

TAPE #26GRACE VILA & LESLIE MARTIN

Recorded: March 1979

(What vivid memories of your childhood have you?)

Leslie---Being brought to Grace's store here (Main St.) by my parents. If I was a good little girl, I was brought into town, and there was a toy store next door.

(Was the toy store in your family, Grace?)

Grace---It was my uncles. It was actually up where Forestland Realty is now. When you first were allowed to go shopping you went to Thomas' Meat Market, it was up where Garibaldis is. And all you got was meat there. You went to the different stores for different things. Then you went to ~~XXXXXX~~ Staggi's store for taffey---there were two taffey stores, one in this block and one in the other block. Staggi's was right on Main, and Spagnoli's was Bev/Ann's Beauty Shop.

(When was the Oddfellows built?)

Grace---This section burned down in ~~1862~~ 1862. Then it was built up immediately.

(How did Jackson get started as a town?)

Grace---It was a trading post; a stop between Drytown and Mokulumne Hill.

(How was Jackson named?)

Grace---It was named for Colonel Oliver Jackson.

(Were you born here?)

No. Neither one of us were born in Jackson.

Leslie---I was born in the house I live in out on New York Ranch Road.

(That's the big red house with the old barn down in front?)

Yes, that's it. It's the only old, two storey house out there.

(What did your folks do?)

My grandparents farmed. They came here in 1869. My dad was a teamster from Calavaras. He drove from Murphy'X to Jackson. This was a freight run with the teams of mules. When he came over here he worked top-side in the mines. He never went underground.

(Where did you go to school?)

Jackson. Technically, at that time, we were just barely in the New York Ranch School District. But since my mother had to come here shopping, she got permission for me to go here. But she had to drive me back and forth to school.

(What old buildings are on the Ranch Road? Like the winery.)

Well, the winery wasn't there. The house was there, but the winery isn't that old.

(Is there an Indian Reservation there?)

Yes, Margaret and Earl Dalton live there now. The government was supposed to give the land to the Indians within the last seven years. But I don't think it has ever been cleared through court yet.

...you know where there is a house right next to the road? After you pass the winery coming toward Jackson---that's on the edge of the reservation. If you take that road up over the hill, Margaret and Earl live up there.

(Is it still up in the air?)

As far as I know. Margaret had to go to Fresno where they had some hearings.

I haven't seen her much in recent years...I know she has been working on the grinding rocks.

(How did you get to school? Did you ride a bus?)

Grace---You walked.

Leslie---Once in a while my mother would drive me when she went shopping. If you were a boy, like my brothers, you got a bicycle and rode it. Being a girl I had the privilege of being driven, because my parents didn't want me un-chaperoned.

(What did you do for entertainment?)

Walked the fields, and by the time I was seven or eight radio made its appearance. Radio was a big thing in my life; I could hear music from all over the country.

Grace---And we got down to see the theater once in a while. They had talent shows, and there were the tent shows too.

(Did Chataqua come?)

Yes, it came here. And also the regular tent shows that had plays came here too.

Leslie---And you had your Italian Picnic. Everybody took their lunch; it was a picnic in those days.

Grace---And there was always a big 4th of July celebration.

(What about dances; was that a high point?)

Yes, dances would go on till three in the morning, sometimes.

Leslie---I don't know about the dances in town; the ones I heard about my uncle and aunt told me of. We had an old barn across the road, and they had barn dances there. Usually played the violin and organ.

Grace---In Jackson the dance hall was where Sprouse-Rietz is. And I think each town had a hall in town where they would dance.

(Where were the movie houses?)

The theater in Jackson is where the ATI parts store is now. That was the Ratto Theater.

Leslie---I can remember stage pageants there. That was when I was in the first or second grade.

(Where did the other shows perform; the live shows?)

Chataqua would perform near the old hospital building. On Water Street where the apartments are. The tent shows were up by the Broadway Hotel. The old brick house by the Hotel was near there.

Grace---Jack Tam was a Volcano boy. Clarence Bradshaw was originally from Volcano. And Clarence was working at the Argonaut at the time disaster.

(Did either of you do much travelling?)

Grace---Well, we had a car before I was born.

Leslie---We had a car when I was a little girl, and the first places I was taken was by car. It was tough; water bags hanging on the radiator and things like that. We had relatives in Markleville, and my Aunt had a ~~xxx~~ cabin in Hope Valley; we would visit her.

(Were most of the roads made of dirt?)

Leslie---Right. And if you met another car, one of you had to back up. It took a long time to get from here to Silver Lake. But you enjoyed the scenery along the way. And you waved at everybody; you were all friends in those days.

(Where was the legitimate theater in Jackson?)

Grace---The movie theater had a good sized stage. Groups would come in from Stockton and put on three-act plays there. It isn't really that old a building.

Leslie---Sutter Creek had a theater on Main Street. And Jackson had another theater later. It was in the lot on Main Street; next to the loan company. That theater was still going in the 60's; it was the Amador. My older daughter worked there when she was in high school.

Grace---There was an earlier theater down here at the corner; the Masonic Building had Rocca's Theater. That was an old one.

(Jackson was a pretty wide open town, wasn't it?)

Grace---Yeah, until 1956. That's when they had to close up everything. People would come, just like they would go to Reno today. (How did they manage to keep everything in order and relatively free of publicity?)

Grace---Well, it had to be kept on a small scale because it was a small town. Nobody wanted the other fellow in on it.

(Why didn't a million people descend on Jackson?)

Leslie---There were fewer people around then, and transportation wasn't as good as it is now. It was really wide open in the 20's and 30's. And in the 40's I knew people who had heard of Jackson in Europe.

Grace---We've had a lot of people here, and a lot of money here. And that was when a dollar was worth a dollar. But everybody went along; they didn't complain about no place to park or anything. Of course, there were more hotels, and there were more boarding houses, too. Remember, the mines were open then.

(When did the mines close?)

Grace---They were closed by government order, because gold was not considered a strategic metal. Then the price of labor went up and

they couldn't re-open, because the price ~~was~~ of gold was held at thirty-five dollars. And now, of course, it ~~isn't~~.

(How was the town closed down in 1956?)

Leslie---It was good old Pat Brown, the Attorney General.

Grace---Brown wanted to be governor, and he felt he had to do something spectacular. This place was called Little Reno, you know. And he had to close us up in order to become governor. We've been supporting the Brown family all these years!

(How did the town get warned of raids and things?)

Grace---They would; government officials wanted to come up here on weekends; nobody wanted to close it up completely.

Leslie---I can remember when I was a kid; they said everything closed officially at 2 o'clock, so you just went around the alley and in the back way.

Grace---You just didn't tell somebody they couldn't have a drink.

That would be ridiculous. Well, how many bars did we have on Main St.

Leslie---I don't know; more than twenty I think. We used to have them up and down both sides of the street. And Main is only a couple of blocks long. When you got off onto Water or Court Streets you ~~were~~ were in a residential area.

(I get the impression that everything was very peaceful.)

Grace---Everybody knew their place. That was it.

Leslie---I remember as a little girl being told that you didn't talk to certain ladies who dressed in fancy clothes as they went up and down Main Street. But I never knew why or anything. But you respected your ~~parents~~ parents word in those days and did what they said.

Grace---It was a different world. ~~XXXX~~ Discipline and manners were important. These guys on the street now act much rougher than the people did in the old days. And they were really the Underworld. But when they talked to us, they used their manners. And we used ours.

Leslie---If you were raised properly, you just didn't stop and talk to strangers. But I can't think of anybody pushing themselves upon you in a case like that.

(What was the club under the Wells Fargo Bank?)

Grace---It was The Louvre. It's just a slab of cement now.

(Was Garbarini's across the Street?)

Grace---Yes. And The Bank Club was underneath. The bank, itself, was in the parking lot. There was an alley way on each side of the bank, and at the end of each alley you went down into a bar and restaurant. The Bank Club didn't serve meals as much as the Louvre.

(What about the National Hotel?)

Grace---It wasn't any bigger than the others! Each bar had its gambling tables. Or wheels or whatever. And there were slot machines. They had everything, except it just wasn't as big as it was in Nevada. But the town would be humming all night long, and yet it didn't seem as if it was too crowded.

(What can you tell me about the Chinese settlement here?)

Grace---It goes way back. You didn't see too many here when I was small.

Leslie---The Chinese were mostly gone by the time I was in school in the late 20's.

Grace---You see, they followed the American miner during the gold rush. The Americans would Placer mine, and the Chinese would go through the tailings. And by the 20's there were very few families around. The Louv~~er~~ Club was run by Chinese. But they didn't have families here. They would be single men coming from China who would later go back.

(Where did the Chinese go?)

Leslie---Well, the Chinese graveyard used to be up the hill. They would hang things on the trees to keep away the evil spirits. You'd know there had been a funeral, because all these things were hanging from the trees. But then they dug up the bodies and sent them back to China.

Grace---As far as we know, they did. Their main idea was to go home. If they didn't go home, they wouldn't get to their heaven.

Leslie---There is a custom. When we were stationed on Okinawa it was the eldest daughters job to scrape the bones of the dead and put the bones in a casket. This was done after they were dead seven years. Maybe the Chinese did the same thing.

(Did the Chinese get along with everyone?)

Leslie---I don't remember. We didn't get around much; we didn't have much social life, about all we did was to go to the movies.

(Your dad was a teamster?)

Yes.

(How big was a team?)

Six or eight mules; I'd have to go home and look at a picture. One of the old buildings at our place was the blacksmith shop, and we did all of our shoeing and things there. That's why we had it.



(Leslie, when did you get electricity?)

There was no electricity on New York Ranch Road until 1948. When my daughter was born, she came home to kerosene lamps. When she was three weeks old the power company turned the current on.

(When did Jackson get electricity?)

Grace---They had a private line. It was put in by a local company, not PG&E.

(Do you remember Latang's Gas Works?)

Sure. It was a coal gas operation. The gas pipes ran under all the buildings. I think it closed down in 1919.

(Where was the brewery?)

Grace---Up where Galli's Drive In is now. It became an Ice House after they closed the brewery. It was the Jackson Brewery, but I don't know the name of the beer. (It was Strom Beer.)

(Where was the soda works?)

Grace---It was right next to the brewery. Everyone was busy doing something. There was a cigar factory where The Cellar Door is now.

Leslie---Where did the Krabenhoff Building get its name, Grace?

Grace---Krabenhoff had it built; he was Strom's son-in-law.

(Was there a dance hall in there on the 2nd floor?)

Grace---It was on the 3rd floor. There was a little balcony, and the room extended to Main Street. But they didn't think it was strong enough to hold the people.

(What was on the street level?)

Grace---Just stores; the second floor was a tourist garage. They were getting ready for tourists even then, but nothing happened.

Leslie---In those days you could afford to build a tourist garage because your cars wern't so big and heavy.

~~XXXXXXXX~~ Leslie---I graduated from the 8th grade in that building. As the schools got bigger they began using it for graduations. It had a stage and everything.

(Where did the kids go to grade school?)

Grace---They were torn down.

Leslie---The school was in two buildings, and there was a bridge across the top where you went across from the 5th to the 8th grade. The Court House was also two buildings; the Court House itself and the Hall of Records. And you usually had grammar schools in the different areas. Kids used to walk into the Jackson school by the 4th grade.

Grace---They even had a school up in back of the Linda Vista Motel for awhile. Apparently they didn't have enough students so they gave it up. Then they got our first school bus; it went and picked the kids up.

(What about train service?)

Leslie---Wasn't it ~~XXXXX~~ McGee who used to ride the train down to go to High School? He used to ride it from Martell to Ione.

(Did they have any jazz bands in Jackson?)

Grace---Jan Van Theil was conductor in a jazz band. They were amateurs but they were really playing jazz. After all, it was 1920, and jazz was the thing, along with the flappers.

(Did you go to San Francisco often?)

Grace---It's surprising how often we did go. It was our "city", you know. You called it the City, and that wasn't Sacramento either. A lot of the Italian families had relations in San Francisco. They would land in San Francisco, and then they would move up here. They didn't do much mining; they were mostly farmers. None of those Italians were going to stop in Sacramento or Stockton to shop. No, it was on to San Francisco!

(Did they go by train to San Francisco?)

Grace---Mainly, I think. People didn't drive too much then. There were cars, but some young guy had to have the nerve to drive it. The conservative foreigher wasn't going to tackle that. He wanted to get home!

(Do you recall anyone taking the boat from Sacramento?)

Grace---I think Mr. Bonnefoy had an interest in the riverboat at one time.

Leslie---I don't remember anyone doing it.

Grace---There was a bus line from here to Mokulumne Hill, and one to Stockton and Sacramento.