Eleze Butler Coffman

This is Edie Butler interviewing Eleze Butler Coffman for the Humboldt State University Oral History Project. On February 4, 1984, in Williams, California.

From 1951 or ’52 until 1957 (listed in 57-58 catalog as Junior Librarian) Eleze was assistant librarian at HSU and for most of that time was librarian of the college elementary school. Eleze and I were both attending a community history workshop sponsored by the _____ Community History Project, when she mentioned that she has once been assistant librarian at HSU. Knowing the opportunities to interview people away from the Humboldt Bay Area were limited I asked her if she would consent to be interviewed. We used part of the workshop time which was intended for a practice oral interview and I was able to arrange for use of a recorder and tape. Copies of this tape will be included with the other workshop tapes and held at Feather River College in Quincy and in Colusa County. Mrs. Coffman describes the college in a period of transition, because of the growth of the college itself and because of the post war era. The interview was ended a bit abruptly and perhaps prematurely by the time limits of the workshop. After the recorder was turned off she remembered to mention the salary she had earned. Her starting salary was 358 dollars a month by 1957 she was earning 376 dollars a month, she added that she turned down a county job because the pay was less.

EB: So what years were you at Humboldt?

EC: I was at Humboldt 1952 through 57 about the last part of 57 I wasn’t much good to the college because I was off on sick leave most of the time. While I was working at the college I had not yet married and so my name at the time was Eleze Butler. And I was a junior librarian. When I first came to the college it was in the spring semester and I’m not absolutely positive if it was 51 or 52 but I think probably 52 ‘cause that’s when my first yearbook goes and I think I would have bought one my first year. I was sort of almost semi volunteered for it by the head librarian who was desperate to get more help.

EB: Why do you suppose she was so desperate? What was going on at the time?

EC: Well this is the whole point of why I think this is an important period of time, this was very definitely a transition period and when I came to work there, I worked in the very first library they ever had, you see. And the very next year they moved into the new library which was the second one that I believe now they had.

EB: Where was the library the year before? In your first year?

EC: The, nothing was on the campus as far as classrooms went except the building on the hill, which is a U shape, all right now the, gee I don’t know which.

EB: Founder’s Hall.
EC: I don’t know which wing it would be. It’s the one, I guess facing south, yeah faces Eureka, all right now that was the library wing. And frankly it was pretty dismal, I don’t know why everyone thinks libraries in order to look eridine have to be dark and gloomy and that sort of thing.

EB: You should see the one there now.

EC: Oh it really was a dismal thing. The shelves extended up you know as high as anyone could reach, in fact you had to do, if you were as short as I was, you had to do some crawling to get up to the top shelves. There was a, it had, the room itself did not have any windows except on the north side facing out into the quad because the librarians offices were in back of it, they had the windows. But the student, the library portion for the students didn’t.

EB: But the li… that room did extend all the way to the courtyard?

EC: No there, you had a walkway there, you know, the hallway’s there, so that kind of blocked some of the light off too, because the roof ran out and over this.

EB: There aren’t any windows in that.

EC: They were up above the bookstacks, about the only thing that was there was the door. Which we left open as much as we possibly could, but in Humboldt you can’t leave the door open for very long and stay warm. So she was, also remember the teaching staff at that time at the beginning of the fifties was just recovering from the damage done to it by World War II. Because World War II kept people in their places who would normally have retired and moved on. So that the majority of your staff like Gatlier, in the University of California were literally, though they had wonderful minds, I’m so glad got those people to teach me, but they were literally doddering around on canes in order to teach you, you know. And the new ones coming in were not quite ready to move on and the same thing was true of librarians there, the classes had just not been as full as they had been with the boys coming back and getting their GI bills and going to colleges you had this demand for services which you could not staff.

EB: This librarian up there she was...

EC: Begging for help.

EB: Very desperate? What was her name?

EC: Helen Everett, yes, and so she called me up and asked me, she wrote me and asked me to come at that time I was not feeling very librarianish and though I was rather sarcastic with her saying that I didn’t really catalog, you know, and if she wanted me to just come and add the headings like 500, 600 I’d be glad to do that. But she was so desperate that she phoned me then and said, she herself would do the cataloging if she would just come and take care of the circulation desk. And I couldn’t bear to let anyone down who was that desperate, so I went. But at that point I thought it would be just until the end of the spring semester and she would pick someone up in the summer. Because of that, well I’ll go back, it might interest you how I got this, since this was in February and coming from Colusa here, looking at the map, see Eureka was not _____ I hadn’t gone up there hardly at all. I’d been there once I think when I
was about eight years old, but you don’t pay attention to how you get there, services like that. And I found out I could go all the way to San Francisco and get on a bus and go up, or I could go up to Redding and go across, well how much more fast and easy it would be to go to Redding, you know just hop on the bus, get on the bus and go over, easy, in February, but then I got up to Redding on a _____ bus and discovered that it was such a tricky road and dangerous road that the bus only ran once a day and that coming in as we did around eleven o’clock I had missed the bus, so I had to stay overnight in Redding and then catch the bus the next day, and it did, it took us forever to get there and he had to put chains on twice and we slid once and almost went off the edge, this was before they improved 299, you understand.

EB: It’s still a journey.

EC: It’s still a journey but I don’t think it’s quite as hazardous. And so we dropped down, it was dark by the time we dropped down from Blue Lake onto the shore of the ocean there and came on around to Arcata. I had never seen a redwood burner in my life.

EB: You mean a tepee?

EC: The tepee kind, and they were all going, now I understand that your wood was pretty all gone from up there, that you don’t have the amount we had then, but it was almost, from the time you made the curve out of the valley around on to the shoreline it was almost solid with these tepee burners until you got into Arcata, and there were even some right in the city limits. And I looked at these things with these sparks pouring out of the tops of these funnels and I didn’t know if I was coming to hell or where. It just looked like you might imagine Dante’s inferno to. Mrs. Everett met me at the bus station, she wasn’t at all alarmed by the fact that I was so late, she knew what the trip was and she had made arrangements for me to stay in the dorm at Nelson Hall, which was the only girl’s dorm at that time. Since I had no housing and you know as I say I wasn’t planning to stay beyond three months so why should I look for housing. So I was three months in the dorm and at the time the dorm was pretty new and the, I think of her and call her the dean of women but her name was not the dean of women at that time. I think they call them associate dean of students or something like that. Which she was assigned to look after the girls. And to look after the girls she had to live in the dorms. If you can imagine you dean of women.

EB: Was this still Helen Everett or was this Monica Hadley?

EC: No no, now this was dean of women, so this was Kate Buchanan.

EB: Oh, okay.

EC: And I was so happy I lived in the dorm because I adored Kate Buchanan, I thought she was an absolutely wonderful, wonderful woman, and the fact we were living side by side, room by room in this dorm really gave me a chance to get to know her very very well, and we ate together in the cafeteria, the faculty had a small room they could sit away from the students if they chose, we didn’t often, it was table something like this.
EB: Was the cafeteria in Nelson Hall.

EC: Yes, yes it was the only one on campus at the time, I don’t think there was one in the Redwood Hall, the boys came over from Redwood Hall to Nelson to eat there. Kate was fabulous with her feeling for people, and when girls were in trouble, she really would help those girls. In fact I want to say, maybe it was because Humboldt is so separated from the rest of the environment, you have to struggle to get there.

EB: That’s right, you don’t get there by accident.

EC: And you’re all by yourself when you get up there, but and maybe it was because they were so small but everybody cared about everybody else. And you know most students, yeah, it’s all right if the teacher sits down but your conversation kind of wilts, you know, that never happened.

EB: With Kate?

EC: No, it never happened at the school, the teachers are welcomed with the students, you did things with the students, they had folk dances, at Nelson Hall, even after I moved out, I went back and I folk danced and who was I folk dancing with, I was folk dancing with the boys. The student boys, and you know I wasn’t left alone to one side and I wasn’t that great a dancer that you know I would be automatically chosen for my great ability either, it’s just I was simply another girl there to be danced with. And it was sort of an amazing thing and it was, I look back at those people and sure, everybody has faults, but on the whole they didn’t there wasn’t the back biting, there wasn’t the climbing between departments clawing each other’s eyes out and this sort of thing. Kate eventually was made a real dean of women and became much more formal with an office but still this caring, was always there. She was the sister of Edgar Buchanan, you know the motion picture actor.

EB: I think I have heard that.

EC: Well she looked just like him. And at the same time up at Arcata there was Don Karshner, who eventually became the dean of students and he was married to Kate’s sister Gail and Gail looked a little bit like Kate but not as much as Kate looked like Edgar, and I guess the acting ability ran in all of them and in fact, Kate said one time, had she had a different face, because you know Edgar Buchanan’s his face on a woman wouldn’t exactly make her a movie star. And she had to do character parts every time she acted. I think all of them would have loved to have been actors because we had up there a theatrical group, it was, I don’t remember students being in it, it was a community group, mostly teachers, mostly the faculty of the college.

EB: Where were the plays performed?

EC: I guess in our auditorium, but it was more of a community group.

EB: The auditorium was still in Founder’s Hall or was it?
EC: Yes, there wasn't anything else. This is what you've got to realize, all that was there was Jenkins
Hall, the gym, the student’s union, across a great big parking lot which is now I believe your music area
and I think the third library was put on where the student union was, I don't remember. But you came
down the steps and here was this great big parking lot ran across just before the hill dips on down was
the student union. And then Nelson Hall was over to the side of that. All right, that was about it, now a
lot of the classes were held in the houses where the college had purchased their land and then these
houses were still left erect and they were using these homes as some classrooms or nurses, doctors
offices for the students and thing like that, health things and things like this.

EB: And faculty lived there?

EC: Of course, CES, the college elementary school was there. But there wasn’t much, you kind of made
a little comment yesterday about the Siemens building problem. And I went home and I thought about
that, perhaps he over did it, I mean three libraries in one man’s term you know is even an awful lot,
different libraries. But if he hadn’t I don’t know what would have happened to the college. Because
remember again you are having now, by the fifties you were beginning to get the first push of the baby
boom that had come during the war plus the fact that we had so many of the veterans there. We had so
many veterans who had married and had families of their own that the college had brought in pre-fab
housing and they had it down below CES and called it Humboldt Village.

EB: Oh I remember a few of those? It’s gone now.

EC: It was a big. Yes it would be, but it was a big unit at that time and it was filled totally with veterans
and there were more waiting to get in. At the same time you were beginning to get this increased
pressure from these new, younger, just born and up and ready for college people. So you had a back-log
there and remember here you were with this building on top of a hill and that was all you had, that all
the classrooms were in that, that library was in there, the administration and registration everything
was in there, so if we hadn’t gone into a building program, the college would not have just stayed stable,
and would have deteriorated. The building program really became the massive effort during that time.
However, president Siemens also was changing a little bit on, oh I don’t know exactly how this, well he
was wanting to upgrade the staff I guess. Humboldt College maybe because it was so far away from
everything else had quite a record, I think, of taking on to its own staff its own students. That’s what
happened to Mrs. Hagne remember, Ms. Hagne I spoke about the other day, she had been educated at
Humboldt, and then she went on and became one of their education people and she was a very very
good one. I am not saying that it was a bad thing to do. It was a little bit of an in-grown thing to do, you
know. Because then the ideas that you have been taught certainly perpetuate themselves, because
you’re not going out and getting anything new and I think this is what president Siemens was looking at,
plus the fact, at that time, it wasn’t as important to be a PhD as it was to simply know what you were
doing. Nowadays this isn’t true, you have to be a PhD and whether you know your subject matter or not
it going to be another matter totally. And frankly I like the way it used to be, if you knew your stuff you
got to be a teacher. All right, now where I feel I was in transition was I knew some of the teachers there
that had been there since before I was born. Mars Hicklin was, came there, I believe in 1921, Hap
Arnold came in 1925, I don’t Pop Jenkins retired, I can’t remember the exact date ’55 or ’56 and he'd
been something like thirty-five years at the college at that time. That’s who Jenkins Hall is named for. So I knew these people who’d been there from almost the very beginning of the college. And then all these new people pouring in, I don’t know how many are still there, but I watched the ending of the old, I know my subject matter, I can teach, and professor Siemens was really demanding now of the staff, if you care to continue at Humboldt, you’re going to have to go out and get your PhD. And for people who have been born and breed and remember like Pop Jenkins was the head of his department and he brought in and he worked with people in Art, he was Industrial Art, but even so the Art was kind of under him in a way because he threw pots that were of this world and yeah, pottery is an Industrial thing but it’s also an art form. And Reese Bullen was known as an Art teacher but he was also a potter and did the Industrial Art after Pop left and he’s very well-known and is Pop’s you know, you pretty well know, but Reese didn’t have his PhD and frankly he was so busy creating, every extra minute of his time was spent over on that wheel throwing pots that he didn’t want to bother sitting in courses and writing which he would have had to do to complete his doctorate you know.

EB: And it wouldn’t be a matter of just going into some night classes to get a PhD would have been a considerable effort.

EC: It would have been a considerable effort, it would have meant he would have had to have at least a year out probably. Although the funny thing about the college was a lot of us did take courses from each other, like I decided at that point that I would go on and take my, either administrative or supervisorial credential in education you see because when you’re a school librarian you hold a special credential in education anyway it’s just like a PE teacher’s credential in one subject, so I could have gone ahead and gotten my administrative credential, and I started to work on it and I was taking courses there at the college and again, now here I am teaching these kids yet I’m sitting in the classroom with them as a student and there is no friction, no bickering, no looking at you as, hey what are you doing here? Everything is, knowledge is wonderful, let’s learn as much as we can from each other.

EB: I’ve been in the same position where I’ve taught a class there and I take classes up there and…

EC: Well I don’t know how they’re feeling now but at that time, it was simply, knowledge is the intimate self and it doesn’t matter how old you are or how you get it.

EB: Were people given sabbaticals to go work on PhD’s?

EC: Yes but it wasn’t easy to get because, remember our faculty was so limited. We’re not producing these people to come in here at this point yet, you know to get a lot of____, we’re very limited in faculty, so you could get it, in fact I think somebody did go, I don’t remember who it was, it wasn’t Reese I don’t know what happened to him, whether he decided to do that or not. But you sure had to struggle, and if one person was off on a sabbatical, that was it. We had such a small small staff that you simply didn’t do more than one.

EB: So what were the feelings of faculty about this push for the PhD.
EC: Reese resented it terribly. A lot of, remember we’re getting new people pouring in now, and most of them are coming with PhD’s.

EB: The people who were coming by the ‘50s?

EC: The new ones, the new ones, that were coming in, Joe Trainor, oh I can’t remember all... Bill Ladd, those that came you see were coming with degrees. The older people like Mr. Hicklin head of the departments, Nickolan and Macginitie and those people and if they didn’t have PhD’s they weren’t worried and they weren’t really pushed because they were going to retire in a year or so anyway, you know. It was a person like Reese who was very young, he’s not, you know at the top of his department quite yet, although after Pop left he practically was. So you know, come on you got lots of talent, don’t waste 40 years of your life getting a salary for a BA when you can have salary for a PhD. So though the push was there, I’ll tell ya it wasn’t up there on everybody. And another thing I’ll say about president Siemens’s regime, I was a junior librarian, and that was really low man on the totem pole because librarians oddly enough are not considered teachers. As I say I took teaching courses when I was a librarian, I had to take special courses there, I was issued a state credential just like any other teacher, but librarians are not considered teachers by teachers.

EB: Yeah, in recent negotiations for union bargaining units that whole issue, still a couple of years ago was still being chewed over.

EC: If anything I think it would come out worse.

EB: Were you and Helen the only librarians there?

EC: No, well let me just finish my statement on this, even though I was such a low person on the totem pole, everybody in that college was involved in setting standards. In other words, what are we going to ask now as entering standards of this college, there are so many people coming now who want to go in and we’re going to have to start weeding them out, we don’t just, we can’t take in everybody anymore. What are the standards going to be? And they had workshops and every single faculty member was involved in setting the standards, in setting the curriculum, what should we require as, before we move our people up into the upper division unit, what are we going to require down here first. Which is to me kind of unusual, that a person in junior department would be doing this. Take the department heads, yeah, I can see it. But for an administrator to work it through every single person on his faculty.

EB: That was Dr. Siemens way of doing it?

EC: It seemed to be. And it worked very smoothly because I felt that Homer and president Siemens had a good working relationship and then Dr. Balabanis of course had very great relationships with his department heads so really everything worked fairly smoothly there.

EB: What were the feelings of the faculty about his new era of entering standards and promotions or advancement standards?
EC: When these things happen to you you don’t see patterns, it’s very difficult to realize exactly what’s going on, that’s why you’ve got you administrator I suppose. But no, this is just something we have to do, hey look we’ve got all these people, how are we going to be fair about it. We have to set some sort of standards if this is a state college we have to take just about everybody, but how are we going to go, weed out and how are we going to handle this and this sort of stuff, it was just another job to be done and you did it. There wasn’t anything special. And at that time see I thought. Gee, why shouldn’t I be saying something, I mean, it never occurred to me it was a very unusual thing for me to be expected to do. So I never heard any ______ it was just a job, it was something you talk about and we talked about it, it needed, it helped the college, we did it. So this is how that went.

EB: What other librarians were there?

EC: Oh, all right, I having been a school librarian, told how the only way I could stay was if I could move to the college elementary library. And so she then hired me to do that in the spring and that’s when made the commitment to stay.

EB: That’s when you moved to CES.

EC: Yes, I was down in CES totally. Helen Everett was the head, she had Dean Galloway assisting her, Merriam Malloy was the cataloger, I was replaced by Charles Bloom who has just retired this year. So that would be circulation and I think he stayed in circulation. Bill Haverstock, Helen did find someone to help Merriam in catalog, Bill Haverstock came to help Merriam catalog. Dean was doing the reference and the buying and things like that.

EB: Did Helen do the cataloging when you first got there as she offered?

EC: Yes, yes she did help me. Yes she did. She had to there was a big backlog. I remember again very few, I wouldn’t say few books had been published during the war, but not all that many. Because of paper restrictions and now there was a torrent of books that had been held up that were pouring out of the presses that were important works and studies that had been simply delayed and upgraded. I mean I’m talking about non-fiction, not fiction books, and all these things, anytime you had non-fiction book it takes too long to catalog anyway, and all these things were just pouring out in torrents, all of them were important because you were getting all the atomic things coming in which the libraries had never had before you were getting all these new things that had happened during the war, new medical way of treatment, all these just masses of materials coming in.

EB: It was busy and exciting?

EC: Yes it was busy, it was exciting, it really was, and it was a transition time and a time of change and from being kind of a school that had been more oriented, you know really, they were normal colleges, they were more oriented to teaching and we had a small business department, I mean really small, I think there was one classroom for the students, you know that wanted to do business.

EB: For the business curriculum?
EC: Yes, so that and Industrial Arts had been a quite a bit, due to Paul _____ he brought his own
department up on this kind of thing. And so now you’re getting more and more and one of the first
buildings that was built after I came, after the library went up, that was the very first thing, was the
science building. And that was a big shocker to everybody, not in as much as we didn’t think we needed
a science building but we went in and sat down in the classroom and here were these gorgeous seats
with soft cushions on them and nice, not velvet, but you know, the velour, type seat covers and these
beautiful paneled walls and all this stuff and we were looking at this, our eyes were flopping out and
saying gee! How wonderful it is to have this marvelous stuff.

EB: Is that the one down next to Jenkins Hall?

EC: Yes, yes. All right you now had a lot of room too. So now we started getting physicists and
biologists and all this sort of people coming in. The Forestry had of course been one of the major things
there. Had sort of, was developing as a major thing even long before I came, but they hadn’t had a
building for it. That building came up right away. And the Forestry department just, you know,
exploded, if you wanted to be a forester you came to Humboldt State.

EB: I think you still do in this stage.

EC: Yeah well they should, that’s a perfectly logical place to go for it. I would like to speak about the
summer school, because summer school was so different there than I think it is now probably. There
were so few teachers during the war that anybody could teach who had graduated from college,
remember that? That’s how I started my teaching before I even got my credential, I had graduated from
college, I could teach grammar school, and I did. A lot of teachers were sort of resurrected out of their
neighborhoods, people who had taught, under this system of taking examinations instead of, you know,
being credentialed by the state and they were pulled out of their retirement and back into the
classrooms.

EB: This is in elementary and secondary classrooms?

EC: Yes, yes. And so they naturally for their own benefit wanted to update themselves and then after
the war, they either had to stop, I mean, or by this time we were getting a little bit of inflation too, you
know a lot of going on and that made prices rise a little bit and everything too. And if they wanted to go
on then they had to get their credentials. And so you were getting fifty-five, sixty year old women in
your summer school earning their degrees. And they had taught for years. Their knowledge is fabulous,
how are you going to teach teaching methods to people who could probably teach you? It wasn’t
exactly easy. But these people were so appreciative, the very fact that you were trying to give them
something so that they could do what they wanted to do and achieve what they wanted to achieve. As
a librarian, you did things for people, you know, they come in, they need something for their paper, it’s
not on the shelf or you can’t lay your hands on it. Okay, you find it and you call, hey, I got this for you
today. Oh, such appreciation, I would have, I would receive little cups, china cups with flowers and
thank you’s from these people on this sort of thing. Also a lot of the older women would come in there
because it was cooler and they didn’t have to cope with trying to learn in you know 110 degrees heat
either.
EB: So they were vacation on the North Coast and study?

EC: They would vacation on the North Coast and learn at the same time. I remember a woman I thought was so pitiful. We would have to verify that we had no teachers to go and supplant these people, they were operating on a year to year credential. And we would have to verify, no, we have no one who can, we can graduate that has a credential and can go up and take this woman’s place. And I remember four summers running we received this pitiful note from a board of trustees of the school board, please don’t have anybody come and replace Mrs. So and So…

EB: Do you remember what school district that was?

EC: No but it was in the mountains up between Crescent City and over the crest there somewhere. Gasquet, up around Gasquet someplace.

EC: They didn’t you know, no one wanted to go up there, this lady was a tremendous person, and really I can imagine the kids learning like mad under her, there was nothing when you got up there, there was nothing to do, she had some children so she helped make up the quota in the school. All in all they needed her. And so for four years running, we had no one who could possibly do it until she finally received her state work.

EB: The library in CES, was that for education students or was that for the elementary students who were enrolled in or both?

EC: It was for the elementary students who were enrolled in CES. I am so sorry that the state colleges have dropped having their own normal schools, it was an expense, I’ll grant you, when it comes to budgeting, you know, it means a whole eighth grade staff. But the rooms there were double rooms one way glass through, so you could have a whole class watching and observing another class, without having to have them sitting on top of anyone else. Besides that you could control how your teacher was approaching a problem with the students. Now there are many ways of handling children and some of them are better than others though they all work. There’re also certain methodologies that you’re interested in promoting. And at that time this was the exciting thing, see there hadn’t been much changes made in methodology, now with all the new knowledge coming in there had to be new changes in how, you know, how are we going to add all these extra things to what we have also been teaching? So a lot of this curriculum preparation was going on too and this was what was exciting.

EB: The influx of new people with new ideas at Humboldt that hadn’t been...

EC: Right, well it wasn’t just Humboldt, this was going on all over the whole state at this point you see. And when you took and dropped the normal school and went out and used your regular classrooms you had no quality control on the method of promoting this. In other words one person that you were trying to teach to be a better teacher would see one method and another one would see another one, and maybe it’s not the right method for that person whereas a master teacher as we call them would deliberately give several methods so that you yourself could chose the one that is best for you, you
know, in a situation. So I was just so unhappy when I heard that they had done this. The library was for the children, then Mrs. Everett when I came was giving a course in children’s literature which was required of all education students. She eventually turned that over to me. Then too, with all this curriculum development and this new methodology going on everybody started producing thick, syllabi and all this stuff. And this was gradually floating in, what are you going to do with it. How are you going to use it, what, you know it isn’t just books anymore it’s becoming materials, how are these materials to be housed, how are they to come in. And so finally that’s when they decided they would have me start a curriculum laboratory. And the best one in the state was in San Diego so the college flew me down to San Diego and I spent about three days down there looking at their curriculum library and how they had put it together, the type of materials and where they were going and then we started ours. And it was totally for the teachers.

EB: And was that housed down at CES?

EC: Yes, CES had a wing going south which was the library wing and one classroom, well they turned that classroom into the curriculum laboratory, it was right across the hall from the children’s library.

EB: Okay there’s, that’s right only one wing going south. Yes, it’s now called Gist Hall.

EC: It’s called what?

EB: Gist Hall. After President Gist.

EC: What do they do with it?

EB: It’s used for offices and media...

EC: What a shame.

EB: And instruction...

EC: I still think what a shame.

EB: And I think the school of nursing.

EC: The only thing that was invalid with having a CES is that of course all the teachers would prefer to have their children there.

EB: And many of the townspeople.

EC: Because the thought, well not so much the townspeople. We had to go out and get townspeople and we deliberately tried to get different economic groups than the teachers so we were looking for the lower or poor to come in there and we gave them free schooling. It had nothing to do with IQ’s it had to do with trying to get economic and that sort of stuff.

EB: So it was a normal school.
EC: Yeah, so it was a real school. But even so you’re going to have more, if you’re going to have children of college professors you’re getting a little higher grade of IQ than a regular school would have.

EB: And more motivated.

EC: No, I wouldn’t say, no.

EB: Describe _____

EC: They’re just normal kids, they really were. A little bit cockier perhaps, because, as I say they were upper intelligent quotient, most of them and when you get children like that you are going to have a certain, “Hey I’m great stuff” you know, attitude, but that was just normal kid stuff. All right now with all this new methodology coming in and new concepts one of the things we did that I really was so happy I was there to work on was, we began the camping program that really has kind of swept the Northern California. Bill Raleigh came as the teacher of the, the principal of the elementary school there, he followed Mr. Griffin, Griffith I guess it was, who moved on to an upper grade and Bill came in. And Bill was interested in this camping, and his idea was not simply showing the kids the outdoors by being in the outdoors which is what we seem to get down to now, our children here in Colusa go to Woodleaf and the Woodleaf is sort of do it yourself out in the, you know, woods approach.

EB: They go for two or three days.

EC: A week, but it seems to me that what they come back with is more of a conservation attitude and Bill’s concept wasn’t that, we went for looking at nature, yeah, we did a long nature study and stuff like that but what he was looking at was a change of _____ where a non-achiever in a classroom might achieve well in a different situation, and he didn’t sell us on this, we said, ok Bill, you want to take a class out for a week, we’ll go with you. Sure we’ll do all this extra work and you know leave home and, oh it was a hassle I tell you, I had to pack books up a ton high because I took a library with me and all this sort of stuff. And you’re committing yourself to not being at home so somebody’s got to take care of your cat and I mean it can be a real hassle.

EB: Where was the camp?

EC: We went down to Garberville, there was a YMCA camp there across the river from Garberville and the children had of course gone to school after September so we rented that camp and went down there. But Bill prove his point the very first year he was there, there was a little Mexican boy who really was put down by all the other kids, I mean he, I would say maybe his IQ was 100 or 105, it wasn’t anything special and his economic condition was very bad so you know he couldn’t offer a great deal there, and so he was literally a snail, you know, he was in himself and all tied into a knot kind of and very very silent. All right, this boy, well he also had, it was a Spanish Indian mix, I guess merely maybe more Indian and he was tied as I say, up inside himself, but he was a fisherman. And we had the Eel River which ran between this camp and Garberville, and he got out in the Eel River and he caught the fish and nobody else could catch the fish so everybody else, hey! This boy’s not so bad. And that boy’s status in
class changed so completely that he came out of his shell, he was accepted as a part of the class, and so we were with Bill, we will do this from then on.

EB: So it was an annual event?

EC: It was an annual event. And there was another little girl who was utterly terrified of the water for one thing, she came from a very religious family who didn’t like her to show herself, so a swimsuit was kind of a no no. And the nurse said she had to go in swimming for health reasons, so the parents had little choice about that. But they got her a very modest swimsuit and we didn’t care you know it was way down almost to her knees sort of thing and we couldn’t care less but the child was terrified of the water because she never had any experience, and this was another thing I felt very good about because I taught that child to float and you know you have to really give yourself to the water in order to trust it enough to float and she trusted me enough that she would do it. So I felt very good about that and she broke through her fear of the water and did learn to swim, so when you see children changing you realize that what Bill was talking about was right, it has nothing to do in this plight with curriculum, it has to do with emotions, it has to do with the inter-weaving of social strata. And it is worth it for that point and this is why I was so unhappy as I said to see it turn out maybe to be a classroom situation in the open where it is very definitely structured and all.

EB: And one hopes that there’s still that room for those other, that time for those other things to evolve, and have a chance to occur.

EC: Right, but we did a, we

(end of tape)

EC: ______ before I ever got there had had the foresight, now I don’t know whether this is when Siemens first came and I don’t know how long he’d been there before I came there to tell you the truth, because I didn’t pay any attention to that and I knew he wasn’t that old a president, he’d, they’d talk to him as a new president.

EB: Yeah, it was just a few years earlier.

EC: But I didn’t know if it was one year or what but anyway someone had the foresight to buy what they felt would be the needed amount of land for the college, and a lot of the area being close to the college was better homes, newer homes, maybe I should say it that way, the old part of the town was across the, what is now your freeway gulch, but at that time, it was just a plain gulch. And quite a deep one, so naturally the people had these nice new houses or comparatively new they were twenty something houses.

EB: But they were substantial?

EC: Yeah, well yeah, they were nice homes they were only thirty years old you know, got a lot more wear and tear in them and all and they were being asked to sell to the college at, you know, no state’s ever going to give you a great price, it may give you what they consider a fair price, but it wouldn’t be
maybe market value. And so there was a lot of still, slopped over unhappiness about the grabbiness of the college. All right well even before I left they were acquiring more land because it was very obvious because of this building program going on and the student’s applying that this was not going to be the ultimate growth pattern, there was going to be much more and we’d better move out while we can you know. And these homes, they went out so far that they were nice homes and so these were allowed to be used by the faculty as rental apartments until such time as the college needed to take them down, but it didn’t make the people in town any happier.

EB: No because they had, many people had moved out of their houses and then yet here is, someone else was living in them.

EC: They weren’t taken down, maybe the feeling wouldn’t have been as bad if they had come right down. They could have seen the growth, but it’s very difficult, you know I’m on the planning commission now, and it’s very difficult for people to think even twenty years ahead, you know they don’t see this.

EB: Well change is hard.

EC: But I don’t think our boys did so much damage as you hear in many college towns where you have the, like in Berkeley I remember when I went through school, we had very few boys during the wartime, but even so, they were yelling and hollering and yodeling down the avenues at each other you know, and creating a noise, a nuisance for the people who lived in Berkeley and there was drinking and that sort of stuff. There was undoubtedly some drinking at college but if so it was very well controlled. And I don’t know of one case of damage to the town, you know where the college had to go and clean up like they did sometimes, but there was that feeling and there’s a difference and part of it maybe because up there, there was literally nothing to do unless you made your own entertainment and happiness, we didn’t watch TV the way people do now, and if you’re going to form your own social groups you’re going to try to form on your certain interest levels and the townspeople wouldn’t be interested in history or they wouldn’t be interested in. I remember one summer I was there and I was in this apartment building there where only just four apartments in the building, it was a very small complex, and we all kind of got together after work, after summer school work and we’d sit there in the evenings and we would eat ice cream with peaches chopped up over the top and we would discuss, of all things all summer long, Einstein’s theory of revolution, you know trying to get this really hacked down so that we could handle this theory, now very few people in town are going to be interested in discussing Einstein’s theory of revolution you know, and I think it was more this type of interest differential without feeling hey, they’re sitting out on the hill talking about Einstein’s theory of revolution, they’re snobs, intellectual snobs more than it was anything else on the basis of... we rarely ate at our own homes. If you ate at your own home you had four other people eating with you. And this was our method of doing things, so you got to be a very good cook, I got very fat, a lot of people did, and then afterwards you’d play canasta, you know you’d have some of these intellectual discussions or something of this type.

EB: You mentioned that the students had to make their own activities. There just wasn’t very much...
EC: Everybody did, the faculty...

EB: Yes, what kind of things did the students, things to remember that they participated in or created for themselves?

EC: Folk dancing, cards, all quite types of activities, they were all just plain discussion, tremendous amount of intellectual discussions went on, and this is why I think they enjoyed having the teachers eat with them. Because if you’d try to leave they’d grab you and sit you down and get you into these discussion groups and it would be, it would be almost like small seminars being held in bunches around the, yes impromptu seminars, just on anything you wanted, and you got to know people really well and their feelings for these things, as I say I adored Kate Buchanan and I don’t know anything Kate did that she didn’t do right and this sort of thing, except, and we come down to the exception, I couldn’t agree with Kate on world unity, Kate did not believe in the UN she did not believe that world unity was ever even rational, she believed in nationalism, the United States, very patriotic nation, keep its own hands to itself and its thoughts to itself and.

EB: And other countries likewise.

EC: And other countries likewise, and these are the things you found out about each other, you went through these, just sitting and talking but I spent hours and hours and hours at canasta, we would go out and, I say we, the kids are doing this too, not just teachers you understand. Out on the beaches and having beach parties with food, oh, there were two things that faculty did that were unusual, I don’t know if they’re still doing them I don’t think they are because the faculty got too big I believe, and one of them was, every spring or summer, I don’t really remember because to me there wasn’t any difference, you see I worked through the summer too, we had a salmon bake and the teachers, some of the teachers, not me I was never a rock climber, would go out and they’d gather this sea weed off of the beach and bring it in and we’d went up to I believe it was around Blue Lake, I don’t remember, on Mad River somewhere anyway.

EB: Camp Bauer?

EC: Probably, probably Camp Bauer. And they would dig this big hole and they’d put the sea weed in and they’d put the salmon on it and we had this terrific picnic time of all faculty, do they still do that? Okay, there’s another thing the faculty did was a program for the amusement of the students where they did takeoffs on the students and one year when I was there Look magazine, or Life I guess it was sent a photographer because they thought it was so unusual that a teacher would do this and we would try to get some incident that had happened during the year, then we’d take some kids that we felt could take teasing and we’d pick out, you know the characterish part aspects of these children and would do them. I remember one that Helen McPherson if you go interview her did, she had as a student teacher that year, she was a master teacher you see, she had this student teacher who was going to be married and while the girl undoubtedly was paying attention to her work, her major heart was with her marriage plans and so here in this classroom situation Helen comes sweeping onto the state with this bride’s veil and this rock on her finger you know, rocking this way and that, and of course everyone knew who it was and it broke the kids up, and the students loved it of course, absolutely loved it.
EB: That’s a nice tradition.

EC: But we didn’t do, I think they stopped that.

EB: I haven’t heard it done.

EC: Well I think they stopped it perhaps almost the last year perhaps I was there because you get such an unwieldy faculty, you see every faculty member had to do it so you see one faculty couldn’t be picking out the one’s they wanted to do and when you get such a large faculty, then not everyone can be on stage it becomes too long. But that was a fun thing and it was educational, I kind of liked that and the kids enjoyed it.

EB: Yeah, any particular comments about living in the dorm that you were in for three years, or three months rather.

EC: No, three months.

EB: Or in things that you noticed about people who were living in them, about dorm life.

EC: The, I didn’t live with the girls, I had a separate room from them with my own bathroom, I didn’t have to go into the shower area, but it was not dorm living as I had known it in Berkeley the girls seemed much more, ladylike should we say? In other words it was much more their home situation type thing and I don’t know they just, I really can’t say it was very different than any other boarding house type situation and with Nelson Hall being the cafeteria, when you went downstairs you didn’t just have girls you had the boys on the bottom floor too, and of course in those days you could not have mixed dorms and so with Kate there boy, no one was going upstairs, no one tried, as far as I know nobody tried, they weren’t any panty raids or anything like that going on at that time. When I moved out of the dorms so did Kate, they finally broke the dean of women away from the concept that she had to be there every minute for the girls and they put in a house mother to a situation then and let Kate go with these others on a more professional level, I don’t know though, I think she still mothered the girls, but it was a little different type thing. I can’t think of any housing you know any dorm life as being anything different, just simply boarding house life would be.

EB: Well we’re running out of time I have another time, can you and I continue this, or should we go back with the other program over there.

EC: We’ll its really run out of time, I think you better stop and I think we’ve just about run out of what I can remember specifically, I hope I’ve given you some leads to go on with.

EB: Yeah, and some quality of life things, they’re real important.

EC: Again the thing I want to stress is, this was the time when Hicklin, and Arnold and Jenkins and these people who had been there in the beginning were leaving. Either through death or through retirement or whatever and all these new people coming in and they didn’t have a place to go and Siemens provided it. I was amazed that he brought us as much as he did.
EB: Any other?

EC: Not really, oh one thing you may get a kick out of, the water situation of the City of Arcata, now I’ve never really checked this out because I’m not a hill climber but I always said, where’s the water come from, ‘cause sometimes we’d have a real chlorine taste and sometimes we would not have a chlorine taste and it would either be just after a big storm or in the late summer months when water was kind of low and you’re coming out with some of the inferior things in your water cup anyway, and finally one day one of the teachers said, oh for pete’s sake Eleze, don’t you know that the sanitation of our water is simply a man walking up the hill with a bucket full of chlorine and throwing it into the reservoir and that’s your water system, so I don’t know if Arcata still has that kind of water system.

EB: No they don’t.

EC: But that would be about the only other thing I can think of.

EB: Well thank you for your thoughts and memories.