed. One could see it.

Sullivan: Usually, for a woman to get the attention of her male colleagues in meetings is quite an achievement, but apparently Grace not only got their attention, they really listened to her. They not only treated her as an equal, but they valued her judgment.

Finlinson: I think that is very true.

Sullivan: How did she do it?

Finlinson: She had a special touch. I have never seen it before and I haven't seen it since in quite the proportion that she evidenced.

Sullivan: You're suggesting a spiritual quality, aren't you?

Finlinson: Perhaps so. When one uses the word "inspiration" and "mystique," some will draw the conclusion that I'm implying a religious or spiritual connotation. I never had that impression. I do not know her views on religion.



Sullivan: That was not in the forefront of her personality.

Finlinson: But yet, when I begin to wonder about her and that "something," I suppose I use the term to explain what I do not fully understand, or account for in her nature.

Let me go on with one or two other items. We were talking about this wonderful group of people, teachers and administrators which she had about her and I'm sure that in each case that she was convinced in her own mind that what she saw were people with potential, with some abilities who shared her own imperatives.

Sullivan: That's another piece of the puzzle. People are saying that she gave others confidence in themselves, but what you're saying is that there was a very good foundation there and she simply saw it and responded to it and recognized it.

Finlinson: Yes, I think Grace was a good judge of quality. Now, this sounds excessively self-serving.

Sullivan: I sense that it's very accurate.

Finlinson: These Bakersfield people were first rate, I believe.

Sullivan: I think that if I had started my career in education at Bakersfield, I'd have wanted to stay here, too.

Finlinson: I wouldn't be surprised. [Laughter]

Sullivan: One of the things that strikes me here in Bakersfield is that people in the junior college are not afraid to admit that they're fumbling along or making mistakes. If you're learning a new routine, all right you're learning a new routine. There isn't this pressure to cover up, which seems to me to ruin a lot of what goes on in education.

Finlinson: I think that's true. But I think you should keep in mind that behind that willingness to admit a failure and not doing as well as we might, most had a firm conviction that we belonged to a really first rate school.

Of course, there are more fine community colleges now. But in those days, all through Grace's administration and I think through the fifties and sixties, you could ask anyone in the know at Berkeley, "Where is one of the stronger junior colleges in California?" and they'd say, "You better go down and see Grace Bird or Ralph Prator or Ed Simonsen at Bakersfield College."

Sullivan: Did you learn anything from Grace about administration?





Finlinson: Here is an example. When we were setting up the Veterans Guidance Center and I was getting staff to help do the counseling--we talked together quite a bit about what to do and how to do it, to go slow and be sure of the moves that we made. We were dealing with a government agency and should keep in mind that there'll be problems with them, and that we should be careful. I always thought that was good advice.

In selecting personnel Grace, I believe looked beyond the professional training and experience. She saw the "whole" person, whom-ever was to be employed.

Sullivan: What you're saying is that the key to good administration, the key to a good college, is to find first rate people.

I'd like to hear about the Christmas party.

Finlinson: Grace Bird encouraged the Christmas party. It would be near her office or in an adjacent room. Many would bring cookies and candies and there would be tea and coffee. It was a festive occasion. Grace delighted in visiting with her staff, students and friends. It was an opportunity for her to create a mutual feeling of well-being and showing her interest in her associates.

And after Grace left, this custom was continued

Sullivan: Was this a tradition that she started?

Finlinson: Oh! I'm sure she must have started it.

[end tape 1, side 2; begin tape 2, side 1]

Sullivan: Can you say anything more about how that blended the staff together?

Finlinson: At the Christmas party, I'm sure Miss Bird encouraged the college choir to have its Christmas singers come through the halls and they'd come to this place where we were all having these goodies. Miss Bird was there to greet them and she was at her best.

Sullivan: Extending herself to everyone.

Finlinson: "Thanks for what you've done for Bakersfield College, and isn't it great to do this." Then the students come in, and she'd say, "Come and meet so-and-so, again." "They're doing this and this." It was great. It was good for the soul. And it's been continued, I hope, in best tradition. But to do it better than Miss Bird did it, would take some doing. Of course others helped very much. Peg and Esther Sargent helped.



Sullivan: A hard act to follow.

Finlinson: And how! A man cannot do it so well.

Sullivan: One wonders about this. What difference did her being a woman make?

Finlinson: I must admit I can never remember thinking when we were planning or discussing what to do and how we would do it, "She's a woman." She was Grace Bird.

Sullivan: Oh! That's a lovely thing to say.

Finlinson: Another way of explaining Grace Bird is to say that she's a poetess.

Sullivan: Yes, that makes sense. It explains a lot of that sensitivity and that ability to combine incongruous elements.

Finlinson: To see beauty, to stimulate the mind, and learning is, to the poet, and endless process. There's never an end to what a poet may write about. The poet has the genius to nurse an idea along. There are many roads to take. There's a skill, there's a special endowment, there's a proficiency, there's an expertness, there's an inventive capacity, there's a creativeness about the person, a person who can inspire. The poet is an ingenious individual.

Sullivan: She really showed what it was to be an ingenious person.

Finlinson: I could never quite fit her into a school of education context. I think she approached this whole education process as an artist. It is an art, and not bound by educational theorists or theories. It was her perceptions as a poetess which she mixed in a wonderful brew that had its effect. I doubt she ever thought of education as a goal, but she thought of it as a process in which one nourished and caused to grow. That was what all this teaching was about.

She saw that most people had some potential for growth. The possibilities of growth were in all directions. And she was a living example of it. You could just see it. She could talk informatively about architecture to the architectural students, mathematics, history, literature, and writing.

There needed, from her point of view, to be a growth in the love of learning, and growth in the inquisitive mind. It was growth in one's awareness in the world. In education, for her, there was no place to stop. You just couldn't get off. You had to keep going. She liked an orderly mind and she liked people who knew orderly ways. How well she would have adjusted to people who operate without respecting others as is now sometimes the case, I do not know.



Sullivan: The kind of student movements that we saw in the sixties and seventies.

Finlinson: How she would have operated in such a jungle, I wonder. Her mind is a cultivated, civilized, humanitarian mind, not tuned to violence, recrimination, the vulgar or the nude.

[Dia Finlinson arrives]

Sullivan: Mr. Finlinson, just mentioned that you have an incident about Miss Bird that might be included. Would you tell it, now?

DF: Miss Bird knew that I was interested in jade. So, one time when Burns was making a trip to San Francisco she encouraged him to bring me, too. And she took me to see the Brundage Collection. I think that was at the De Young Museum. So we had a wonderful afternoon together there. As we came up on the veranda at the front, there was a statuary, and as I recall there were three figures. It was beautifully designed, somewhat on the idea of a circle. They were figures of young men, as I remember. The heads were drooped and the feeling of the bodies was dejected and down, but it did form a beautiful circular design. As I remember, it was a Rodin.

Miss Bird looked at it and didn't have much to say, but she said, "What do you think about that?" I said that the design had struck me, that it was a beautiful design. And here it was above the city, a beautiful setting for it. She expressed her idea about it. "If only they were older people, I could accept it better," she said. But for young people to face a problem or to face life dejected and beaten, that bothered her.

Sullivan: That does say something profound about her.

DF: It really did. It was part of her spirit. She goes after things in a very different way than that, and I've always remembered it.

Sullivan: Her work at the college was certainly bent on having the opposite affect on young people, giving them hope in a tangible way.

DF: Another way of saying it is that one of her strengths is certainly to inspire people, and this particular art object didn't. It made one feel badly. And especially since they were young people. It seemed to trouble her.

Finlinson: Dia and I have a genuine affection for Miss Bird, as you can tell. This friendships is a great satisfaction to us.

Sullivan: That says a great deal about Miss Bird.

[end tape 2, side 1]



Edward Simonsen

[Interview 1: April 23, 1977]  
[begin tape 1, side 1]

## Joining Bakersfield College

Sullivan: Ed, I wonder if you would start by giving your first impressions of Grace Bird as an administrator. That would be from the time you came as dean of men in the fall of 1946, wouldn't it?

Simonsen: Yes, Ralda. As I mentioned yesterday in the group, I had known Miss Bird since the late thirties when I was a teacher at East Bakersfield High School. So I already had a pretty good idea of what kind of a person she was and also what kind of an administrator she was. She had an excellent reputation in the educational fraternity here. People in the high schools, and certainly in the college, knew that she was a very solid educator and a wonderful person and an effective administrator. And when I joined the staff, I was not disappointed.

In 1946 I was planning to go back to East Bakersfield High as a teacher and I was going to have quite a different kind of an assignment than I'd had before. But just about the time I was planning to go back to East High, making these final arrangements about what my specific program would be, I was encouraged by the university to stay on. I had made quite a bit of headway in graduate work in that year since getting out of the service, and I was encouraged to remain in Berkeley.

Sullivan: And get a doctorate right then.

Simonsen: Yes, to go ahead and stay in the doctoral program. I had made a trip down to Bakersfield, in a sense, to break the news to the people here that I would like another leave for an additional year. The people at East High were a little disturbed with me, I'm quite sure. But they went along with the idea.

I'd say within a week after I'd made that request there came the notification that Superintendent Theron McCuen would be coming to Berkeley to discuss with me the possibility of joining Bakersfield Junior College at that time as the Dean of Men. And the implication was, more or less, that Grace Bird wants me to come. Then I had to make peace with the School of Education at Berkeley because if they wanted me back at Bakersfield as the dean of men at Bakersfield College, I didn't have anything to do but accept it.

Sullivan: Because it seemed like such a good opportunity?





Simonsen: It was an opportunity. It was one in a lifetime. Most of the people who were interested in community college work weren't sure where they could get on, and certainly not as an administrator. The jobs were primarily in teaching. And, of course, a lot of the people had been off on leaves and they were all coming back, and there weren't very many jobs even in 1946 for administrators in colleges. So it was an unusual opportunity, and I took it.

Part of it was Miss Bird's reputation. I thought, "What an opportunity!" I talked to a couple of people on the staff up there and they said, "Well, we hate to have you leave but you really shouldn't turn it down." In other words, she was known very well at Berkeley.

Herman Spindt (former superintendent of the Kern High School and Junior College), by that time was on the staff at the university and, as a matter of fact, I talked to him about it. "What do you think about Grace's desire to have me go down as Dean of Men?" And he said, "Well, I don't know what else you have in mind, but you'd be crazy not to take it."

I'm not sure that Grace really knew whether I could do the job or not. In fact, part of Grace's style was to play hunches with people. I don't think she was very scientific on people decisions, frankly.

Sullivan: You had not applied for this job?

Simonsen: No, I didn't apply.

Sullivan: It was just that her idea of the person that should be offered this job was Ed Simonsen.

Simonsen: I don't know who she discussed it with other than Mr. McCuen. Apparently Mr. McCuen agreed, too. I had kept in touch. Counting the service and graduate school, I was gone about five years; but I'd been in touch. I had returned to Bakersfield. I had visited people. So it wasn't as if I had deserted them or anything like that. My impression was, what an opportunity to go to work for Grace. And, of course, I was never disappointed because here was a recognized community college, one of the oldest.

It didn't even have a campus. The kids used to describe it as being located between two large buildings on the Bakersfield High School campus. It was just plopped in the center of things. It was not a very good physical setup. But the thing that was exciting about it was what was offered at this college, what a tremendous following it had. There was at that time--and I think still--a great reservoir of support. Many of the people in the community, even back in those days--1946, this was--there were a lot of people who had gotten their start there. The people who were lawyers and



Simonsen: doctors and professional people of all sorts, as well as a lot of the trademen and people who were out in the community working in a variety of occupations, had gotten their start through BC.

All the time I was in the service and overseas, I was on Grace's mailing list and received the alumni newsletter. So I had a feeling about it. And everybody else did. Anyway it wasn't quite the same as going to work for somebody that I didn't know before. I knew what I was getting into, and then I was pleasantly surprised because there was Peg Levinson as the other dean. There were only two deans. Peg and I were the deans.

#### Being Dean of Men

Sullivan: Grace obviously got what she wanted in the way of deans.

Simonsen: We were a triumvirate. We were never a troika because there was no question who was boss.

Sullivan: That's interesting, too. I wonder if you'd talk a little bit about the interaction between you and Grace and Peg. I'm curious to know, for instance, what Grace told you when you came and talked to her about the job.

Simonsen: She gave me the assignment. As dean of men, I had the usual number of counselees--somewhere between three hundred and four hundred counselees that were my responsibility.

Sullivan: That's a very large number.

Simonsen: It was a heavy load. In fact, I think a more reasonable load is fifty to seventy-five per counseling hour. I was counseling four, five, or six hours a day, and that was one of my major responsibilities. But I also was director of student activities and was head of student government and was the director of athletics.

Sullivan: That's a lot of territory.

Simonsen: It really was. I covered the whole waterfront in the student personnel field. Peg [Levinson] had a very heavy counseling load. At this time we were talking about eight hundred or nine hundred students, and I had roughly three hundred and Peg had at least that many. Then there were some other counselors.

Sullivan: I was wondering about the relationship between your counseling and the load of the regular counselors on the staff.



Simonsen: Most of the other counselors were part-timers. There was a director of guidance and testing where a lot of the more formal work was done. Peg and I didn't do the testing.

Sullivan: Was that the dean of instruction who did the testing?

Simonsen: No. There was a coordinator, Dr. Orral Luke, who has recently passed away. He had just started out. He was brand new. There had been some people in this responsibility earlier, and a lot of these things were pretty well set up.

At that time the basic test that was given was referred to as the ACE. It was a Thurston psychological exam, and everybody took that. In this respect, we were a very academic institution because the Thurston Psychological Exam was not a very good exam for the typical community college group. I think it's probably still used, but it wouldn't be as all-important as we made it at BC.

Sullivan: But was it useful at that time?

Simonsen: I think so. I learned a lot from my colleagues. I took some test and measurements and guidance courses at the university, but they were pretty perfunctory--more or less overviews. But I remember I learned from Dorothy Albaugh [teacher of psychology at BC] about the Thurston Psychological Exam which, I think, was considered a good test. The thing that Dorothy told me has always stuck with me. She's the one who said, "This particular test will never overrate a student as far as his academic competence or aptitude are concerned. It will not overrate them. But the thing that you have to watch out for, Si--" (she got very thoughtful), "it may underrate them, and there is where you have to use your skill as a counselor, as a teacher, and as a human being to find out whether this test was underrating somebody because the person had had poor basic skills."

Sullivan: You then had to decide whether this person might be capable of more.

Simonsen: It's not going to do a real tough student in at all, but it might cause you to overlook someone who is sort of a jewel in the rough; in other words, somebody who didn't have a good background in English or mathematics would get cut down by this test.

I told you yesterday about how we had all of the records of the students, including the records of those who had been in school the previous five to ten years. We used to have a lot of fun going back over some of those as we'd get the reports in from the colleges and we'd find people making straight A's in physics at Berkeley; we'd wonder how are they doing that because they just barely struggled through here.



Simonsen: I remember one fellow who, by the way, went on and worked at Lawrence Radiation Lab and got a Ph.D in physics. This guy's test [was interesting]. The Thurston Psychological was divided into qualitative and quantitative. He was pretty high in his quantitative and he was down in about the fifteenth or twentieth percentile in his qualitative. He flunked Subject A and took "bonehead" English about four times before he made it. He finally struggled into Berkeley and in a matter of four or five years later he was a Ph.D. And there were a lot of other examples. We used to have a lot of good sessions over those students who didn't look like very good prospects who would then do very well.

Sullivan: They had the potential.

Simonsen: The thing that has made us feel good and one of the reasons that we're excited about being in the business that we're in--it's really not much of a trick in education to take the brilliant student who has excellent grades, excellent study habits, excellent background, etc., etc., and make a good student out of him.

It seems to me that the real challenge of the community college is to take the outstanding student and take the very average student and take the student who doesn't show any promise at all and sometime down the line find out that all three of them did exceptionally well. Some of the selected institutions, I think, don't realize how many jewels they are leaving in the ground.

Sullivan: And you're a facilitating organization. These jewels in the rough really need you to refine them.

Simonsen: We still have a major responsibility for helping the student, no matter how good he is or how poor a student he is, to become a substantial junior at a senior institution of his choice. I'd like to think that that's pretty basic to everything else that we do. In other words, we're not going to force everybody into the program that will get him or her into Berkeley or Stanford; but for the person that has that desire, it can be done and it's quality work. I think it's tremendous.

I've talked to a lot of senior college people. I've talked to professors from Stanford; I've talked to people at Harvard like David Riesman. I had a number of conversations with him, and he has some reservations about the community colleges but he's amazed at what we can do. Linus Pauling has told me personally that he thinks the job the community colleges do is fantastic. He told me, on an airplane going east one time, that his students at Cal Tech who had had two years of community college were just as well-prepared as those who had spent two years in the lower division at Cal Tech.





## Standards

Sullivan: He was speaking, I assume, about community colleges like Bakersfield College. Those who come from other places, maybe in large cities, have a different story to tell. What do you think about that? I'm suggesting a problem area here.

Simonsen: I don't quite buy that myself. I think it is true that Bakersfield College has had a fantastic reputation after senior institutions witness the records that our students have made. There's something that occurs, though, that avoids the problem that you're alluding to. When Pauling said his community college transfer students did exceptionally well, you want to remember that there was a weeding-out process that occurred. So the student from, perhaps, an urban community college who ends up at Cal Tech had to cut it in calculus and physics all the way through and all the way through chemistry as well. And a certain weeding-out process occurs. So if he is pronounced "ready" to enter by the selection processes that Cal Tech would use, that person has got to be ready to get in. I don't care whether he went to BC or whether he went to Taft or Barstow or Los Angeles City College or wherever.

The thing that people fail to realize, I think, is that at a community college in order to get into something like calculus or Math 3A,B,C or 4A,B,C, you must have had the elementary courses first. A student who gets there is going to be just as good as that student who is taking a similar course at the state college or university.

In other words, it's open admission but not necessarily to each and every class. You have to work your way up. If you're ready to go into the front door, you can do so. If a student was ready to go to the university as a freshman and take regular University of California freshman classes but he decides to go to a community college, he'll take virtually University of California classes in our institution. I don't know if you get the distinction.

Sullivan: Yes, I do. I guess one of the areas that I'm thinking about is the whole area of English and language skills. Certainly in a calculus course everyone knows what territory should be covered. But in a field like English there's lots of room for variation. It's a matter of the teacher's individual judgment whether you're going to read ten novels in a semester or just five, and how many papers you're going to require. In a field like that, some junior colleges may not prepare their students as well as others.

Simonsen: I think that's possible if you were to select a given area such as that. Some of our English people would say, "That's a good theory, Ralda, but did you know what we do here and here and here?"



- Sullivan: I'm not attacking Bakersfield, but I am criticizing other places.
- Simonsen: Well, in fact, you might be right in criticizing Bakersfield in some areas or maybe at a given particular year. It's a changing situation. But I think the thing that our people have done is that they've really made a study of learning difficulties in English, for example. Contrary to a typical pattern of many years ago, that a person would take Subject A and flunk it and then he would take bonehead and he'd flunk it. Then he'd take it and flunk it again. He might flunk it three or four times. We haven't always done that. We analyze what's wrong with them and try to attack the problem that he or she may have. There have been a variety of things done. I know you teach English at the university, and I know it's not true of everyone, but a lot of the people that we've gotten from their first year out of the university with their master's degree don't have a master's in English, they have a master's in English Literature. They're not very well prepared to teach composition or to teach remedial writing.
- Sullivan: That's right.
- Simonsen: I don't want to get on a soap box, but we don't feel it's beneath our teachers to really get down to cases with our students as far as what they really need. If they need to go all the way back to the fifth or sixth grade, we'll take the time. We won't take a whole year in the fifth or sixth grade, but we'll give them what they need and move them up. They do competency examinations to bring them along. We analyze what it is they have to know and then go at it.
- Sullivan: How did the administration of Grace Bird deal with such instructional problems?
- Simonsen: We were still fairly small, and a lot of work was done in the individual areas. Each psychology professor didn't go off on his own. There were a lot of committee meetings about instruction. Workshops, pre-school meetings, and a lot of things that are more typically done in the high schools. For example, English people always did the sharing of reading of exams. They borrowed very heavily from the Berkeley Subject A program. In fact, many of our teachers came out of those programs. Paul Gordon [English teacher], for example, knew this thing inside-out and backward, and he was not ashamed to work at that level.
- Sullivan: It's vital that work be done at that level.
- Simonsen: Tom Merson was very analytical about what we should be teaching in the various science courses. There were a number of other professors who were the same way. The point was that Grace would encourage



- Simonsen: the people to get in there and know what it is that is required at the university. Most of everything we've said about Bakersfield College is what Grace described as the "golden years" of the college [1920-1950]. An awful lot that was done might be criticized today--
- Sullivan: I'd like to hear about what might be criticized.
- Simonsen: Because it seemed that we were preoccupied with what the university was expecting.
- Sullivan: Was there too much emphasis on the college as a transfer institution?
- Simonsen: Maybe not at that time. At this point in time there is criticism and it would be justified if you were to pattern the entire college after the university; the fact is that in the years since the thirties and forties and fifties, there have been a lot of other options open to students.

The state colleges have expanded and the private colleges have become more aggressive. We have a lot of different places that people go. Everybody isn't going to the University of California anymore. And then, of course, in the community colleges, not only aren't they going to the university or private colleges or the state colleges, a lot of them aren't going to the senior institutions at all. They're going right out into jobs.

#### Goals of Students

- Sullivan: Do you see the community college now as primarily terminal education for people who are going to enter the job market right away? Or is it still primarily a transfer institution? Or is it divided?
- Simonsen: It's divided. But percentage-wise, I think if you attack it from the point of view of what they actually do rather than what they're intentions were--a lot of people, when you start right out with them and ask, "What are you going to do?" they say they're going on to a senior institution--some years ago we found that about two-thirds would say they were going to go on, but maybe only one-third would. Now it might even be worse than that, percentage-wise. The fact is that in those days going to the senior institutions and getting the baccalaureate degree (and maybe for some, the master's degree, and for a few, the doctorate) was the ticket to a good job.

Today it's a different story. It might be the worst thing in the world to get a bachelor's degree for some people now. It might be good from a general education point of view, but from the standpoint



Simonsen: of finding employment, it might not be the best thing in the world. A person might be better off to take one of our programs here and become an RN and start out with one thousand dollars a month at the local hospital; whereas, the person with the bachelor's degree might find a pretty good job clerking somewhere for half that much money. So if you go the dollars and cents route, it makes you wonder a little bit.

No matter what the students will choose, whatever they may need, there always was and it seems to me there is now and perhaps will always be a rather large component in the college that will be considered "transfer." And I think it's much larger today than it was in Grace Bird's day. But percentage-wise it's smaller. We now have over twenty thousand students in our colleges here; whereas, about the time that Grace left we only had about twelve hundred.

Sullivan: This would have been in 1950 that she left.

Simonsen: That's right. In other words, the numbers are still quite large, but the percentage of the institution that is inclined this way is much smaller. This probably explains partly where these students have come from. There wasn't really much for them. In the time of Grace Bird, we really didn't have a separate occupational program of much consequence. It was all in conjunction with the high school.

Sullivan: I was going to ask you whether, under Grace Bird, this was primarily a transfer institution?

Simonsen: It's not so much under Grace Bird as it was at the time of Grace Bird. Community colleges were that way.

Sullivan: It wasn't her choice of emphasis?

Simonsen: I don't think it was. In fact, Grace was very supportive of the development of terminal programs.

[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]

Sullivan: I want to ask you about some administrative procedures, but I want to give you a chance to finish what you were saying about Bakersfield College as a transfer institution.

Simonsen: I think it was during that period of time, in the late forties, that community colleges began to recognize that there was more to being a community college than the purely academic program, or the transfer program. Grace brought, for example, Parley Kilburn in to become director of the continuing education program--adult education. We hadn't done much til then. And part of the reason we hadn't





Simonsen: done a lot of these things was that the high school was doing such a magnificent job. For example, in occupational training the high school had a fantastic Ag [agriculture] program, a tremendous shop program.

Sullivan: These were junior college adult education programs?

Simonsen: Yes, but they also had it in the high school. In other words, there was no reason, in a sense, for a lot of these students to think about a community college because they could get it [at high school]; they were commercial majors, we used to call them. They'd whip through and come out of high school as qualified secretaries or qualified machinists or mechanics, or qualified workers in agriculture, and so forth.

But adult education at BC really didn't get in motion until just about the time that Grace was leaving [1950]. Grace encouraged it and believed in it, but it hadn't really caught on. At least, by the time that I joined here it was still pretty much the other way. But it was leading into it just about the time Grace left. In other words, she was sympathetic with it but I can't honestly say that we had such a great program--extension or occupational--in the late 1940s. It was in the early 1950s that this other effort or emphasis really got going.

#### Changing Needs

Sullivan: I'm wondering what social forces led to the community college taking over more of those vocational training functions. Why was it no longer sufficient for the high school to carry that load? What was going on?

Simonsen: I think there were a lot of things. I think you have to keep in mind that after World War II there was Public Law 346, which was the GI bill, and a lot of students came back. Their first choice was to try to become what they saw in the service as being pretty wonderful. So a lot of them decided they ought to be engineers, for instance. By the time I joined the community college we had a lot of GIs and there was a big emphasis on the technical fields. When I say technical I'm talking about bachelor's degrees, master's, and doctorates. But a lot of these same people found maybe they didn't quite have it for that kind of a career. So then they began to look at some other things that they could do.

Sullivan: Requiring something between a high school and university education.



Simonsen: A lot of them took the first couple of years in math and science, discarded the idea of going on to a senior institution, and went out into the community and did exceptionally well. They had a two-year pre-engineering program, for example, that put them in pretty good stead in the community in terms of the kinds of jobs they were able to do.

Sullivan: And the whole economy was expanding and providing new jobs, and the community college was training people to fill these middle management and lower level positions, I suppose.

Simonsen: And the para-professionals. That's a whole new story. There was some of it in the late 1940s, but it really got started, as I said, just about the time that Grace went to Berkeley.

For example, there was a community-needs survey which I believe Grace instituted, that just started to find out what was really needed. And then, since 1950--twenty-seven years ago--in that past twenty-seven years this whole occupational area has exploded. The whole idea of continuing education has exploded. I can remember a time when we just had a handful of evening classes. Grace brought Parley Kilburn on at a time when we only had a couple of classes. I think we had a psychology class and a geology class. Then Parley Kilburn began to add many classes.

In 1956, when we were on a new campus, we had many more students in the day than at night. But then there was a turn. I think we were a little slower in this than a lot of other institutions. Then we got to the point, about 1958 or 1960, when we noticed that there were just about as many at night as in the day. And next thing you know, there were many more at night than in the day. But this has all occurred since the days of Grace Bird. The point is that she got this thing started in such a beautiful way that anything the college wanted to do, it was doomed to be successful.

Sullivan: By starting with her community survey?

Simonsen: That was kind of what started it. But, what I meant was that it was going to succeed because the college had a good reputation in other fields and continued to have a good reputation.

Sullivan: For thoroughness and integrity.

Simonsen: Yes. They never thought of it as a "fly-by-night" outfit because we were teaching people how to weld, for example.



## The Nature of Administration

- Sullivan: It was reputable. Your talking about the new campus just set a whole new question in my mind. I'll throw it out to you and see if you want to deal with it. That is, I understand that you had a great deal to do with dealing with the architects and all the work that was involved in setting up the new campus, and that you were the man that really put that together. It occurs to me that there are different kinds of administrative jobs. Different kinds of people do well at different kinds of things. I wonder if we could get into talking about the business of being an administrator, if you want to address yourself to the question of the different kinds of people and the different kinds of [work].
- Simonsen: You mean without reference to Grace?
- Sullivan: With or without reference to Grace. I know we want to talk about what kinds of things Grace taught you in educational administration, but this just came to mind. I don't know if it's anything you want to respond to, or should we just let it go?
- Simonsen: I think that being an administrator involves a lot of general qualities that are necessary. If a person is a good administrator, he could almost say, "Well, what do you want me to administer?"
- Sullivan: Would you talk about those qualities?
- Simonsen: I'd almost forgotten about my involvement in the new campus. But I think before we go on to the new campus we should say that Grace didn't push the board, or didn't push Mr. McCuen and Mr. Taber, as hard as some other administrators may have done. You didn't think about her being a woman, but she was a "lady," and a lady has to show good manners. And she was very respectful of the board and of the superintendent and deputy superintendent, and didn't want to become obnoxious about it. She wouldn't get in there and pound the table, but in a very quiet way she kept stressing with them, "You know, it's about time that we get going on this college--a separate campus. It's no good the way it is, our being on the high school campus." Many, many communities--Visalia, Modesto, to name a couple--had their separate college campuses many years before. She established, first of all, that we had a great program, a good college, a good staff. And, while she was rather deliberate about it, the foundation was there, and about the time that she left--I think it was three months after she went to Berkeley--we purchased the land for the new campus, and it was where she wanted it to be. Namely, up on the hill. That was her idea.
- Sullivan: How did it turn out that she got her way?



- Simonsen: She got her way. As I say, somebody might say, "Well, it's about time." And some other guys would have, perhaps, rocked the boat and maybe have been a squeaky wheel and gotten the campus earlier.
- Sullivan: Is that a criticism that could be made of Grace Bird?
- Simonsen: I always looked upon it in another way. In the first place, the relationship between the college and the high school was always good. There wasn't the break. This was no situation such as you find in South Africa; this was not Rhodesia where Smith, up until very recently, has been holding the line. Grace reasoned with people on the board and at the administration level, and they said that we should have a separate campus. It was continued under other people. Grace's successor, Ralph Prator, while impatient at times, did have great respect for the board. And then later, when I became president of Bakersfield College, I had respect for the board. Ours is a very unusual situation. There was a transition; there was never a break; there was never ill-feeling about it. But it took us a heck of a long time to get there. Of course, there are some areas like Glendale, Santa Monica, and Long Beach that took a lot longer than we did. But getting back to this administrative thing. First of all, Grace did have the idea of it being on the hill, and immediately when Ralph Prator came on the scene, his primary responsibility was to get that college organized. We had the property and we had a bond issue to put over. I was still the Dean of Men. Ralph was probing for somebody to get this planning off the ground. He had tentatively assigned it to a couple of people, who will remain nameless, and they couldn't pull it off. They didn't know where the hell to start, frankly.
- Sullivan: They were not administrators.
- Simonsen: They weren't. They were wonderful guys, and they were excellent teachers and very knowledgeable, but they couldn't get it off the ground. I was doing primarily student personnel work--all those other jobs I told you about.
- Sullivan: Can I ask a question here? Were you counseling students that were not being counseled by any other counselors?
- Simonsen: Yes. We had our own group. We divided them in different ways in different years. Little by little I lost some, and I didn't have three hundred the whole time. But, to make the point that we brought up a little while ago, that if you're an administrator you can probably administer almost anything. I saw that this planning was really not getting anywhere and a lot of people were getting impatient. So I went into Ralph Prator and said, "Ralph, I haven't had a lot of experience in school buildings and planning and all that, but I did take a course at Cal and found it pretty interesting, and if





- Simonsen: I could help you any, let me know." He said, "Well, thanks a lot, Ed." And the next day he called me back in and said, "You know, I've been thinking about it. How would you like to take that over?" Before long he had relieved me of virtually everything else and I became, in a sense, the liaison person with the board, with the faculty, with the administration, with the architects, with Ralph and all the other people. And that's about all I did.
- Sullivan: Were you given a new title for that?
- Simonsen: I became dean of administration. Administrative dean. The point is that what I knew about planning was pretty small, but I learned a lot in a hurry. What I was doing mainly was coordinating--bringing people together, setting up the meetings, and getting the involvement of all the people. And, of course, Ralph was right there. I was more or less his executive officer for this function, because he had a great interest in this new campus.
- Sullivan: Is that what a good administrator does? Doing the coordination?
- Simonsen: I think so. And you learn an awful lot in a hurry. Right now, for example, we have a need in the colleges for people who can work in personnel. I've spent a good part of my career working in personnel but I had relatively few courses in it. I've read a lot in it. I've taught personnel, but you learn an awful lot on the job.
- Sullivan: That raises in my mind the question about the value of course work compared to on-the-job experience.
- Simonsen: You get certain general principles from the courses. In Human Relations you learn that you don't run over people.
- Sullivan: Can't you get that from reading a book?
- Simonsen: Yes. That's another thing. I think a lot of this you can learn, but a lot of it, if you have to learn it, it's not going to take. In other words, a lot of these things are human traits. I know some people in our organization at different colleges who could probably get a high grade on an objective examination about such a subject as personnel or human relations. They'd pass it with flying colors. And yet their human relations aren't worth a damn. And I know some other people who might not do too well on a test but seem to know how to get things done without stirring up everything.



## Hiring Personnel

- Sullivan: That comes to the question, how do you make decisions about who you're going to hire. A while ago you said that Grace Bird was not scientific and she worked on hunches.
- Simonsen: She went more on the human side of it.
- Sullivan: It's my impression that she would have the sense to know who would be good at working with people, and never mind the test scores. Is that right?
- Simonsen: I think so. You saw some people around the table yesterday that Grace chose. One of them was Peg. And Peg was a superior teacher of English, but the biggest thing in her favor was the fact that she was a superior person, and Grace saw this. I didn't realize that she didn't visit any classes. She never visited any of mine either, come to think of it. I never thought about that. She didn't know if I did a good job in my classes.
- But she had her antenna out. She knew what was going on. And another thing. There are a lot of studies that have been conducted that show all the way through the grades--and I think it's true in community college, college, university, graduate school, etc.--that if you're expected to succeed and to do well, you'll do well. As long as you have, maybe, a little bit on the ball. If you're expected to do well, you'll do well. I guess you could overdo that. That's almost maudlin.
- Sullivan: Enough people have said that that was one of the things that Grace communicated.
- Simonsen: She had great faith in you. She had great faith in the kids on the football team and the coaches. I think we had a lot of successes because success was expected. She made a few mistakes, as we mentioned the other day. But I can count them on the fingers of one hand.
- Sullivan: Mistakes in personnel?
- Simonsen: In choice, yes. When this gut reaction wasn't scientific enough and she got fooled by the person who was, maybe, all smiles all the time.
- Sullivan: How would she correct her mistakes? How would she deal with it?
- Simonsen: She belled the cat. They just weren't around after awhile. But she would always pick them up, though. For instance, if somebody



Simonsen: was teaching journalism and he wasn't doing it very well but he was a good journalist, she might suggest, "Maybe it's about time for you to go out and work for a newspaper." And that happened. Other people had gone back into selling something, whereas they had left sales to become teachers. It was really a kick. She might not appreciate hearing that I said she wasn't very scientific, but I felt that she used a lot of intuition--I don't know if it's women's intuition or what. But she had a feeling for people, and she wasn't wrong too many times.

#### Learning From Grace Bird

Sullivan: Do you want to say anything more about what you learned from her? Yesterday you said that working with her was like taking a course in educational administration.

Simonsen: Well, I think one of the things I learned was this business of being a builder-upper rather than a tearer-downer. Grace did a lot of talking, as you well know. But she was a pretty good listener, too. But she never gossiped.

Sullivan: That's interesting.

Simonsen: Which may be rare among people who do a lot of talking. She was always dealing in the world of ideas. She was very interested in her kids and she was interested in what we were interested in. She was interested in the spouses. She was interested in everything that was going on. [Pause]

Getting back to the business of what I learned from her, I think of the business of being positive, being "up" on people, of having respect for teachers. There was never any thought, as there seems to be today, about the teachers being over there and the administration being over here. It really was pretty much one happy family, and that's regarded as kind of a bad thing today because if it's all one happy family, then the administrators are paternalistic. And maybe there was a little paternalism involved. I think it's possible. I think Grace did watch out for her people, for her staff. She watched out for the students. So there was a little paternalism. When you talk to Mr.[Burns] Finlinson you might want to ask him what he thinks of this business of paternalism in education. I remember once he said, "I don't understand why people are so upset about administrators being paternalistic. I always had a lot of respect for my father because he helped watch out for me." But anyhow, that's a no-no today.



## Changes

- Sullivan: Do you want to speculate at all about what's happened? This is an interesting change.
- Simonsen: It is. People don't want you to do things for them now, unless they ask for it, unless it is part of their non-negotiable demands. If they say, "We want it," and then you give it to them, then they want an argument.
- Sullivan: That puts them in the driver's seat.
- Simonsen: But if you give it to them without their asking for it, they won't appreciate it and they won't consider it anything that helped them because you gave it to them, therefore you must have wanted them to have it, therefore you don't get any brownie points for that. You don't get any credit.
- Sullivan: You were just pleasing yourself. It's your "trip" that you foisted on them. [Laughter]
- Simonsen: That's right.
- Sullivan: This is an interesting change.
- Simonsen: It's like a kid. But, you know, it happens in our families, too. In other words, if your kid comes to you and says, "Mom, I want to go to Europe." You say, "Oh, what did you have in mind?" "Well, I want to do this or that." And then you say, "How are you going to pay for it?" "I was planning to work all year and I was going to save up and I was going to cut into my allowances, and I've got a special rate to go there." You say, "Well, that's pretty good. Where are you going to get the rest of it?" "I was just wondering, do you think you could give me a loan?" Then you say, "You seem to have a pretty good plan, but let me talk to your dad about it." Okay. Then you go to your husband and say, "This crazy kid wants to go. He's got it all worked out. What do you think?" Then he'd say, "Let him sweat about it a little bit, but it really makes sense." Then after a week or two you finally, almost reluctantly, agree that he could go. And the kid goes and he gets a hell of a lot out of that trip. And you compare that, on the other hand, with you and your husband deciding that it's time for Johnny to go to Europe. You look in the books and you find the trip for him. You draw the money out of your savings and you tell Johnny one day about this package that you've worked out. The kid will probably reluctantly agree to go. But he'll sit on his hands the whole way. He won't appreciate it. He won't thank you for it. He won't do a damn thing about it. And then when he comes in the next time and





- Simonsen: says, "I want to go to the music festival," you say, "Well, I sent you to Europe." And he'll say, "Well, hell, I didn't want to go to Europe."
- Sullivan: Yes, that's exactly the way it happens.
- Simonsen: This is the same thing that's happening. The teachers might resent my likening them to a group of kids, but it's not too different. It's not too different. [Laughter]
- Sullivan: I know this is an area that disturbs Grace Bird very much. She can't square the way teachers are acting today with her idea of the teacher, who should have the welfare of the student uppermost; and for a teacher to be thinking about "What's in it for me?" seems alien to her.
- Simonsen: It's been an evolutionary thing. I talked about paternalism earlier. I always thought the kind of paternalism--or maternalism, I guess--that Grace applied was always a good thing. It was always very positive and good. But it wasn't too many years before that that teachers--and students, as well--were treated in a rather shabby fashion. For example, you go back in educational history and you find that it used to be that a teacher who was going to start in a small elementary school would have to go around and be interviewed by all the board members--all out in the community. She might have to walk out in the middle of a field and the farmer would stop the horse and interrogate her. One of the things he might say is, "Do you smoke? Do you drink? Do you realize that we expect our teachers to live in private homes?" All the restrictions. And little by little, they have rebelled; now what you do outside of the classroom is nobody's business.

Little by little, it's gotten to the point where anything that we did on the personnel policies that wasn't asked for is paternalistic. Then it's gotten now, in a nutshell, to the idea that it's been recognized that the administration and the board have the power, and the teachers want some of it. Preferably, all of it. It's a big hunk of bologna, as they say. They cut it off a slice at a time. And there's only about this much left, as opposed to what they started with. They've got all these benefits and now they want the rest of it.

In a short while, at the rate some districts are going--in fact, it's happened already in some municipalities. Look at the sort of things that can happen in San Francisco. Berkeley had some serious strikes. Even Governor Brown thinks that public employees have just as much right to strike as anyone else. Anyhow, education is just caught in with all the others. I think if there had never been any problem with the garbage workers and the policemen and the fire



- Simonsen: department, then probably education wouldn't have been involved.
- Sullivan: You were here at a time when Grace Bird could be maternalistic or paternalistic and it was accepted on both sides and there was a harmony there. And now you've seen the change in a place like Bakersfield where teachers, one would assume, were well-treated. You can see where teachers would react if administrators really asked for it by being unreasonable and by continuing to treat teachers shabbily. But apparently there was a lot of harmony here, and now there's as much need for collective bargaining, or there is as much collective bargaining, in Bakersfield as there is in, say, San Francisco. What's made for that change?
- Simonsen: I would like to think that we aren't that bad off here.
- Sullivan: That there isn't that much acrimony?
- Simonsen: No. As a matter of fact, we get along very well with our staff. But also, though, our staffs don't live in a vacuum. They live up and down the state. They go to their meetings and they hear these horror stories. So now the name of the game is that we know that our present board is an excellent board. The teachers have said to me, "Si, we trust you. But you may not always be here. We want the policies, we want the procedures set up in such a fashion that we will be protected." So little by little, you agree to putting these things in writing.
- [end tape 1, side 2; begin tape 2, side 1]

### Coping

- Sullivan: Do any incidents come to mind that you want to get in about Grace Bird as an administrator? You've seen her under pressure. It's hard to imagine Grace Bird showing pressure, but surely there were problems, surely there were moments of pressure. She was a good administrator. How did she cope?
- Simonsen: I think Grace had a certain dignity. Even though, as I said earlier, there was no question about who was in charge, she did delegate quite well. I think a lot of the real problems of the late 1940s were problems of working with students. There were very few problems in working with faculty actually. It was a fairly simple thing.
- Sullivan: What were the problems with students?
- Simonsen: A lot of the GIs were back, and some of them had picked up some



- Simonsen: bad habits in the service. So we were spending a lot of time with pretty mundane problems.
- Sullivan: Dealing with things like theft?
- Simonsen: Some of that.
- Sullivan: Vandalism?
- Simonsen: Not much vandalism. Gambling, smoking--no pot or anything like that, just plain old smoking where they weren't supposed to--and drinking and things of this sort. Some of the students didn't like to go to class. But talking about the "golden years," everybody seemed to be pretty excited about what they were about. We were growing and we had a lot of anticipation about some day having a new campus. Most of our problems were putting out the fires that arose over the fact that we were sharing a campus with the high school.
- Sullivan: What kind of fires were those?
- Simonsen: Invariably we'd get calls from the principal of the high school. "Your damn kids are out there smoking right in front of my office. They're smoking in the elm grove and they're not supposed to be smoking there." High school students weren't supposed to smoke.
- Sullivan: How did you handle that?
- Simonsen: We were almost like hooky cops in some respects.
- Sullivan: Hooky cops?
- Simonsen: Yes. A hooky cop is usually running down the truants but we were running them down for doing things they weren't supposed to be doing at that particular time and place. A lot of our problems were pretty much "nuts and bolts."
- Sullivan: It takes skill to handle those nuts and bolts problems. I wonder if I could get you to give me any examples of either how Grace would handle them or how you would handle them.
- Simonsen: Grace had a knack for avoiding controversy, it seems to me.
- Sullivan: She was not one for confrontation?
- Simonsen: As I say, she belled the cat on some problems. But an awful lot of the problems that the college had were handled pretty much by the staff. For example, the serious problems of the students were handled by Peg and me. I used to spend a lot of time putting



- Simonsen: out these fires. I'd get a call from across the street from the hot dog stand. The kids were figuring out ways to cause problems, to rob the guy blind, a lot of stuff like that. I used to break up fights.
- Sullivan: What did you do with the case of the hot dog stand?
- Simonsen: We'd be supportive of the guy. We had to remind the student that he shouldn't be stealing money out of the kitty. It was really funny. Some of the students were pretty tricky. They'd go and get a job over at the stand and then they would work up a little racket with their cohorts. The kids would go over and buy a hot dog or hamburger and a milkshake and give the person a dollar bill or a five-dollar bill; then the kid would put the money in the till and give them change for five dollars or ten dollars. All he had to do was do that about three or four times a day and the owner would soon realize that something was happening. So we used to cooperate with him on things like that.

And, as I say, the fights and the smoking and all. As I look back, a lot of it was pretty small potatoes. We used to have our share of problems with the high school regarding the use of certain facilities. Before I was director of athletics, the college football team had to practice in the end zones because the high school had the field. By the time I got on the scene, the college had one-half of the field, from the fifty-yard line south, and the high school took the other part of it. But we were having problems in scheduling the auditorium to get around the high school program. Other facilities, too. We had to work around the high school.

- Sullivan: You had to compete for space.
- Simonsen: We were negotiating all the time with the high school. The funny part of it is that I think we concluded that--and we mesmerized ourselves along this line--once we had our own campus, we wouldn't have any problems. But it was funny, when we got our own campus--and this was after the days of Grace Bird--there were a new set of problems. In fact, larger problems.

#### Junior Colleges Now

- Sullivan: Do you want to talk about those and get into the ways in which junior colleges have changed? You've already touched on some of that. But if you want to get into being something of an oracle and start predicting the future trends, I want to invite you to go ahead.





Simonsen: Well, the only thing is that if I get on that, I probably won't get to some of the other things that you had about Grace because that is kind of a separate problem. We've already talked a little bit about it. The way in which you must work with staff today is quite different. This whole matter of working with staff, to a certain extent working with students, and even working with administrators, working with the state government, working with the bureaucracies and so forth is quite different.

Sullivan: It's all changed.

Simonsen: In a nutshell, it's different. It's much more complicated. And I've heard some of my colleagues say it's not nearly as much fun. But I don't accept that, frankly. I think it's different.

Sullivan: You're being very positive.

Simonsen: No, seriously. It's like the Japanese symbol for "crisis." It's got something to do with an opportunity, a challenge. A crisis. That's not exactly the wording, but the gist of it is that if you look upon everything as a challenge rather than as something to louse up your free time, I think you get along a lot better. I know certain administrators, who will again remain nameless, both in our operation and throughout the state who are throwing in the sponge--number one, because it's no fun anymore and number two, because they can't cope. You just can not let it get you down. If you do, you better get out. For instance, in the group of people you were with last night, you know that each person deals with controversy all the time.

For example, Mr. [Glenn] Bultman is an attorney. That's not all peaches and cream. He's dealing with conflict all the time. And if conflict gets you down, you're probably not choosing the right field. I don't know very many fields that are too smooth, and I'm not even sure I'd be very interested. I don't know exactly what kind of problems you run into if you're a funeral director. But frankly, I have never found anything that is completely devoid of problems.

Sullivan: Are you saying that there's a lot of conflict in community college administration now?

Simonsen: There's certainly more than there ever was before. But it's not just community colleges. I think that the plight of David Saxon is quite different than the plight of Robert Sproul. And, to go back to the days of Kerr, the plight of Kerr under Governor "Pat" Brown and the plight of Kerr under Reagan was an entirely different thing. You get different personalities on the scene and the whole thing changes, and sometimes the only answer is to get out because



- Simonsen: the chemistry is such that it's not going to correct itself. I think it's part of our times.
- There are troublemakers all over the place today. There are the coat-holders. Do you know what they are?
- Sullivan: No.
- Simonsen: They are the people who will hold on to your coat while you fight the other guy. A fight that the coat-holder, perhaps, precipitated.
- Sullivan: Did Grace Bird have her coat-holders? Did she have conflicts?
- Simonsen: No, the kind of coat-holders I'm talking about don't have an official status at all. They're the troublemakers. And they're the ones that create conflict. They almost seem to get a fiendish pleasure out of doing so.
- Sullivan: Are they people on the faculty? Or certain student groups?
- Simonsen: Yes, guys that get their kicks this way. Certain people out in the community get a kick out of gossiping.
- Sullivan: Is this anything new in our school system?
- Simonsen: I don't think it is. But the thing is that right now all these crazy things that happen are given such visibility. The crazy thing that happens is in the newspaper the next day.
- Sullivan: And it was not in the newspaper twenty years ago? So maybe it would die from lack of encouragement.
- Simonsen: That's right. Or like a hundred years ago--in Irving Stone's The Greek Treasure for example--in those days the communications weren't very good. They didn't have radio. They hardly had newspapers. It was all done by word of mouth. So a lot of the problems that we have are because of society's brilliance in developing some of these goodies such as television. The whole matter of instant communications. Sometimes you might have had a hell of a problem but you wouldn't know about it for one hundred days because it would take that long to get the word to you.
- Sullivan: Are you suggesting that all of this publicity is a disadvantage most of the time, or some of the time?
- Simonsen: I think it's an absolute marvel. I think it's fantastic to think what we can watch on television today.
- Sullivan: But it just creates new problems?



Simonsen: It creates some new problems. But again, it creates some opportunities, too. But you have to deal with it. It's only in our lifetime that you could watch a president be assassinated and the assassin be killed right on television. I know certain friends of mine in administration who say, "I'm getting out." But, you know, I've also heard it from people who earn their living waiting on the general public. People who work in the post office. They say, "I'm getting out."

Sullivan: Public contacts between people who are not familiar with each other are becoming more and more abrasive. This seems to be what you're saying.

Simonsen: It isn't just that. As I said, I don't know much about working as an undertaker. There might be less conflict there. But if you read something like Studs Terkel's Working, you read the whole damn thing and how many of those things are peaches and cream? There aren't many fields, are there, that are without conflict?

Sullivan: Terkel has a definite sympathy with the working man and his being exploited.

Simonsen: The guy that works on the assembly line, for example. He can hardly wait for the eight hours to be over. And he can hardly wait for the vacation. And he can hardly wait until he's eligible for social security. That's kind of sad. How did we get onto this?

#### Collegial Relationships

Sullivan: We were talking about change. I could interject here and bring us right back to Grace Bird by saying that yesterday Peg Levinson talked about how Grace Bird corrected her once. Remember, she said she was counseling a student and Grace Bird came in and said, "Your chin was right on the desk and you were doing all the talking." Peg said, "Grace never said to me, 'Sweetie, that's no way to counsel.' I didn't have to be told that." And I just wonder whether you were ever corrected by Grace, and how she did that.

Simonsen: I'm sure I was corrected, but I was never particularly aware that I was being corrected. As a matter of fact, it was the "golden era" of the college, and I feel very fortunate that I have had the experience and have had the colleagues [that I had]. For example, I think that Peg Levinson is a great person. I think of her patience with me.

Sullivan: Peg's?



Simonsen: Yes. I don't know how many of the times that Peg corrected me that she may have been put up to it by Grace. I'm a first-generation American. My parents didn't have any education to speak of, and I learned my English in a rather strange way, I believe. I had to relearn and I had to get rid of a lot of things, some of which I haven't gotten rid of yet. But over the years, Peg very quietly would call me and say, "Ed, I've heard you use a certain expression several times and you have it all loused up." She wouldn't use the word "loused up," but she would say, "You're not using that correctly." And I'd say, "Okay, Peg, what is it?" And off she would go and tell me. But I always appreciated that and I honestly was never offended by it. I could take it from Peg. And I could have taken it from Grace, too.

For example, there's a word that I hear other people misuse all the time; it's a word that a lot of educators use, and I feel rather smug because I know they're using it wrong. People will refer to something being their "forté." They're partly right because it's spelled f-o-r-t-e. But Peg pointed out that that's the way it's spelled and that's the way it's pronounced in music, but it's really pronounced forte [one syllable]. And I said, "Are you sure you're right, Peg?" She pulled out the dictionary and said, "Here it is." And sure enough, it's the way Peg said. But that's only one. There are a lot of other words. And Peg, being an English teacher, knew these things. It's a pretty minor thing, but I think what she did for me--and I think I also learned it from Grace, but not by her telling me but by example.

The matter of having a love for good English, even though I've never been known for being a great writer or a great speaker, but I think I have a sensitivity for it. And a lot of it I really did get from Grace by listening to her, and from Peg by listening to her but also by having her help me out. For example, I have published things for journals and have written forward's for books and so forth, and even in writing letters to our contributors to this Grace Bird Oral History Project, if I can get Peg to proofread, I do so. Lately, in the last fifteen or twenty years, I find that she doesn't find as many errors because I know she's going to look at it and I try to catch them before I give it to her. But she'll invariably be able to find, not so much an error as a suggestion of how the thing could be worded better. She's very kind about it. But I always feel better about it.

Anyhow, this is a lot of what was going on in our operation, it seems to me. It was mutual respect. There was even a non-romantic love, agape, that existed between a lot of us people, and it was a pretty wonderful thing. There were other colleagues besides Grace and Peg who were very close. Of course, there were the other two ladies you were with yesterday, Edna and Lorraine. I feel very





- Simonsen: fortunate. In different ways, they were also in there. And by the way, all these people were selected by Grace.
- Sullivan: There was a harmony.
- Simonsen: Yes.
- Sullivan: Another thing that just came to mind is that I have the impression that Grace used humor and comedy a lot and knew how to use it to make a point.

#### Executive Ability

- Simonsen: I think that was true. I probably shouldn't say this, but I think a lot of people would and maybe it's worth saying, but as much as she was the academician and the scholar and the very precise person that she was, and she was in charge and there was no doubt about it, it was amazing for a woman administrator, contrary to what a lot of people would have thought about women administrators at that point in time, she really could delegate. I had my areas of responsibility, and I really didn't have to go and check it out with her. I always kept her informed, but I didn't have to check with her.
- Sullivan: You had the feeling that she trusted you, she had confidence in you, she knew you could do it, and she let you do it.
- Simonsen: Right. And this was a marvelous thing. I know the same thing was true with Peg. Later, we were getting geared up to the idea of a dean of instruction; we really didn't have one. Tom Merson later became dean of instruction but that was after some years. He was building up to it; he was one of the people being groomed for that position, as well as other people, like in testing and guidance, too. Grace knew what they were doing, but they were doing their thing; they were setting it up. The veteran's coordinator was doing his operation.
- Sullivan: What you're suggesting is that maybe part of the way that she was in charge is that she knew how to let go of things.
- Simonsen: Right.
- Sullivan: Do you want to say anything else about how she could convey that impression of being in charge without being overbearing? That's a very fine line, isn't it?
- Simonsen: It is. A lot of it, as we said yesterday, was her dignity. You



- Simonsen: know, you just had an awful lot of confidence in Grace.
- Sullivan: She just was so thoroughly competent.
- Simonsen: She exuded confidence.
- Sullivan: Confidence and competence.
- Simonsen: And she was respected up and down the state. She brought us along. For example, I think it was Tom Merson that mentioned that the state meetings were held here in town. They were held at the Bakersfield Inn for many years in the fall.
- Sullivan: Just regularly and always?
- Simonsen: Yes.
- Sullivan: Was that Grace's doing?
- Simonsen: Yes, right. But I think part of it was the geographical situation. Nobody was flying in those days, to speak of.
- Sullivan: So they were taking car trips.
- Simonsen: It was easier to come here, and also there was train service from the Bay Area down through the valley that was quite good. And if you were driving, this was a fairly central location. Even though it wasn't the geographic center; I think the geographic center is Fresno. But the population center is out here about fifteen or twenty miles. So, when you're talking about community colleges, we were virtually in the center of the state. We met here every fall. But the point I was going to make is that while this particular state association was sort of a presidents' club, Grace always made it a point that Peg and I should go. We were always there. We went to these meetings. So we received an exposure. And it's an interesting thing--somebody yesterday said that she'd been president of the Central California Junior College Association. Bakersfield College has the distinction of having had more presidents of the state association than any other college in the state.
- Sullivan: Can you explain that?
- Simonsen: I don't know. Part of it is that, being in the center of the state, we have sort of leaned both ways. If it's convenient to be northern California, we are, even though we're closer to the south. For example, the meeting I'm going to tomorrow in Yosemite is a meeting of northern California presidents.
- Sullivan: And you go to the meeting of southern California presidents.



Simonsen: Yes, and that's usually at Arrowhead.

Sullivan: Very nice.

Simonsen: I go to both of them. And I'm about the only one who goes to both of them. Grace used to do this too. And Ralph Prator used to. The interesting thing is that the four presidents were Grace, Ralph Prator, myself, and then the first faculty president of the state association was a fellow by the name of Bill Nielsen; now they have faculty presidents every three or four years. Bill Nielson was also recruited by Grace. He's a superior mathematics teacher. BC is the only school in the state [that has had four presidents]; ever since the founding of the organization way back in the twenties, there's no college that has more than about two. Maybe there's one that has three. But Bakersfield has four. Prior to the time of the faculty member coming in, nobody had more than two and Bakersfield had three.

Sullivan: It makes me wonder if it has anything to do with the foundation that Grace laid as president.

Simonsen: Yes, I think so. Grace always had a lot of faith in our associations. In addition to the state association, we also have been very active in the Articulation Conference of the University of California. Grace was a prime mover in that operation. It called for articulation between the high schools and the universities, the high schools and the community colleges, the high schools and the state colleges, and then all of those groups with the community colleges and back and forth. It was a fantastic thing.

Sullivan: Is that process going on still as satisfactorily.

Simonsen: I'm not as aware of what's being done now, but I know that every once in a while I hear that there's an Articulation Conference. It's more a matter of articulation between colleges rather than the districts. Since I've been away from the campus for almost ten years now, it could be going on a lot more than I know. I don't get involved in those relationships today. You might ask John Collins because if it's going on, he would know. But I have a feeling it still is.

Sullivan: I know they're having them, but my question is whether they're as effective and as satisfactory to everyone concerned. I just wondered if there's anything else you want to be sure to get in.

Simonsen: It seemed to me, in our preliminary discussions, you had a couple of other key questions. You might want to go quickly over those. I'll see if I can give you a Mike Mansfield answer on each of these.



- Sullivan: How about this one? "I know her well enough to know that she has very high standards and will not spare herself to achieve them." With this in mind, I wonder what it was like to work for her when she was very demanding.
- Simonsen: Well, I think you'd almost be ashamed if you didn't put in a day's work because you knew that she was working. One thing that Grace used to do that I don't think I have ever done very much and I certainly don't do now at all is that Grace used to write virtually everything out longhand.
- Sullivan: All of her memos and letters? She did not dictate?
- Simonsen: I don't think she did much dictating. She preferred to write, and it was much more time consuming because you can speak about five times as quickly as you can write. She would write in this most perfect hand. She'd write these things out. And they were letter-perfect from the beginning, so there's no reason why she couldn't have done dictating although she preferred her method.
- [end tape 2, side 1; begin tape 2, side 2]
- Sullivan: You were saying that when Grace spoke--
- Simonsen: When she spoke, she spoke perfectly, too. So, in other words, I think that she just felt comfortable with writing things longhand and she has always done it that way, and they were beautiful. Mention was made yesterday about her greetings at Christmas. I'm not aware that she ever did, as I will do even on Christmas notes, scribble them out ahead of time and correct them; but Grace could write it all out. And in her speech, she was always perfect. I don't ever remember her using an incorrect word.
- Sullivan: She just had a lot of facility with the language.
- Simonsen: That's right. The point is, though, that I don't think I could operate this district that way.
- Sullivan: It would just take too much time.
- Simonsen: Too much time. Lorraine is my administrative assistant. She has a job much higher than a secretary. She's part of management. Other than the faculty members, she's probably the highest paid woman employee in the district.
- Sullivan: Good.
- Simonsen: But the point is that, with Lorraine, I can do a letter in a matter of seconds. I might mess it up pretty bad, but I don't stop. Then





- Simonsen: she comes back with it and I get to thinking I can write a pretty good letter because she's corrected it all, if I didn't put it together quite right.
- Sullivan: I wonder if this isn't also the difference between the way a man operates and the way a woman operates.
- Simonsen: That could be, although there's a difference in the way men operate, too. When I took on this superintendency/chancellorship, one of my first assistants here, Gil Bishop, was an outstanding guy. I don't think he ever worked for Grace. He arrived at East High about the time I went to the college. But he knew Grace and had respect for her. When he worked for me, he never dictated. He's a good typist. He had been a journalist and he really had great facility with that typewriter, and that's the way he did it. He would type it and not worry too much about how it looked, and then he could turn it over to his secretary who polished it up. She wouldn't change any words but just clean it up and put it in good style.
- Sullivan: One of the things that interests me is that there are all sorts of people doing good jobs, but almost nobody escapes criticism, I'm inclined to say, except Grace Bird. Here she was, a woman running the college, and there are always negative sides; people will talk about her "dignity"--they don't talk about her being fussy or school-marmish. Apparently she could hit this business of leading, being in charge, just right without being accused of being overbearing. Are there any criticisms that could be raised?
- Simonsen: One criticism that I would have, like the example of her writing all these things longhand, is that it took her many, many more hours than necessary. But that was not encroaching on my time, but on hers.
- Sullivan: Maybe she did not spare herself.
- Simonsen: And the job was her whole life. I'm sure she took things home at night to write memos to people, whereas I don't operate that way. Normally, when I leave, I leave. My desk can be a mess. I'm not going to worry about it.
- Sullivan: Could it be said that she maybe set a standard of performance that was too hard for most other people to follow? Was that a problem?
- Simonsen: I don't think so. I think she inspired other people to work. You'd search a long time before you'd find anybody who would criticize Grace Bird.
- Sullivan: All right. I've done my best. I've done my best to get it out of



Sullivan: you, and I can't do it.

Simonsen: The only negative thing I might say is that if she were to be dropped on the scene today, it might not be the way it was. That's not a criticism of Grace; that's a criticism of the way things are now. Her manner maybe today wouldn't go over quite as big, although I think that probably if the situation had changed, she would have changed, too. So it's not quite fair.

Sullivan: Yes, that's right. Because intelligence and confidence and good will and what she calls a "happy heart," I think, win out.

Simonsen: One other thing. I told you about working for Grace Bird and with Grace Bird. It was a real education. It was like taking courses in administration and management. But having her as a friend all these years is like taking postgraduate work.

Sullivan: That's a lovely thing to say!

Simonsen: She continued to go to the community college meetings when she was with the university, and we always got together for a drink or for breakfast or lunch or whatever. She didn't have the tape recorder on, but she always had a list of questions in her mind. "Now, how about this, Si?" "Si, what about this and what about that and what about this?" She was a good talker, but she really had the questions and she wanted to know about what was happening to this project and that project.

And the postgraduate work I was telling you about--she always had her ideas. She never came on like "Now, listen, here's the way it ought to be," but she had a way of getting her points across and I never found it offensive. Anyhow, I said it yesterday and I say it today that I really feel fortunate having had Grace as my first real mentor. There have been a lot of others for which I am also grateful, but this whole business here at BC with Grace was something that was really unusual and something that has helped me and put me in pretty good stead in the profession.

Sullivan: Well, you've convinced me. [Laughter]

[end tape 2, side 2]



Student Recollections of Grace Bird: Fragment of a Conversation  
with Glenn Bultman, Edna Taber, Lorraine Anderson and Edward Simonsen

[Interview 1: April 22, 1977]  
[begin tape 1, side 1]

Sullivan: Glenn, what years were you at Bakersfield College?

Bultman: I graduated from high school in 1931, so I was there in 1932 and part of 1933.

Sullivan: Glenn, would you talk about your recollections of Miss Bird from the point of view of a student?

Bultman: One of the things that I remember so much about Miss Bird is that she was kind of one of us. That's real nice for a student, to have somebody that you feel like you can go to and talk with and who understands what you're trying to say and what you're trying to do. This was just great. We enjoyed her so much because, really, of that personal relationship.

I suppose that she had that with a greater number of students than you would expect. It's hard to remember all of the students that go through the college, but she had kind of a knack of remembering, it seemed to me. We'd go back and visit after we'd been out, and she'd pick it right up from where you were when you were there. She hadn't forgotten anybody or anything that had happened.

Sullivan: Did she seem very young? Was that one of the things that made it easy to relate to her?

Bultman: I guess she was. She was definitely young to be a dean of a college. At that time they called her dean. Of course, she was president in today's language.

Sullivan: I'm wondering if it had something to do with the spirit of the times that students would feel that their dean identified with them, or whether there was something special about Miss Bird that made you feel that way. It's just not fashionable for students to trust the administrators at the present time.

Bultman: I don't think it was a matter of trust. I think it was a matter of personal relationships. She had a desire to see you succeed and I think that we reacted to it. It seems like that as I think of it now.

Sullivan: Did it have something to do with the size of the place? The smallness?



- Bultman: It definitely must have. I don't see how it would be possible in a large institution to have the intimate, close relationship that we had in a school the size of Bakersfield College in those days. How many did we have?
- Simonsen: I kept some figures. I have them on my desk. Before the war it was about 175 graduates and about 950 enrolled. It dropped down to fifty graduates during the war and five hundred or so students. Then it went up again after that to about thirteen hundred students.
- Taber: It would have been smaller than that, wouldn't it, in 1932?
- Sullivan: Do you remember her acting in plays or putting on skits and using humor?
- Bultman: Oh, yes. Miss Robinson and she used to work together a great deal.
- Anderson: She put all the makeup on us.
- Taber: I was in those plays.
- Sullivan: And Grace Bird would come around and put the makeup on?
- Taber: She did the makeup.
- Bultman: She did a lot of things in connection with that. I think she was sort of the right-hand woman, I suppose you'd say.
- Anderson: She was everywhere.
- Bultman: It was not only the students, but it was kind of a community theatre in those days. That was the only theatre we had that was centered around the college and the high school.
- Sullivan: Were the actors students or were they partly faculty, partly community people.
- Bultman: I think they were primarily students, as I remember. But there were some other people who had graduated not too far back.
- Sullivan: And the town would turn out for these performances?
- Bultman: Sure.
- Taber: I remember Ceiling Zero was sold out.
- Group: Ceiling Zero! Oh!
- Sullivan: What year was that?





Anderson: It was about 1939.

Taber: It was sold out for every performance. It was fabulous. I'll never forget that.

[end tape 1, side 1]



## IV THE PRESIDENCY OF BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE IN THE 1970s

## INTRODUCTION

John Collins who came to work at Bakersfield College in 1947 is now president. He offers a perspective on how different it is to be president of a community college in the late seventies, which in itself is another perspective by which to view the years that Grace Bird presided over and built the college, the years she refers to as "the golden years" in which to be a community college administrator. Collins' views may be aptly called "after the golden years."

Ralda Sullivan  
Interviewer-Editor

6 April 1978  
Regional Oral History Office  
486 The Bancroft Library  
University of California at Berkeley



IV THE PRESIDENCY OF BAKERSFIELD COLLEGE IN THE 1970s

[Interview 1: April 25, 1977]

[begin tape 1, side 1]

John Collins

The Changing Scene

Sullivan: I wonder whether you would talk about the circumstances under which you came and what you were doing and what your first impressions of Grace Bird were?

Collins: In those days you got your job in a much simpler manner than now. I was interviewed on the Berkeley campus by Theron McCuen and actually offered a job as a veteran's counselor at Bakersfield College the same day. So, I came down to Bakersfield in mid-July, 1947 in a black suit and presented myself to Grace Bird who immediately assigned me to the veteran's counseling center and I worked for Burns Finlinson.

Sullivan: I'll bet you were warm in that black suit.

Collins: [Laughing] I wanted to make a good impression, you know, and that was the only suit I had in those days. I was fairly fresh out of the service.

Bakersfield College in those days was still sort of an adjunct to the high school. We were on the high school campus. We did have our own building, and we did have a good reputation for preparing students to go to a four-year college or university and get a baccalaureate degree or higher. But the college was not very far into training people to go out and get a job and we certainly were not putting much emphasis on the education of adults.

Sullivan: It was primarily a transfer institution.



Collins: It was primarily a transfer institution. We sent a high percentage of our students to Berkeley and to Stanford and some to Fresno State and so forth. We took a great pride in preparing these students to go to the university and then of course when we got the feedback from the university that our students did well, that just reinforced what we were doing and we continued along those lines.

It wasn't until the end of the 1950s and perhaps even into the 1960s that we began to talk about a community college, and why shouldn't this college be running at night, serving adults in the community that want to get a promotion or improve their competencies, or enrich their lives. Why not, you know? And so we saw a big move in that direction until now, out of fifteen thousand students over half of them are coming up here at night or on Saturday. So the college that Grace Bird administered was initially a very small, almost elitist, junior college, which then, toward the end of her tenure was beginning to respond to what the veterans wanted and what the people in the community wanted.

Sullivan: So vocational and recreational and community service oriented programs began to come in.

Collins: Yes, and general education that would just simply lead to enrichment, but nothing like, "Well, why don't we go out and recruit minorities?" "What about women that didn't get their chance?" "Why don't we have day care centers so that the women can go to college?" you know. That came later.

Sullivan: Really in the sixties, the later sixties, in the seventies. Isn't that true?

Collins: Yes. And of course, some of it is a result of what the students were telling us in the later sixties. The cry was for relevance which practically nobody could define, but I think the institutions responded by getting closer to the people, trying to find out what their needs were and then trying to meet those needs. And sometimes it means taking the college out to where the people are. Not everybody feels comfortable coming up here on the hill to this rather imposing college. It looks almost like a four-year college sitting up here.

Sullivan: Yes, it does.

Collins: So we have a Downtown Center and we have a Delano Center and we take classes out to Arvin and Lamont and up to the prison in Tehachapi and all over town. Now that's quite a different kind of operation than when I joined the staff in 1947.

Sullivan: It was all contained on that campus which they shared with the high school.





Collins: Shared with the high school and probably, with a few exceptions, was over at four o'clock in the afternoon.

Sullivan: To sum up, would you say that these changes occurred because the population of Bakersfield changed and people's expectations changed?

Collins: Yes. You see, back in the early days of Miss Bird's tenure, this was a small town, thirty thousand maybe, and a one industry town.

Sullivan: Oil?

Collins: Some agriculture, but mainly oil. Now, you know, it's a transportation center; there's enormous agriculture, oil is still big, services to the people are much greater, and governmental services and financial institutions have just spread out all over. So the town has grown remarkably. As a matter of fact, Miss Bird will tell you--that in the early days where the college is now was a little landing strip.

When this college was built in 1954 to '56, it was sitting out here all by itself and now, twenty years later of course, you can see it's completely surrounded by residential development. I think this was one of her dreams.

Sullivan: Yes. This is where she wanted the college to be.

Collins: I don't think that anybody wanted to continue forever this sharing of the high school campus. It was fraught with all kinds of difficulties. Miss Bird was able to contend with those things and keep the students and faculty reasonably happy.

Sullivan: Before we go on, do you want to say what has happened to the transfer program? How much of that is now in the program at Bakersfield College?

Collins: Well, I think what's happened is we've maintained the transfer program at about the same level as twenty or thirty years ago with respect to the numbers of different majors the students can prepare for. For years this college said, "We don't care what profession you want to go into, we've got the first two years."

Sullivan: Is the college still saying that?

Collins: And we're still saying that, see. We're still saying that. But from a percentage point of view I would suggest that we have fewer students going to the university and state colleges. Greater in number, but fewer in percentage of the total because we've got this other massive group of people who come here, some of whom have already got a degree.



- Collins: They're never going to be transfer students. If you gauge success on the basis of how many are transferring you're going to be disappointed. My wife has been a student here. She's got a master's degree. She would count statistically as a person who came here and didn't transfer. Now isn't that ridiculous?
- Sullivan: She's part of the community making this a real community college.
- Collins: Yes. So, we still do an exemplary job of preparing students to go to the university now.
- Sullivan: Where do they go?
- Collins: They go to the state colleges and we have a state college here in town which they didn't have before 1969. Half of the students who transfer at all from here to find their way to some higher level, half of them go across town to Cal State.
- Sullivan: Oh, that's interesting.
- Collins: And that changes the statistics of those who go to Berkeley and Stanford and USC, etc., because they can go here for nothing for two years and the registration fees across town are not very high either. And so you can get a baccalaureate degree. You can even get a master's degree out there in teaching.
- Sullivan: So that makes education more accessible to people who otherwise would not have been able to afford to go to these universities.
- Collins: Much more. And to people who probably wouldn't come here at all because they'd think, "Oh, I can never get to the next station." Now they're coming here because they can see they can get to the next station. They can drive across town, or maybe they even live out on that side of town and go to Cal State, so why not?
- Sullivan: Is there any lowering of the quality of students who come as a result of that?
- Collins: I don't think there's a lowering of quality, but the faculty thinks so.
- Sullivan: What's the nature of the difference between you?
- Collins: Well, when you open your doors to everybody and even go beyond that and recruit everybody, the whole conglomerate of people that form the student body naturally are at a lower level. We're dealing with more students who have educational handicaps.
- Sullivan: A broader spectrum comes in with a larger number.



Collins: Sure. And when you take the broader spectrum you're taking from the lower end with respect to preparation to succeed in a college classroom. So the faculty confronts them and some of them have major disabilities. Well when you confront a few of those you begin to think maybe the good students aren't coming here anymore.

I maintain, and the high school principals assure me, and some of our statistical studies would bear it out, that we're getting about the same percentage of the top high school graduates as we were back in Miss Bird's day. We're getting the same percentage, but when you have this big influx of people that don't come to us directly from high school, then you've got a totally different situation.

#### On Well-Laid Foundations

Sullivan: Before we go on talking about what's going on now, I want to ask you whether you want to talk about what it's like to come as a president to a place where you feel that the foundations have been very well laid.

Collins: Well, this college has benefitted greatly from stability. The first president, in effect, was Grace Bird and she stayed from 1920 to 1950.

Sullivan: Yes. Thirty years.

Collins: Thirty years. Now that in itself sets a tone. She put her stamp on this college. Thirty years is a lot different than the average tenure of college presidents today which is about five. In five you barely find out where the front line is and then maybe you're on your way to someplace else. Maybe a promotion or maybe you've just decided that the job isn't for you, you know..

So, here's Grace Bird for thirty years and her boss, Theron McCuen, and some others that preceded him, were there a long time. Ralph Prator who succeeded Grace Bird stayed eight years. Ed Simonsen was president for ten. Burns Finlinson for four and now I've been president for five. Maybe Finlinson and I represent what is really happening nationwide. That is, that the tenure is getting shorter. That it's going to be unusual to find a person like Grace Bird ever again heading a college for thirty years.



## New Pressures On Junior College Presidents

- Sullivan: Do you want to talk at all about what kind of changes have taken place to cause the tenures of college presidents to be shorter?
- Collins: Yes. And then it would be interesting for me to find out if Grace Bird concurs. I think now what shortens the tenure of college presidents are the pressures that are brought to bear on the office by agencies, by groups, by individuals, where it was almost unheard of in the past. For example, the federal government is now into helping to finance higher education. As soon as they sent us the first dollar they began to also send us the guidelines and the rules under which we had to operate.
- Sullivan: Are those sometimes in conflict with your own rules, your own most comfortable way of running an organization?
- Collins: Well, they'd be in conflict with the most comfortable ways. They're not in conflict with my philosophy. I firmly believe that in order to approach equality of opportunity that you just have to turn to the federal government. We're one great big country and federal participation in education is onerous because you have to do things their way. But it does give people their chance and not everybody was getting their change before.
- Sullivan: So it's a necessary difficulty.
- Collins: It's necessary because the society is much lighter and the society is more complex and there's a strain toward consistency. By that I mean we're trying to live up to what we say we believe in. If you say you believe in equality but you don't behave as though you believe in equality, it puts a tremendous strain on the system and people constantly remind you, "Well, you say you believe in equality, why don't you put your money where your mouth is, why don't you come through?" So there's this strain.
- We wrote some things down a couple of hundred years ago that are hard to live up to, but we try to live up to them, see. In trying to live up to them and with a larger society, is why then the job becomes very, very difficult.
- Sullivan: The hiring process and the evaluation of teachers and decisions about granting tenure must be one of the focal points of strain.
- Collins: For instance, the hiring process comes out of the Federal Civil Rights Act, and we're not left strictly to hire someone who we want or who we think would do the best job.
- Sullivan: What happens to standards? That's one of the concerns, isn't it?





- Collins: That's one of the concerns and of course education always has to be concerned with standards. I personally think that nothing is going to happen to standards, that is, nothing bad. I think there are lots and lots of able people. Some of them have to be given their chance first to be trained. I don't want to compromise with that. And then after they're trained, be given a chance. You know, we all know that down through the years there were a lot of incompetent white males, see.
- Sullivan: Certainly. In education--
- Collins: In education, and in business and industry and everywhere. Just because you're white and male, that doesn't qualify you. Yet, the colleges mainly have been run by white males. So what I'm saying is you have to give people a chance.
- The federal government is saying, "Do it!" but it isn't easy. Particularly it isn't easy when you don't operate in a vacuum, but rather have what has been described as participatory governance so that other people are there. Well, all of their biases come to the fore and you know, it's easy for somebody sitting around a table to say, "Well, what we're going to do here is lower standards." But it is the president who finally has to take the responsibility for it, not a committee--
- Sullivan: Can I interrupt to ask by "participatory governance" do you mean community advisory committees or faculty advisory committees?
- Collins: No, I mean mainly within the college community, faculty and to some degree, students.
- Sullivan: Oh, yes. Do students sit in on the hiring process?
- Collins: They have. Not very frequently anymore, but during the--
- Sullivan: The later 1960s--
- Collins: You bet.
- Sullivan: Did they have actual voting power or only advisory power?
- Collins: I think it was mainly advisory. You know, I was ticking off, or I was going to for you, all the pressures that make things different. Well, there's a pressure from the federal government. Another pressure is, of course, from the state. The governor can speak from a powerful platform about what should be taking place at these colleges and what should get priority. And then there are people from the community: "You're a community college? Well we're a part of the community! We'd like to help you a little bit you know."



- Collins: People in the community feel very close to the college. I would wager for all that, that scarcely any private citizen could pick up the phone and get the chancellor of the University of California and have a little chat with him about some book they're using in some course.
- Sullivan: No.
- Collins: But the community feels very free to do that here, because a whole lot of them out in the community know me for one thing. I'm here and I have to be close. I'm not removed.
- Sullivan: It's not the dean of instruction then who's called, it's the president.
- Collins: That's another thing I want to comment on though too that's different than Miss Bird's era, and that is we've had to decentralize quite a bit. No one person can do all these things. Whereas she knew all of the faculty and knew all the students, I don't. Now right there the social dynamics of that difference is extreme, enormous.
- Sullivan: Would you talk about that?
- Collins: When you know everybody and have known them for years and have hired them and know about their families and can ask them, "Well how's your boy doing at UCLA?" and "I'm sorry to hear your wife is sick and I hope she's better," or to students out on campus, walk across campus and know most of them by name, that puts you in a very, very powerful position because the group is closely knit and you are the acknowledged locus of power. Now when you turn around and look at the fifteen thousand students and the 250 faculty here.
- Sullivan: You have fifteen thousand students and 250 faculty?
- Collins: Day faculty and we've got another two hundred at night. So we have in the neighborhood of five hundred faculty. Some people work for us at night that I don't even know and I'll see them in the community and they'll say, "By the way, I work for you, John." "Oh, you do?" "Yes, I teach this or that at night." Well now, that would have been unheard of with Grace Bird. She knew everybody, because of the smallness.
- Sullivan: Now, can I interrupt and ask you about the number of administrators? Has that grown and increased tremendously in the last twenty-seven years?
- Collins: Sure it's grown. And some of it is so that we can meet the needs that are being expressed. For example, we have a dean here whose



Collins: full time job is to administer financial aid to students. I would guess that maybe Miss Bird and Ed Simonsen did that out of their back pockets. I know that when I was dean here I was in charge of financial aid and it was just one of the little things that I did in addition to many other things.

Sullivan: But now because of the number of students--

Collins: And the number of dollars.

Sullivan: Yes, the involvement with federal government.

Collins: Yes, and the reports and trying to make sure that people truly are qualified for financial aid. You have to go through a whole rigamarole, you know.

So, size changes things. I don't care whether it's a village compared with New York City or a very small college compared with a large one or Bakersfield College before 1950 compared with itself after 1970.

Sullivan: That's very clear. You can see that in the difference between a small private high school and the big, all-city high school in Berkeley.

Collins: Anonymity, you know, breeds deviation in my book.

Sullivan: Would you say more about that?

Collins: We are all constrained some way in our behavior. We don't follow the law of tooth and fang. We don't live in a jungle. And I maintain we are mainly constrained by each other. To the degree that you know each other, the constraints are powerful, like in a family. You don't cheat your sister or brother in a major way. You don't do your mother in. On a campus here, though, students enroll, are here a short time, some of them are lonely and some of them never feel like the faculty knows them or that the administration knows them and so their behavior is affected.

I have an example I gave you the other night, but I'd like to reiterate it: In our EOPS program, Educational Opportunity Program and Services, we have about 150 students, pay an awful lot of attention to them, give them money, give them books, special counseling, special tutoring and also a counselor who is a rather directive type, who really gets on them if they don't attend classes.

The point I'm trying to make is that their retention rates are higher and their grade points are higher than average because we pay a lot of attention to them. It could also be true that students



Collins: across the board did better academically during Grace Bird's time than they do now simply because a lot of attention was paid to them.

Sullivan: Well, Grace Bird would call somebody in and say, "You're fooling around. Either get with it or get out!"

Collins: Yes, something like that, and that would be a rare time when I would do it. The dean might do it or the assistant dean might do it or a counselor might do it, but unfortunately my days are so packed with things that, for a variety of reasons, take higher priority than that, that I don't interact that way with the students, nor with the faculty.

#### Duties of the Junior College President

Sullivan: Do you want to talk about the sorts of things that a college president now has to deal with?

Collins: I'd just like to say that my days are full of meeting with people, whether it's somebody from the faculty, my own administrators, a student from the student newspaper, the faculty senate president conferring about hiring somebody, coordinating our efforts with the other two colleges by giving up a day a week or a day every other week and meeting with the other presidents and the chancellor.

My days are so full of meeting with people that it's necessary for me to do the paper work at home at night. Now, what is the paper work? Well, the paper work is a fantastic volume of mail, much of which I just refer, but I have to see it. I have to see it to know what's going on.

Sullivan: Now your secretary, I assume, screens that before you get it?

Collins: Screens some, but is reluctant to screen too far, you know, lest I find that something's going on that I don't know about. You can't keep up with everything and occasionally you are surprised.

[end tape 1, side 1; begin tape 1, side 2]

Collins: But it's fatal to be surprised too frequently. So you try to keep your finger on everything and the fact that we consult and participate with the faculty in certain decisions means an enormous number of hours.

Sullivan: Of conference?





Collins: Of conference-type things. This afternoon is completely gone with two group interviews for a deanship. All last week, every afternoon was gone for the same purpose. Now, you know, contrast that with thirty years ago when you could go take a trip to the university, find a promising person and hire him or her.

Sullivan: You have to go through the established set of procedures. That's required by affirmative action, isn't that right?

Collins: Well, it's not only required by affirmative action, but it's a gain that the faculty made here, say, ten years ago.

Sullivan: Was this as a result of faculty organization and collective bargaining?

Collins: Oh, not collective bargaining. We are just starting on collective bargaining and selection of the staff is not negotiable.

We could say, "We're not going to let you have any voice in it." We probably won't. You see, there's a certain value in consulting. The main value is it will keep you from falling into a deep pit and making a dumb choice, an experience which anybody that's hired very many people probably has had and wished they had it to do over again. But that's the main thing it does. In other words, through the screening process, for the people that are outrageously no good, around the table enough things are said so even an insensitive president would know, "God, don't hire that person!"

#### Changes in Faculty Organization

Sullivan: How about changes in faculty organization and their ways of relating to the administration? I know Miss Bird relied a lot on department chairmen to intercede between teachers and the president.

Collins: Well, she could tell you exactly how she operated, but when Ralph Prator came on the scene the faculty--that was 1950--the faculty was resisting his trying to set up a committee system.

Sullivan: He wanted to set up faculty committees?

Collins: He wanted to involve them more. And I can remember hearing some of the more senior faculty: "I don't want to waste my time sitting around a table discussing this. We always were able to go in and see Miss Bird and get things settled. What's wrong with that?" So Prator came on and moved us in the direction of more consultation. Ed Simonsen continued that at about the same level.



- Sullivan: What would the faculty committees do? Would they consult about curriculum?
- Collins: Curriculum. Consult about student services. Consult about counseling. Maybe even athletics. But even in the ten years that Ed Simonsen was president--I was dean a good part of that time--the locus of power was definitely over here.
- Sullivan: In the president's office.
- Collins: Yes. And any consulting groups we had, the president appointed. Now, contrast that with where the senate will choose their representatives on the curriculum committee and I'll send mine. Same thing on the selection committee for administrators. Same thing on the student services or whatever it is, the faculty senate decides who they'll send.
- Sullivan: Does the faculty senate participate in the evaluation and promotion of faculty through a budgetary advisory committee or anything like that?
- Collins: Not really. To begin with, promotion is automatic here. You spend the years and you get the higher rank and more money.
- Sullivan: There aren't merit increases?
- Collins: No.
- Sullivan: The great decision is the tenure decision, isn't it?
- Collins: That's right, and that doesn't go to the senate. That stays in what I would call the line authority, from the department to the deans to the president.
- Sullivan: Has that changed since the 1940s and 1950s?
- Collins: Sure. Who gets hired and who's retained. The faculty out there and the departments have a much louder voice in it. The impression I want to leave is that I'm not saying that all of these things are bad. I'm saying they're different.
- Sullivan: You're describing change.
- Collins: Right. I'm describing change and I'm trying to relate it, then, to what the person that sits in here has to do, which is a totally different thing than if you run a small organization with almost no, or very little, consultation.
- Sullivan: Burns Finlinson started to talk a little yesterday about the Bakers-



- Sullivan: field College mode of organization in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and I wonder if you have anything at this point to add about how the mode of organization, administrators relating to administrators, deciding who's going to do what, relationships with the faculty, how that's changed in addition to the things you've already said.
- Collins: Well, the major change in my estimation--two major changes--one is decentralization. We don't hire anybody for a department without the department being involved. In the late 1940s and probably all the way through the 1950s, Ed Simonsen traveled around the country, picked out some good people, brought their papers home, showed the papers to the department chairmen, and made the decision. So, you see, that's one of the most important things that happened to the college, who gets employed.
- Sullivan: Oh, yes. Now it's not just the department chairman. Is it the entire faculty?
- Collins: Well, if the department chair wants to bring in his whole faculty and see the candidates, he can. Some do and some don't. It's a joint thing. I have a kind of unwritten agreement with the departments. I will not insist that we hire somebody that they do not want. By the same token, I will not hire somebody that I don't want. So, we find a middle ground. Sometimes we compromise. It's amazing; mainly we're on the same track.
- Sullivan: I was wondering, how much agreement and how much conflict there is?
- Collins: So, decentralization is one thing that's happened. And the other thing that's happened since those days is faculty--well, it probably amounts to the same thing--faculty participation in the decisions. For example, we're in a discussion right now whether to reinstate the *F* grade. I wouldn't think of reinstating the *F* grade without going to the faculty.
- Sullivan: You mean the *F* grade was eliminated.
- Collins: Eliminated some years back.
- Sullivan: When was that eliminated?
- Collins: That was during the 1960s when nobody was supposed to fail.  
[Chuckle]



## Changes in Standards

- Sullivan: Do you want to talk about grades and standards and grade inflation right now? It looks as if the pendulum is swinging back if there's talk of the reinstatement of the *F*.
- Collins: I think the pendulum will definitely swing back to higher standards.
- Sullivan: Good! [Laughing]
- Collins: And [responding with laughter] this silly notion of the right to fail, you don't hear it so frequently anymore.
- Sullivan: Do you want to speculate about why the *F* was removed?
- Collins: Well, I think the *F* was removed because the students put the pressure on that you not only were not giving them the units, you were penalizing them. And I agree. It is punitive the way it operated. And some people got into a terrible pit out of which they could never dig.
- Sullivan: You mean just such a bad grade point average.
- Collins: Oh, like down thirty grade points and we would boot them out of school and when they tried to get back in, if we let them back in, they had the thirty on their backs right off. And that was bad.

I like to think that--this is my own philosophy now about grades and standards--I think that practically everybody could succeed in some program here, laying aside the mentally retarded people, under optimum conditions, and that perhaps, if we gave them a little taste of success, we would begin to create those optimum conditions. So, my own view is that I wouldn't want to act too hastily to return to the *F* grade.

On the other hand, people who come here because they don't know what else to do and take up a chair and drop out and then come back and drop out and then come back. I think we ought to start saying to them, and it would be a favor to them, "Look, you can't do that. That's too expensive for us. You stay out for a year and when you're really ready to come back here and put your energy to work on going to college, why we'll consider letting you back in." Now I don't think the faculty and I are very far apart on all of this.

Another thing that we have recently decided is what kind of calendar we'll operate on. Well I didn't do that in a vacuum. The faculty took a vote, the students took a vote, the administrators took a vote, and then I decided.





Sullivan: Were there any hot issues?

Collins: Well, yes. The students were 95 percent, well ninety percent for staying with the "early start" calendar where we start mid-August and we didn't go that way. We went back to a conventional calendar. The faculty was split right down the middle and sent me the thing over saying, "We're split, you do it." And I did do it, but the point I'm asking is, I took into account all the things they said and then made a decision.

Now, I don't think Miss Bird had to do that and therefore she could probably direct her energies more in the direction of stimulating the faculty to do even a better job. Just showing an interest helps people do a better job.

#### Teacher Unions, Teacher Attitudes

Sullivan: Oh yes. What about changes in teacher's attitudes towards the job? Is that related to the rise of teacher unions?

Collins: I think mainly teachers are professionals who want very much to succeed in reaching the objectives of their profession; that is, to cause the people who come to them to learn. I firmly believe that. I don't say that that's true of every teacher, but I'm talking about teachers in general. They want to do a good job.

They don't want to just have shorter hours so they can run home and do their gardening or work on their car or moonlight. When they come to us for shorter hours I honestly believe they think they could do a much better job with the students if their burdens were light enough. Now, as far as unions go, we have the law which says we're going to have teacher's unions.

Sullivan: This is a state law?

Collins: State law. And if the teachers want it, they can have it under the prescriptions of the law. And I just think it's up to administrators to adjust to that, regardless of their own feelings, and do the very best job they can of administrating a college under a partial new set of rules. It could be that collective bargaining might even reduce the ambiguity that we live with now and draw the lines and perhaps we'll get along as well under collective bargaining or better than we did under the other system. The only thing is, it's a whole new thing to cope with.

Sullivan: It takes more time and energy.



- Collins: Yes. Now we have an exclusive representative, elected last Thursday. Now, Simonsen has got to start meeting with them and I'm on Simonsen's team. And let's say between now and June 1st we have to meet for fifty hours or forty hours or whatever it is, that's just fifty hours or forty hours that I don't have to do other things.
- Sullivan: To communicate with faculty and students, for instance.
- Collins: That's right. It just pulls me away a little bit more, see.
- Sullivan: One of the things I wonder is whether you think that the presence of the union and the rules is going to protect the incompetent teacher more than before?
- Collins: No more than now. We've already got rules that protect incompetent teachers--called tenure.
- Sullivan: How about the process of really firing people who should not be granted tenure? I understand that that's more difficult.
- Collins: It is so fraught with difficulties that most people shy away from it. The burden of proof is on the administration to show that the person's incompetent.
- Sullivan: Even before tenure is granted?
- Collins: Well you have one year under our system and you don't have to show cause. But the second year you have to show cause and after the second year you can be brought into a court of law.
- Sullivan: Is it three years before tenure's granted?
- Collins: Two. Whereas the university and state college system's anywhere from seven to ten. So they have almost instant tenure here.
- Sullivan: Have you instituted any proceedings to protect yourself by much more careful observation and evaluation of first year teachers.
- Collins: Well, we have a system of evaluation, also required by law, that purportedly does that. Generally, evaluations look pretty good. A person has to be fragrantly rotten to have a bad evaluation come over here and be brought to my attention.
- Sullivan: Doesn't this raise a problem about maintaining standards?
- Collins: Sure it does. See, there is no industry or profession that I know of that has both collective bargaining and tenure.
- Sullivan: Interesting point.



Collins: Now they not only bargain collectively with us, but in two years time they have tenure. I really think there's more of a threat to an educational system with tenure than there is with collective bargaining. You see, tenure was supposedly to protect faculty members with respect to academic freedom, to be able to say what they think to be the truth in their own classrooms. But since it's blanket, it also protects against being fired for good reasons.

#### Relations With the University of California Now

Sullivan: Yes. The history of tenure's a fascinating subject. Shall we talk about the articulation process with the university; certainly that was something Miss Bird was very effective in and involved in after 1950 as associate director of the university's Office of Relations with Schools.

Collins: Well, I think she was a lot more effective than they are now.

Collins: Yes. The articulation conferences are okay, but the Office of Relations with Schools up there has no authority. I'm going to be categorical about this because I feel strongly about it.

Sullivan: Please, tell more about that.

Collins: Who has the authority? Well, it's the barons out in the schools and departments.

Sullivan: You mean the schools of the university.

Collins: Right. They have their little baronies and they are the barons, and they decide everything. I want to give you the outstanding recent example and then probably close off with that.

Last year our graduate after two years of being here in business administration had a 4.0 average. She wanted to go to Berkeley. A statistics course that we offer that involves the use of a computer is a two-unit course. The university's similar course is a three-unit course. Now, that probably should have been corrected before and it is corrected now. On account of that difference they would not let this girl into the University of California.

Sullivan: Into the business school?

Collins: The School of Business Administration up there. I called the Office of Relations with Schools. Those guys got in touch with Bowker [Chancellor Albert Bowker]. We got in touch with our senator,



- Collins: Stiern, to try to break the log jam so that we could say to the high school kids here, "If you do well here you won't have any trouble getting into the university." And nothing worked.
- Sullivan: Even though you went over the content of the course and ascertained it was adequate?
- Collins: That's right. That girl spent a quarter out here at Cal State making up that deficiency and last December, the winter quarter, was admitted to the School of Business Administration at Berkeley.
- Sullivan: Finally.
- Collins: She got in. But here was the president of the college vouching for her. In the meantime, they've got their rules taking in all kinds of flakey people up there, you know. They're able to take in 2 percent of people that don't qualify. Well, why in the hell couldn't they have said, "Well, we'll bend a little bit here." But they couldn't bend.
- Sullivan: It seems very strange. One wonders if there weren't other reasons.
- Collins: I don't think there was any other reason than that the School of Business Administration was full and they weren't about to have one more.
- Sullivan: Well, that's the other reason I was wondering about. But you're suggesting that the university has become very rigid.
- Collins: Sure. And I'm suggesting that since they have an Office of Relations with Schools and they've got those 104 community colleges feeding into the university, they ought to pay more attention to what we say when we recommend somebody.
- Even if that girl had been short a couple of courses, if I vouch for her, and I would have with her 4.0 average here--(it's obvious in our toughest classes she was getting A's; I knew she could make it at Berkeley)--I think they should have said, "Okay John, we'll take your word for it. She's in."
- Sullivan: Again, the communication process has changed. You're dealing with vaster organizations.
- Collins: And see, Grace Bird's day, even then with maybe sixty community colleges when she was the director, she knew all the presidents. If they called her at the Office of Relations with Schools, I'm sure Grace Bird said, "Let me check into that. I'll get back to you within a couple of days." And she was influential enough to effect some kind of change in there.





- Sullivan: She also knew Bob Sproul as "Bob" and if all else had failed probably would have called him.
- Collins: I think it's an indictment of the university that they can't bend when we strongly recommend. Now I know they can't take everybody just to please some parent here in town who wants to get a borderline case in. I wouldn't make that case.
- Sullivan: It seems like a strange breakdown in communication.
- Collins: But it also indicates that the university's huge too. The bureaucracy can absolutely defeat you. So finally the guy that I was dealing with in the Office of Relations with Schools say, "John, I've tried everything. You're right. They're wrong. But I can't do it."
- Sullivan: What you're talking about seems to me is the rise of bureaucracy and it's effect on various kinds of relationships.
- Collins: That's right, Balda. The bureaucratic system is much more complex than in Grace Bird's time and everybody that runs any kind of an organization will find that organization's bureaucratic. There's nothing wrong with bureaucracy per se. It's the complexity and the mindlessness of it, the impersonal nature of it, that is bad. You have to have an organization and as soon as you have an organization you have an element of bureaucracy. I think the main thing is that it's impersonal. In Grace Bird's day it was personal.
- Sullivan: Does that call for new kinds of administrative skills?
- Collins: I think so.
- Sullivan: And new kinds of administrators.
- Collins: Right.
- Sullivan: Who's effective in such a situation?
- Collins: Well I'm sorry to say that it's beginning to look like the legalistic types are the most effective.
- Sullivan: So if you go to law school-- [Chuckle]
- Collins: Maybe going to law school is the way to be able to function, because, you know, the person who wants to do it by the seat of his pants and his good feelings and to make people happy and all that is absolutely going to get destroyed.
- Sullivan: Is going to get ground up?



Collins: Ground up in small pieces.  
[end tape 1, side 2]

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## INDEX -- Grace V. Bird, Volume II

## administration:

- the job of, 112-114, 116-118. See also Bakersfield College; Bird, Grace; junior college
- Albaugh, Dorothy, 29a, 42-43, 78, 104
- Aldrich, Hazel, 37
- Allen, Avery, ii
- American Council of Education, 45
- Anderson, Lorraine, 29a, 70, 125, 129
- Articulation Conference, 128
- Atwood, Louise, 37
- Atwood, Stod, 37

## Bakersfield College:

- atmosphere, 57-58, 97, 125-126
- campus, 55, 61, 112-114, 137
- changes, 48-50, 52-55, 95, 108-111, 135-139
- staff organization, 47-49, 95, 103-104, 107, 145-147
- See also Bird, Grace; junior college
- Bird, Grace, 13-14, 21, 26-28, 35-40, 63, 69-74, 75-77, 80, 83-85, 90-99, 123, 132-133, 151-152
  - as administrator, 3-6, 8-11, 15-18, 28-29, 31-34, 41-42, 47-48, 51-53, 56-59, 64-68, 77-82, 84-88, 102, 116-121
  - as a woman in administration, 7, 12-13, 57, 84, 99, 112, 126
  - as teacher, 82-83
- Bultman, Glenn, 296

- California Junior College Association, 52, 127
- Camp, Bill, Jr., 24
- Camp, Don, 24
- Camp, Georgia, Appendix, 18a, 20, 22-26
- Camp, Wofford B., 18a, 19-20, 24
- Collins, John, 5, 89, 135
- community college. See junior college
- cotton growing, in California, 19-20, 24



di Giorgio, Josephine Jewett (Mrs. J.S.), 27-28

Farnham, Kate (Mrs. John), 27  
 Finlinson, Burns, 29b, 75, 89, 116, 135, 139, 146  
 Finlinson, Dia, 29b, 90, 100  
 Forker, Virginia, 29a  
 Fox, Virgil, 25  
 Frost, Jack, 64

Garnett, Edna, 76  
 Garnett, Porter, 37, 74-77  
 Gatley, Miriam, 2  
 Gordon, Paul, 16-17, 88, 107

Harbison, John, 55  
 Harris, Norman, 12, 52-53  
 Heffernan, Mrs. William, 90  
 Hemmerling, Edward, 12  
 Hill, Merton, 41, 78

Jastro, H. A., 20-21  
 Jewett, Hugh, 18a

junior college:

administration, 60-61, 144-147  
 change, 49-50, 52, 59-60, 95, 108-111, 122-124, 135-152  
 counseling, 42-43, 103, 143  
 relations with the university, 59, 128, 150-152  
 role of, 44-45, 60, 105  
 standards, 46-47, 146-147  
 structure, 54-56  
 teachers, 149-150  
 veterans as students, 45-46, 52  
See also Bakersfield College; Grace Bird

Kerr, Clark, 59, 122  
 Kilburn, Parley, 109, 111

Lawrence, George, 8  
 Levinson, Margaret "Peg", 1-2, 16, 29a, 42-43, 57, 80-81, 89, 92, 98, 103,  
 115, 120, 124-125, 127  
 Luke, Orral, 104





Maguire, Ruth, 29a  
 McCuen, Hazel, 29a, 62  
 McCuen, Theron, 5-6, 29a, 92-93, 101-102, 112, 135, 139  
 McDaniel, J.W., 31-32  
 McKaig, Leonard, 8, 16  
 McKinley, Florence, 16  
 Merson, Thomas, 73, 107, 126-127  
 Mills, Marie, 13  
 Mitchell, Mrs. Frank W., 28  
 Morphet, Edward, 56  
 Morris, John, 54

Nelson, Thomas, 54  
 Nielson, Bill, 128

Pananides, Ethel, 73  
 Pananides, Nicholas, 12, 73  
 Pauling, Linus, 105-106  
 Peterson, Basil, 96  
 Prator, Ralph, 6, 61, 89, 95, 113-114, 128, 139, 145

Riesman, David, 105  
 Robbins, Katherine, 13  
 Robinson, Ethel, 21, 39, 41, 68, 80-86, 133

Sargent, Esther, 95, 98  
 Saxon, David, 122  
 Schafer, Adelaide, 73  
 Shirrell, Eleanor Jones, 1  
 Shirrell, Elmer, 1-2  
 Simonsen, Edward, 7, 29b, 61-63, 87, 89, 92, 120-121, 127, 139, 145-147, 149  
 Simonsen, Marvine, 29b, 90  
 Simpson, Roy, 60  
 Smith, Jack, 5  
 Smith, Jerry, 83  
 Spindt, Herman, 1-3, 58-59, 63, 69, 102  
 Sproul, Robert Gordon, 59-60, 122, 152

Taber, Dorothy, 69  
 Taber, Edna, 29a, 63, 125  
 Taber, Harold, 69  
 Taber, Theron, 6, 16, 54, 61-63, 69, 112  
 Tibbett, Lawrence Mr. and Mrs., 37-38, 82



Umphrey, Harry, 21

Vandereike, Paul, 82, 89, 95

Wattron, Bette, 29b

Wattron, Frank, 29b

Young, Robert, 2-5



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