

BEVERLY BOUWSMA: A HEARTLAND GIRL IN OUR HEARTS
(Sat., April 4, 2015, 3PM @ the Hillside Club in Berkeley)

presented by Kathy & Tom Brady

Kathy: Many of you who came to this memorial to honor Beverly knew her and Bill longer and better than Tom and I did. We first met Bill at a conference in 1971 and soon thereafter hosted him and Beverly during their visit to Eugene, Oregon. Later in the 1970s, while visiting friends in Berkeley, we sampled our first splendid evening at the Bouwsmas, and when we moved to Berkeley in 1990 they welcomed us kindly in so many ways.

Tom: Our presentation this afternoon depends greatly on the Beverly Bouwsma's contribution to the Department of History's oral history series. The series, in turn, owes much inspiration to Gene Brucker and Carroll Brentano. They were concerned that the history of the University and its academic culture was not being preserved for future generations. Ann Lage, an interviewer/editor for the Regional Oral History Office (ROHO), recorded Beverly's oral history at the beginning of 2001.

Kathy: Let's begin with Beverly as a Berkeley figure who had many friends and acquaintances. Bill Bouwsma moved, of course, in exalted campus circles and in the national world of the historical profession. Some of their children were Cal students, and most had friends among the children of other History professors. In this milieu, Beverly held a special standing. She seemed to know what was going on, and she was always ready with food, aid, and advice. She had the gift of being sympathetic but not nosy (and the additional gift of laughing heartily at the foolishness of others but also at her own follies). Beverly has been described as someone "who likes people." This oral history shows that through and through. She figures in endless stories: of dinner parties she gave for the historians and others, of the care and feeding of hapless young runaways, of helping deal with the problems of the homeless and of teaching new immigrants. All are recounted in the oral history with sharp powers of observation, good will, and a spark of humor. These have obviously gave her over the many years enormous satisfaction and a fund of hilarious anecdotes. She looked back on the people she's met with as much pleasure as the "fun" she and the history department had, dancing and drinking away the 1960s.

Tom: In our appreciation of Beverly, Kathy and I retain the oral histories' form of dialogue, and in most places we preserve the oral history's actual words. Kathy takes the part of Beverly, while I play the part of "Interlocutor." We've centered our dialogue on Beverly's pre-Berkeley, life. At the center stands not the mighty University of California but Beverly Jean Hancock Bouwsma. It is she whom today we have gathered to remember. Let us now take a brief trip with our friend to another time and place...

GROWING UP IN THE HEARTLANDS – LINCOLN, NEBRASKA AT MID-CENTURY

Interlocutor [Tom]: Was there a lot of awareness of people's ethnicity?

Beverly [Kathy]: No, not in Lincoln. Everybody was more or less the same. I didn't know, for example, there were really Jews around until I went east to college. It hadn't occurred to me.

Interlocutor [Tom]: So most people were of some northern European background.

Beverly [Kathy]: Yes, yes. There were a lot of Czechs. They were lower class. Germans, they were upper class. Scandinavians, they were okay, fine. English, also fine.

Interlocutor [Tom]: Were the Czechs more recent immigrants?

Beverly [Kathy]: I don't know whether that was it or not, but they somehow were just looked down upon, I'm not sure why. It seemed as though a lot of them lived on farms, and their daughters would come in and be maids. I think that was it, really. Although, there was a Catholic bishop who was Czech. But somehow Czech wasn't quite good, I'm not sure.

Interlocutor [Tom]: Well, maybe Catholic wasn't either?

Beverly [Kathy]: It wasn't, I guess. Come to think of it, it wasn't. Maybe that was it? But they were, of course, Catholics, weren't they? You've probably got it.

Interlocutor [Tom]: Just a guess. What about your father's ethnicity?

Beverly [Kathy]: He was English.

Interlocutor [Tom]: English?

Beverly [Kathy]: Yes. He was very down on French Canadians. He had a somewhat English accent, Canadian accent. He never made anything of his family or his ethnicity, except that he was not a middle westerner. He did not have that accent, and he was very clear about that one. And he had

certain manners that he thought were superior and they were, to the normal middle westerner.

Interlocutor [Tom]: What kinds of things?

Beverly [Kathy]: Oh, things like he would tear his toast into four pieces instead of two. He prided himself on things like that. Yes. And he hated our accents, that we said, "roof", no, we said, "ruf" and he said, "roof," or the opposite. I don't know.

MEETING BILL BOUWSMA

Interlocutor [Tom]: Now, when did you first meet Bill?

Beverly [Kathy]: Oh, heavens. Oh, I guess we were both about twelve. Well, we may have been thirteen. Whenever you go into seventh grade, that's how old we were.

Interlocutor [Tom]: Tell us more about that.

Beverly [Kathy]: Well, I saw Bill, who at that point was a little overweight. He was kind of puffy and very strict looking. He was on the safety committee, and although we were the same age, I was about a year or two behind him in school, because he skipped grades and I didn't. There he was on the safety committee, and I was running through the halls, so he had to arrest me. He did. [laughter]

Interlocutor [Tom]: This is at age thirteen?

Beverly [Kathy]: [laughter] He turned me in, and I thought, oh heavens, who is this stuffy, puffy boy that he should arrest me. [laughs] I thought it was the silliest thing I ever heard of in my whole life, and I didn't have very much respect for the principal either, who called me in. But I got through it all right. From that time, I sort of knew who Bill was. Didn't know him well, and we weren't in the same classes because he was ahead of me. In high school he asked me out once, but it didn't go well. It was hot, 105 degrees, and we played tennis, three sets.

Interlocutor [Tom]: That wasn't a great choice.

Beverly [Kathy]: No, it wasn't a great choice. I had heat exhaustion afterwards and had to be treated for that. So that was not a good success. [laughs] You would think that we never would have gotten married. But then, oh, one time he was home from--he was at Harvard by this time, and he came home for Christmas vacation, and on Christmas night he was very discontented as boys--well, as everybody always is, I think. And his mother said, "Oh just call somebody, any--, you know, well, how 'bout the Hancock girl?" which I suppose she mentioned just because she knew my parents, my mother especially. They had been sort of friends, and they were in the same music club and things. And he did ask, and we had a wonderful time. We went out walking in the snow. Very different from the 105° degree time. We had a wonderful time. I don't know why. We talked about interesting things, and we just liked each other.

Interlocutor [Tom]: Were you then in Nebraska?

Beverly [Kathy]: Yes, I was in Nebraska at that point. I don't know, we just had so many things to say, and it was so romantic being out in the snow. And he wasn't puffy anymore. He wasn't even all that stuffy, because he was having a miserable time at Harvard. So he'd been reduced no end, in every way. I think I liked him better that way. So anyway, we had a wonderful time, and I guess we saw each other once or twice more and then wrote letters."

A HEARTLAND GIRL GOES EAST TO RADCLIFFE

Interlocutor [Tom]: He went back to Harvard and you [were in] Nebraska.

Beverly [Kathy]: That's right. And then, by the time I went to Radcliffe, he was gone to the army, because he only had three years of college. He graduated--you know, they made room for them to go through fast.

Interlocutor [Tom]: So when you went back to Radcliffe you weren't going back to--?

Beverly [Kathy]: Oh no, not to him. No, in fact I went farther away, because he went to Denver, which would have been fairly close to Lincoln. No, that didn't have much of anything to do with him.

Interlocutor [Tom]: Did it open your world a bit to have him--?

Beverly [Kathy]: To have a Harvard boy[friend]? Oh, you know, I think we didn't talk about that. I don't remember it mattering. What mattered to me was that I had some friends who had gone east to school. I was very envious of them, because I could see they had been somewhere and done something that was interesting and seemed maybe important. . . .But above all, it was a wonderful adventure. 'Tis, you know, for middle western kids to go east or west. You know, I'd never been east of Chicago, or west of Denver. Those were my limits. North to Minnesota, south to nowhere. So I thought it was just a wonderful thing to try and to see if I could do it."

1944. A HEARTLAND GIRL GOES WEST -- MARRIAGE & RELIGION

Interlocutor [Tom]: Was your family happy about the marriage? And his family?

Beverly [Kathy]: Well, his family weren't very--I wasn't Dutch, and that bothered them, I think, a lot. They had always liked me fine, before we got married, but getting married was going too far. I wasn't Dutch after all, and that made a big difference. And we were too young, which we were. We were both twenty.

Interlocutor [Tom]: Do you think you would have married so soon if it hadn't been for the war?

Beverly [Kathy]: No.

Interlocutor [Tom]: You would have waited?

Beverly [Kathy]: Oh, sure. Oh, of course I would. Although, I wanted to get married. And I was a virgin and all that. Wanted not to be, and so on. The usual things. And Bill certainly wanted not to be, and was also. Then too, it was something to do for the summer, and I hadn't quite known what I would do.

Interlocutor [Tom]: That's an unusual way to describe getting married.

Beverly [Kathy]: Well, yes. We really, really wanted to get married, both of us. Not the day we **gót** married, then we didn't want to anymore, but we had to go through with it.

Interlocutor [Tom]: Did you admit that to each other?

Beverly [Kathy]: Yes, we called each other up. "Do you want--really think this is a good--?" "No, well maybe not." "Well, I don't know, I mean how are you going to know?" "Well, we'll have to go through with it, the cake is here, and the relatives --." You know. [laughs] We decided to go through with it, but we had a lot of fighting the first year. Mostly about religion.

YOUNG LOVE STRUGGLES WITH RELIGION

Interlocutor [Tom]: What had been your religious upbringing?

Beverly [Kathy]: My religious [background]? Well, my mother had been a Norwegian Lutheran and my father had been a Methodist. Serious, serious Methodist. Although his mother married down, I think. Her father was an Anglican and was a doctor, and her husband was something like a blacksmith and a Methodist. So in that sense, marrying down. He went into farming, and finally he invented some kind of grain elevator so that he got a lot of money, all of a sudden, and sent my father to medical school, which was nice that he did.

Interlocutor [Tom]: And then your father could fulfill his medical ambitions?

Beverly [Kathy]: That's right. Exactly, that was how it was. So, what church should they go to? Well, my mother found out when she went to Lincoln, that the Lutheran Church there was the kind that don't drink and all that. Oh, what are they called? Concordia College and that Missouri Synod. They both found that the Episcopal Church would be the good compromise. My father, because once he found out about it, he rather liked it better, and my mother, because it was more like what she was used to. They didn't go to church much at all; they sent us to Sunday school. Later, my mother got with it, and when she was an old lady she went very often, but not in those days. We were sent to Sunday school and then picked up. I argued with my Sunday school teacher constantly. How could this be, how could that be? The usual things, you know. Why did they wear curtains? Dumb stuff. Anyway, by the time I was married, I'd already been confirmed in the Episcopal Church; that was the end, you didn't go after that.

Interlocutor [Tom]: Now, what year were you married?

Beverly [Kathy]: We were married in [19]44. . . .In the Episcopal [Church].

Interlocutor [Tom]: That might have been hard on his family also?

Beverly [Kathy]: I believe it was. In fact, the whole wedding was quite hard on Bill's family. His father was supposed to wear a tuxedo and didn't have one, so he didn't wear one. We have a picture of them looking so miserable at our wedding, his mother just utterly sad, and his father half shut out of the

picture--oh, it was so miserable. [laughter] My parents looked happy, but you can see their smiles were pasted on. My father, I was later told, said, "I haven't felt this way since the Lindbergh kidnapping." [laughter] So, I can't say they were enormously pleased.

Interlocutor [Tom]: Now, was this because they disapproved of your choice, or--?

Beverly [Kathy]: They knew, as I didn't at the time, that we would have problems because of Bill's Calvinist-Dutch thing and my general lack of religion. Also, they knew I was very young, and they didn't know I would go back to school in the fall, because what if he didn't go overseas--they knew all the true things. So naturally, they were a little worried, and so were Bill's parents.

Interlocutor [Tom]: Did you and Bill discuss religion in these brief encounters you'd had?

Beverly [Kathy]: We'd had a few little dustups on the matter. The thing is, Bill hadn't been religious either until he got into the army. Then in Denver there was a whole group of Dutch living in a suburb, and they took him and gave him dinner every Sunday, and, in all, nice things, and he went to their church and got very much involved with it. Loved the sermons. It was just what he'd always been taught in Lincoln, that there was such a thing as the Dutch Church, and he'd never seen it really. Not much, anyway. So that was very nice for him, and he felt right at home. He loved that, and he wanted me to go, and so on. And I said, "Yellow brick church, never in this life!"

Interlocutor [Tom]: Yellow brick?

Beverly [Kathy]: Yellow brick. It was ugly as sin. And the people were boring, after I'd known all these interesting ones at Radcliffe. We had a terrible time every Sunday morning, because he insisted I should go with him on the streetcar out to this suburb to this yellow brick church, and all these Calvinists, whom I didn't even approve of, much less like. So, we had a hard time.

Interlocutor [Tom]: That would be difficult.

Beverly [Kathy]: It was difficult. I thought, "Well, if I have to go to church, at least I want to go to a decent one." So I went to the Episcopal, and I, in fact, quite loved it. I think because I was rather unhappy and I needed something. The minister was extremely nice. I told him what my situation was. They were very nice and invited us for dinner. I know people invited soldiers all the time, but it was very much appreciated, at least by us.

Interlocutor [Tom]: So you would go there, and Bill would go to the Calvinists--?

Beverly [Kathy]: Yes, except that then Bill started easing over to the Episcopal. Oh, then there was a terrible in-between period where he had this good Catholic friend, and he thought maybe a Catholic, that's what he wanted to be. [laughs] So he was going--you know, we were so young.

Interlocutor [Tom]: You were searching.

Beverly [Kathy]: Searching. I thought, well, maybe that would be a good compromise. His parents weren't mad about that, because they really thought that any religion was better than no religion, but my parents didn't think that at all. They were very upset about the Catholic idea, especially my father, growing up with French Canadians, whom he didn't like. No, he was very much prejudiced against them. Anyway, somehow we got it all sorted finally, and went to the Episcopal. Bill, by this time, liked it much better than the yellow brick.

Interlocutor [Tom]: So **you** won out, in a sense?

Beverly [Kathy]: Well, I suppose. It didn't seem like that. It seemed like we both discovered it. Well, it felt like that, but I suppose it wasn't. I've often asked Bill if he minded, or if he had any resentment. He said that he really didn't. It was just hard to get used to it at first.

Interlocutor [Tom]: How would it have been different? I should have asked him [Bill] that, but he didn't tell me this story.

Beverly [Kathy]: Oh, he didn't tell you.

Interlocutor [Tom]: He told me a lot about his family's religious upbringing.

Beverly [Kathy]: Oh, they were so different. The Christian Reformed that--well, he didn't grow up in it because there wasn't one there, which was the great sorrow to his family. They kept rushing back to Michigan where the other Dutch people were. But he didn't grow up in it, and instead they went to a kind of, oh, almost storefront [church]. Terribl[e]--you know, no good music, no--just awful. Well, should I say, low class. Low class, I'll say. They were. The Episcopal would have a pretty church, nice music, and such a thought-out, traditional service, so that even if the sermon wasn't very good, the prayers were. Yes. And they were very old, and very beautiful.

Interlocutor [Tom]: The ritual and the tradition were something you appreciated, it sounds like.

Beverly [Kathy]: Yes, I always liked that part of it, I just didn't, you know, quite believe in anything, and maybe still don't. I'm not sure. Sometimes I do and sometimes not. Bill, I think, does more than I do, although sometimes he says he thinks I do more than he does. We don't know, but anyway we go, still. But we settled on that somehow.

Interlocutor [Tom]: And did you stick with that throughout, the Episcopal Church?

Beverly [Kathy]: Yes, we did. It took about three years...

CONCLUSION

Kathy: Beverly was truly a woman who liked people—as we have seen in these selections. Life was truly an adventure for her, and she always kept moving toward the future. She used her talents to build and strengthen individuals and communities within the family, amongst friends, within Berkeley and the world. She helped us all to have compassion, courage, wisdom and wit in dealing with life. And she often did it with a gentle nudge, some candid advice, and a glass of wine—or maybe two.

Tom: We've come to the end our collective remembrance. Thank you, Beverly, for the life and love you shared with all who have known you. May you stay in our hearts and may you rest in peace!