

Interview with Betty Cooper, February 7, 1984.

Betty: I'm afraid I can't think of much to tell you, I've been very sick.

Annette: Don't worry, When George Bartlett asked me to do this Senior History ~~book~~, he said it was because I do a lot of human interest writing, and he didn't want just the facts--he wanted the people behind it.

Betty: Well, yes, because that's what will cause people to read it. Oh, there were so many amusing--we used to get out of there just dead tired, and we'd laugh as we were going out the door. 'd feel better than the people we helped. You know, we'd go out joking about it. Some of those people got cancer and such and are gone now--I was the youngest, probably, there. Many are in their 80's, and I'm 69. Annie Bartlomei, you've probably heard about her by now--she's in her 90's.

Annette: I haven't no. I know the Bartlomei name, but I haven't heard about her.

Betty: She's in her 90's. I know they've had recognition parties, but I've been there when none of these people were mentioned.

Annette: Tell me about Annie Bartlomei, would you?

Betty: She volunteered, and she washed dishes. We did everything. We had \$200 a month, \$100 for rent and \$100 for utilities. It could be checked with somebody else too, if you want to be positive. We got \$250 a month to use for the cook. See that was 5 hours a day, 5 days a week. I don't think I had a cook that didn't work maybe 8 hours. They never charged us for the rest, 'cause that was it--\$250 for the cook. We baked our own pies and bread. But all these were volunteers, did all of this stuff--there was some baking went on everyday, because volunteers would do it.

Ellen Miller - or
Annette: You were the head cook, were you?

Betty: No, I was the manager for a whole long time.

Annette: Now where was this? Was this the building on State St.?

Betty: 601.

Annette: Yes, I know where that is. I just wanted to make sure which one they were in when you were working there.

Betty: I believe they actually got started in the Methodist Church, prior to getting that building. But I might be wrong, because I didn't go into it until--it was '70, 1970-~~67~~ My son died, he had a heart attack, and he lived here in town. He died very suddenly--he had a heart attack, and he was gone in about an hour. It hit me.

I'd lost a daughter-in-law who lived in Los Angeles--we always worried about how fast she drove. I don't know why, but somehow I felt if I'd been down there she might not have been going so fast. You blame yourself. And my son, I couldn't understand why I'd never noticed it when he said his arm was so tired. Well, I ~~noticed it now, but in those days I didn't.~~

So--my doctor tried to get me to go do volunteer work for the hospitals. He said, "The best thing you can do, Betty, is some volunteer work," and he suggested the hospitals. So one day I was going to look at some property that is the same area as that house. So I was walking past, and I'd been reading about the Center and people who were involved in it--and I was really blue, I couldn't have been bluer--I mean, I was really feeling sorry for myself.

Annette: It must have been awful, losing 2 children.

Betty: Well, yeh. My daughter-in-law, I worshipped; I couldn't have thought more of her if she was my own daughter. And of course there were the 2 little children. So anyway--I think I was even crying, I know I was. So I thought, "Well, there's the Center, I've been thinking about coming and looking at it, I think I'll go see if I can use the bathroom. There were some people there that knew me, I guess everybody knew me. Mary Jennings was covering the front table at the time.

First Cooking - and all around
So I helped out--oh, for quite a long time, then they wanted me for the manager's job. That was before George Bartlett was there. George Bartlett came while I was there, toward the end.

Annette: Was that manager of the entire Center?

Betty: It was the entire Center, at the time, but you worked subject to a Board of Directors. I planned the menus, and did the buying. You had to wash dishes the old-fashioned way, by hand. They don't use the vegetables people bring in any more, but we did in those days. A couple from Lake County would come over a couple of times a week with vegetables.

Annette: Fresh things from their gardens?

Betty: W'd have fresh things. And it wasn't necessarily part of the menu, but I put them on family-style--like fresh corn, I'd put it on the table family-style. If I had sliced tomatoes, things like that, I'd put them on, and they would--well, we served family-style for a long time, they had been doing it that way, but I did change to plate service. But we had extras on the table, and the table looked very pretty, with plates of radishes, all that sort of thing. We baked the bread we had most of the time. Of course, ~~it irritates me when I see that awful bread they use now. I can't criticize them, because they're doing--but I know there are volunteers enough who would go and prepare vegetables. I know that.~~ Because back in those days, it was a lot harder to find volunteers

than it is now, and it wasn't a very popular movement yet.

So we had pies. We got commodities. We got karo syrup, and flour, and that sort of thing. So we made a lot of real good pies. And we made cakes. There were an awful lot of beets for the first 2 or 3 months. Lots of beets. They were great big ones, but they were tender as butter. And there was a lot of corn, and a lot of green beans--all kinds of vegetables.

Annette: Sounds great.

Betty: But the volunteers did all of that. The cook didn't have time, in 5 hours, to bring up meat and everything else. It takes time to prepare all those vegetables. Each one had an assignment. Mr. ~~Lucas~~ ^{Wright} started during the time I was there, he used to come there and eat. One day I asked him if he'd be interested in raking the yard for me-- that was an awful dirty place, with those trees at that time. The ~~leaves hadn't been raked all year~~, and we walked through them. And that's dangerous. There were piles of old lumber and stuff, on the other side of the building, and my husband cleaned that up. They'd just put a new roof on, and all that was ~~lying down~~ ^{being taken care of} there.

~~All this was hard at the time I was down there. I don't want to say his name because the man's alive yet but my husband started doing all the repair work. You know, he didn't charge them anything--if I had a faucet leaking, or a light that needed fixing or something--he'd do it. And it cut way down our costs. But there was this man-- I imagine you'll be interviewing him and he gave me hell--but we didn't have that kind of money.~~

Annette: ~~He gave you hell for what?~~

Betty: ~~For my husband doing it for nothing, because they paid him \$5 a month for everything he did. And he isn't that hard up--he's Al Eldrick. He'd always been able to do that, he was on the Board of Directors. He'd found out what needed fixing, and he'd do it, then charge them for it.~~

~~And I did furnish the first transportation the Center had. I had a little red Opal, and I took it down in the morning, and it stayed 'til I left in the afternoon. In those days I had strict orders to stay open 'til 4:30.~~

Annette: What time did you open in the morning?

Betty: I went down at 7, unless we had turkeys or something. If we had turkeys I went down--we had them cooked fresh that day--I went down and put them in maybe 5, 6 o'clock. *I have pick up*

Annette: Sounds like you were doing the managing and the cooking, too?

Betty: If a cook was sick, I didn't hire somebody to take her place, I did it. Lots of people thought I did all the cooking.

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Annette: Yes, I've heard your name as a cook.

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Betty: No, what I was doing was the managing, but I did an awful lot of the cooking. And I did supervising of the cooks, too. We did have that were real good, and we had some that really had to have a lot of coaching.

Annette: There's a Cookie Phillips, whose name I've heard--I haven't talked to her yet.

Betty: She was there before I was.

Annette: Is she still around?

Betty: I saw her not long ago, she's a lovely lady. I wouldn't be surprised if she's with her children by now, she's in her 90's. I can't think of her daughter's name..but I'll tell you where she lives. We could walk over to her house, when we're through talking.

I believe she cooked the lunch, when the Center first started. It's hard for me to remember. I believe when she left, I did go to work to do the cooking. I'm not positive.

Annette: You mentioned furnishing the first transportation?

Betty: I had a little red Opal--the biggest one, you know, station wagon. And there was never a soul that ever called and wanted to get to the Center, that somebody didn't go get them. My car set there all the time I was there, and it was surprising how many people we got down there that couldn't have gotten there otherwise. I used it to buy the groceries and everything. When they put on their deal about transportation 3 or 4 years ago, and they had the congressman here and everything else, they got up and told when they got the first bus--that was their transportation. That red car set out there the whole time I was there. And it was used--in other words, we did do other things that people needed to help with the car. But mostly just going and picking somebody up.

Annette: Did you do a lot of outreach work in those days?

Betty: We did a lot of outreach work, yes. I also did something that I thought was good. They've had some in there since, but they never trained them, they were just in there working. But they were Youth Corps kids. And one summer in March--I believe it was March through September, I had them before school was out--when school was out, we got 5 new ones, I think. First I had 2 girls--very nice girls. The families lived ~~in the~~ *under the Port Conditions* and they drank. One girl--no, 2 girls--didn't have a dress to her name. When they came to work--well, right away ~~we~~ *we* got them dresses, to wear to work. We had one lady that worked on it and bought material. And one lady made a long dress for two of them, hostessing.

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JP But anyway, that was a training program. You probably know the program--they got paid for what they did, because it was the Board of Education. We had the two, from March until school was out, and I had 5 a time or two--the same 2 were still there--until September, when school started. I think they left a week before school started.

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The Board of Education told them they had to have that much vacation. And those girls *really learned to love the seniors & the seniors loved them*. But first, before that, there was somebody that came down and did the janitor work--and I did plenty of it, when somebody else didn't show up. Our floors were swept and swept good, every single day. Our tables were set by help--everything was done in the outside room. Volunteers help peeled the vegetables, they did an awful lot. And they did all the waitress work--of course, they're doing that yet. I was trying to think the other day. I think 99 was the most we served. And it got to where we were serving 60-70 many days. But we did--I think 99 was the most, but there were--I believe 2 or 3 days we served up in the 90's. And that was a lot in that little.. working between those little 3 rooms. We had only 3 rooms to serve in.

Annette: Well, it sounds like it was really needed in Ukiah, to get that kind of response.

Betty: Of course we did have some nicer menus than they have now. ~~But we had more wholesome menus, I think. Without salt. People wanted salt, they could put it on. There's too much salt in a lot of that food down there. Those people are people who shouldn't have salt, or just very lightly.~~

Annette: To get back to when you first went in there. You mentioned that Mary Jennings was behind the table. Could you give a little more description of what it looked like that day?

Betty: Well, the floors were bare. It was an old house that--some of the group that started it, I could name some. Some of them have passed away. Because I wasn't there when it started, but I knew who the initial ones were. They painted. They got together and went down and cleaned up a filthy old house--it was in terrible shape. They cleaned it up and got it ready to go. And they borrowed the tables from--oh, I don't know what it was, maybe a school, a grange maybe--somewhere. ~~They~~ loaned them the tables, they had these long tables. And the chairs were also on loan. I guess they were loaned by North Coast; ~~maybe~~ we had North Coast by that time.

Annette: Yes.

Betty: So that's who they were loaned from. But, you went in and--at that point, I don't think there were any nice couches around there. But shortly after somebody donated one, and some settees, and things of that nature. The floors rolled, so you didn't dare put anything down, it would all go--you know? Like you say, you want a description of what it was like then. It was pretty barren looking. Let's see, there were 4 rooms, and what had been a breakfast nook, and what had been a kitchen. The living-room was nice and large, and we had a fireplace. ~~When I first went there, they weren't using the fireplace, but my husband cleaned it up and we used it.~~ There was no floor covering on it anywhere--they were hardwood floors, but they were in bad shape. They had a regular sink, double, like the restaurants, many, used to have, and drain, in the kitchen. We had a stove that

somebody gave to them--it did the job, but it was hard to work with. It had a large oven--gas, restaurant-style, stove. And the usual cupboard space, and everything.

But, like I say, they were doing a beautiful job, with no money. And I really believe--you didn't see Phillips in the book? ^{After he} I might be able to find it for you.

We had practically no refrigerator to start with. There were 2 small boxes, smaller than my kitchen refrigerator. While I was there we were doing a chest freezer--a small chest freezer, that was given to us while I was there. We had a Farmer Bros. coffeemaker--we made good coffee, and served good coffee. I had a restaurant for 35 years.

Annette: So you've had some experience.

Betty: I was always very strong on the atmosphere people have when they go to the door. When anybody came to the door, and signed up for what they were going to do, I had somebody--I wasn't doing it all myself, you had to have a lot of people--I had somebody make sure that everybody was introduced to every person that was in there. If they came to a table, and sat down to a table late, we introduced everyone.

~~Now I know a man who calls here every single day. He only came here because his brother and sister-in-law live here, and his sister-in-law's not too strong here, and the brother's an alcoholic. But he likes Whisk, and he came from the Bay area, and he used to come here for his vacations. So when he retired about two years ago he came up here, permanently. But I saw him through the years when he'd eat there. He'd never stay overnight with them or never even ate a meal there, because it wasn't the most desirable place for him to be. His standards are more like Carolin's standards, you know what I mean? His place is immaculate all the time. I can't keep up with the way he keeps things, but he's still a colonel in the air force. I'm always kidding him, he's still in the air force. But this fella, so he never would eat in their home and he wouldn't stay overnight there, though they had an extra room, because it wasn't up to the standards he liked. Which I wouldn't eat at their table either, but they're nice people.~~

So anyway, he knew that whenever they were sick they'd call me for help--they still do. Her mother's sick in Redwood Valley right now, and she doesn't drive, she'd not able to. And she calls me. I don't take her everytime she calls, 'cause she'd call everytime, if I did, but I do take her occasionally out, drive her out to her mother's and back.

And this is something we did at the Center. If somebody called and wanted something like that, I always had somebody I could ask to go. Most of the time, my car was used. And I'd furnish the gas.

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Annette: You were going to tell me about Annie Bartlomei?

Betty: Annie Bartlomei? While I was manager...I'll take it back, they did have one more person they paid ten dollars a week. I'd forgotten that, now that had to come out of the food money. Now the other money came from North Coast. But they paid \$10 a week to a man who washed dishes. ~~He was an ex-murderer from the State Hospital. He really was dangerous, there was no question about that. Several times he got angry at me, and he made some remark about knives one time, so I insisted they get rid of him. I didn't want him well, the kitchen didn't want him either, because of that. I was afraid he'd use one of those knives, and I know his history. I had worked at the State Hospital. What you're working with there is boiling things, and hot grease and everything else, so...~~

Annette: How about Annie Bartlomei?

Betty: I believe that's when I got her. Do you know Marie Str^{en}burg? She's dying of cancer right now.

Franker washed dishes
cleaned - used his car to run errands
Annette: I have her name, but she's not able to talk to me.

Betty: She worked very, very hard. She worked in the dining-room, and she worked everyday. And her husband--these people are people that I went to and got, they were friends of mine--her husband did the dishes for a long time. Annie Bartlomei--that must be when she took over, when he.. He worked in the spring in people's yards, just for pin money and the association with people. He didn't really need the money, but like he'd come over and work a couple of hours, planting flowers or something..but he loved flowers, in the garden. They had a beautiful yard, and he had more time for that, and he was still strong physically. He died of ~~cancer~~ *heart trouble* 3 years ago. I was stuck, really stuck, when we had this dishwasher problem--I guess maybe I washed the dishes for a few days.

Annette: Excuse me, but to get back to Annie Bartlomei. The reason I asked you about her is because you asked me when I first came in if I'd been told about her. What did she do down there?

Betty: You should meet her to, before you write this. She washed dishes and she cooked, and she made the Italian sauces. Oh, if I say that, the cook will get mad. She was a marvelous cook. And she was there and she washed dishes, and she washed dishes for a long period of time. I believe, at one point, she got paid part of the time, but I think she was a volunteer most of the time. And she put in many more hours than they were capable of paying her. See the cook--I've known the cook to go down on Saturday, go down on Sunday maybe to bake pies. ~~We had two or three very devoted ones.~~ Did you hear about Mrs. Pearl *Knight*

Annette: Would that be Pearl Knight?

Betty: Yes. She and her husband both, he washed dishes. The only reason I'm mentioning this is the fact that they did do the hard work, you know, and it's important. And he would repair things, he also repaired things as much as my husband did. Now Al Eldrick--you should

have Al Eldrick in there, if you're going into people who did the repairing, but he's the one always got paid. He did do some volunteer work.

Annette: How long were you there?

Betty: I'm not too sure, really. I went there in ~~1970~~, I think, in September. No, no, I went there in the spring--'cause ~~my~~ *my* ~~husband~~ died in January, the last of January.

Annette: And when did you leave?

Betty: I don't remember that.

Annette: Are you still working with the Senior Center.

Betty: I'm not listed as a volunteer right now. If I'm called for anything I'll do it, but there happens to have been a little friction along the way.

Annette: When you were there, were you working as a volunteer, or were you paid?

Betty: I was a volunteer.

Annette: You were always a volunteer?

Betty: Then I started taking tour groups out. My husband got sick, very ill. He was sick for years, before he passed away.

Annette: Could you tell me a little bit about your personal background? I want to include something of the personal backgrounds of people involved with the Center.

Betty: I was born a block from where I live, over on Clay.

Annette: Uhuh! You're the first person I've interviewed who is local.

Betty: And then I was raised around on this side of the block. We built a home here in 1938. I've actually spent most of the years of my life in this block. The house on Dora's on the other side of the street.

Annette: I should know your name. I've worked a lot on local history.

Betty: *mother* My grandmother was from here too. But my father had no relatives here, they came from Wisconsin. My maiden name was Lambert. I started to school right out here, at Yokayo. And I graduated from high school here.

Annette: Is your husband from here, too?

Betty: He was from--both of us were from early settlers. His grandmother and grandfather--and they were very prominent in town. He was a housemover, in fact he owned the business until he died. My mother

was born at The Forks.

Annette: Did you stay here all your life, or did you go away?

Betty: I was away 3 months one time. And a year-and-a-half another time we sold our restaurant down here--in fact, we traded--for a restaurant in Eureka. We had a dinner place, and we got \$2,500, plus their restaurant. *I was also away for school 2 yrs*

Annette: What was the name of your restaurant?

Betty: It was the old Cecile Hotel, original.

Annette: The Cecile Hotel--I remember that from my historical research here.

Betty: Well, we had the dining-room in the Cecile Hotel. Then we went to Eureka for a year-and-a-half. We went up on a beautiful, sunny day, and I'd never been anyplace else--well, I'd been to San Francisco to go to school. That just seemed great to be near the ocean, and we went up there and the weather was so beautiful. Then during the year-and-a-half we were there, there was never a sunny day, it seemed like. You'd go to work in the fog, and you'd come home in the fog.

Annette: Well, Eureka sure gets it. How long did you have the Cecile Hotel dining-room?

Betty: I married the man that had it. So he had it longer than when I was there with him. But I was there from.. '33, I think--I'm sure, '33 in the fall--I know it was. '33 until we sold it in '36, I guess. We traded. And we moved to Eureka. And then we ended up buying another little restaurant up there, we had two. I ran one, and my husband ran the other--we ran them in conjunction with each other. We moved back here then.

Annette: Did you get another restaurant here?

Betty: We came back, and we opened what is the "Golden Dragon, down that side of town. That had been an old bus depot, and we remodelled that and moved in there. And we were there--that was in 1935--and in 1938 we bought what was "Slim Gardner's," which is--*what is the name of that new ladies' dress shop?* It's just this side of the Palace Hotel, and it has larger sizes?

Annette: I haven't been in it, but I think I know what you mean.

Betty: It was the nicest restaurant in town, when we bought it. And we made it nicer. We remodelled it and--back in those days, you've probably heard about Duncan Hines? Well, that book was written when that man went out as a hobby--it wasn't commercial to start with--he went out as a hobby and travelled throughout the United States, and he didn't like what was going on in restaurants or hotels. So he'd go into a town, to restaurants, and he'd manage to get to know a cook well enough to get in the kitchen, and the restrooms. He'd get to know all

he could about a restaurant. And we didn't know it 'til later on, when somebody came through and showed you they came here because you were in his book. And we ran it for years and years and years. I mean, we really did have a nice restaurant.

Then the old pink house. We just decided we were going to get out of the restaurant, but when our lease was up we went into the pink house, and we converted it into a restaurant. We had a French restaurant down there. We had a graduate, in fact, from--~~on~~ ^{London School of} what's the name of that school in Paris? There's also one in New York, but the one we had went to school in Paris...

Annette: Sounds like Ukiah had better restaurants then, than it does now.

Betty: Oh, it just kills me to go out to eat now. We had the first ~~chop~~, in our restaurant. We had the first game hen, we had the first trout, we had the first lobster tails, we had the first sweetbreads--we were a first in everything. Like I say, that wasn't MR. Cooper, it was the man I married before that. He was an artist, he was a born chef.

Annette: What was his name?

Betty: George Evans. He'd worked at restaurants all his life. He'd run away from home when he was about 10 years old--in those days, you could do it--he was a lot older than I was. And he went to work in hotels--he'd go tell them he could do something. First he got busboy jobs, and at night the other boys taught him how to read and write.

Annette: Sounds like an interesting person. Listen, I'm getting low on time, and I imagine you're getting tired too. I want to ask you one more question. That is, do you have any thoughts on how the history should be put together? As a writer, I'm trying to get an idea of what the people involved would like to see. A big hardback book? A paperback book?

Betty: I think it would be nice if a hardback book came out.

Annette: With photographs? With graphics?

Betty: But, on the other hand, it's going to depend on how much it's going to sell for.

Annette: Yes. Because they do want to use it as a moneymaker, to sell in the future.

Betty: I think now, Judge Gibson wrote his memoirs of Mendocino County when he retired. And, gee, they had, I think they did 3 publishings.

I really do want to think of giving you a list of names, of people that did so much.

Annette: It would be nice to have them all included.

Betty: I told you about when they dedicated the bus, they came in. They gave the history, ~~and then they gave the history~~ a woman who didn't even live here then, Gladys McPhun, gave the history--and was introducing everybody down there to the Congressman. I don't need to be introduced, I've been introduced there before, but that wasn't the idea. I went down there, and nobody said a word about that little red car. And that red car went for about a year-and-a-half, I think. It was worked fulltime for that place. It went when I went down in the morning and when I came back at night.