

Interviewee name: Ruth O'Connell Kent

Interviewer: Evelyn Taylor

ET: This is the oral history of Ruth O'Connell Kent, taken on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011, Camarillo, California. The interviewer is Evelyn Taylor from California State University Channel Islands.

ET: Ok Ruth, first of all I want to say thank you very much for agreeing to meet with me on the Camarillo State Hospital.

ROK: You are very welcome.

ET: I cannot, um, tell you how excited I am to do this interview especially with your son, Jack O'Connell having had such a history with California State University Channel Islands but when I found out that you worked at the hospital, Camarillo State Hospital, I thought, "Oh, I've got to get her for an interview." So, I'm so happy to talk to you. Um, I wanted to first, as we've talked a little bit before we started taping, you have quite an interesting family history. So I wanted to talk a little bit about your previous life, before, pre Camarillo state Hospital. Can you tell me a little bit about your family background, uh, where you were born, who your parents were, your sisters, brothers, that sort of thing?

ROK: Yes, I was born in 1924, October 6<sup>th</sup> and I have a twin sister and her name is Roselyn, so we were Ruth and Ros, and I have a brother and sister a year older than we were and they were Clara and Clarence; and I had two brothers, twins, a year younger than we were and their names were Paul and Alden. So we were three sets of twins, boy/girl, two girls, and two boys and it was fun. We had a nice picture in the New York paper when we were little, and it was fun because you always had somebody to play with. I grew up in Poughkeepsie, in New York out in Titusville we had a big southern colonial home that my grandfather had built. I went to school at a little country school, Two Rooms, until high school, and then Arlington high school, which was a really nice high school. I played on the softball team, I was their best pitcher; my brother used to help us practice. My sister was very athletic; she was forward for the basketball team. I made the team but just barely but we were very athletic and it was fun. Then as I got older, I went into nursing, the war came and all three of my brothers went into service and...

ET: Was that World War II?

ROK: World War II.

ET: What were your parents' names?

ROK: Paul and Dorothy.

ET: And where were they from originally, before New York? Do you know, by chance?

ROK: No, I know my Grandmother, my paternal grandmother was from France, which I have her middle name. I mean my middle name is her last name, which was de la Lande, and she was a French baroness, so I have a little bit of royalty there.

ET: That's pretty awesome.

ROK: Yeah.

ET: That's very nice. So, as a child you lived in New York really all of your life.

ROK: All my life, yeah.

ET: Well, so now...

ROK: We came out to California following the Dodgers.

ET: Really?

ROK: Really.

ET: So, you were a big Dodger fan? Your parents were?

ROK: My husband was.

ET: Oh, your husband was. Ok so then, let's go back. Ok so you graduated from high school and then what did you do when you went, after high school?

ROK: The war came.

ET: World War I or World War II?

ROK: World War II. And all my brothers were in the service and I saw an ad. I was working for J.C. Penney as a file clerk and I saw an ad for the cadet corps, nurse cadet corps. I thought that would be something nice to have and if my brothers weren't back by the time I finished they would need me. So, I went into the nurse cadet corps, which was three years.

ET: Was that in New York?

ROK: I actually went in the cadet corps in Tennessee.

ET: Oh wow, so you went from New York to Tennessee, they sent you to Tennessee.

ROK: Yeah.

ET: Oh wow, and how old were you then?

ROK: Twenty, twenty-one.

ET: Wow, that was a very brave thing.

ROK: Yeah.

ET: And how did your parents feel about that?

ROK: My mother didn't, she wasn't too excited about it but, and my father passed away when I was around ten years old so things got a little hard after that.

ET: Right, right. So then you went to Texas, and you were there three years?

ROK: To Tennessee, yes.

ET: To Tennessee, sorry. To Tennessee, and then did they give you, like a certificate or...

ROK: Yeah, I got my RN and it was a nice program, they paid for everything, they paid for our uniforms, both, for working; a pretty red and white check uniform with a white bib and we had outdoor uniforms, they were grey, grey check seersucker for summer and a nice warm flannel jacket and skirt for winter.

ET: Oh wow.

ROK: And they paid for, of course, all our meals and gave us when, the first three years when we were probies, the first three months I mean, we got \$15 a month then after we got through our probie period it was \$20 a month until we were seniors, and then we got \$30 a month and that was a lot of money in those days since we didn't have to buy anything except what we wanted personally, pay for a movie or buy a tube of lipstick.

ET: Right, right now when you were done, did you fly or did you take a train or...

ROK: Took a train.

ET: And how was that experience?

ROK: It was very fun because there were so many servicemen traveling.

ET: oh yeah?

ROK: And so, we'd all chat and talk and it was nice. My sister came down the last time that I made the trip and we *really* had fun going back on the train with all the servicemen.

ET: How long did it take? How long was the journey?

ROK: About four... oh, I've forgotten, four or six hours maybe.

ET: Ok, ok um, was it a hard transition for you to make from New York to Tennessee?

ROK: No, not really, it was when I first got there with a southern accent I thought, oh this will be great three years and I don't know a word they're saying, but it's amazing how fast I picked up that southern accent. And then I guess, it got so bad that I didn't dare call home 'cause they'd just tease me. [Laughs]

ET: [Laughs] so you started talking...

ROK: Yeah.

ET: How did you deal with the weather because, that's pretty humid?

ROK: They have a nice medium weather there, not too... you get a little bit of snow, little bit of cold weather but not too bad. It's nice and medium in the summer, same thing; it gets warm but not too hot. I liked their weather.

ET: Um, what's it like in Poughkeepsie? Poughkeepsie?

ROK: Poughkeepsie.

ET: Poughkeepsie.

ROK: Um, you mean weather wise? Oh, we had terrible snowstorms out there but I was just a little girl then so it was fun for us; we could go sleigh riding. We had different hills that we liked to slide on and we named most of them, one was "Factory Hill" that I remember, that was our favorite and we'd all try to see who could go the farthest. We'd jump over some stonewall fences, and we could go ice-skating so, as a child it was fun. I'm sure if I had to go to work or something like that it would be very hard.

ET: A whole 'nother story

ROK: Yeah, we got a whole lot of snow.

ET: What did your dad do for a living?

ROK: My dad was, owned his own business they had a Reynolds Reliance Coffee Company and they canned a lot of foods and they made their own coffee and sold that. When I was in high school I still saw some Reynolds Reliance cans on the shelves.

ET: And then your mom was pretty much a stay at home mom?

ROK: Well yes, but she was also a trained nursery school teacher.

ET: Ok.

ROK: So she ran lots of nursery schools.

ET: Well when you dad passed away then, did you guys still stay in New York?

ROK: We moved down to Long Island.

ET: Ok, how'd you like Long Island?

ROK: Not as much as Poughkeepsie because it's damper. We got more rain, and the weather was very damp so the snow wasn't as much fun but, Long Island's a nice place to live.

ET: Then, did your mom go to work?

ROK: Yeah, she started a nursery school; several.

ET: And were you ever a part of that, helping out with the kids?

ROK: Oh yeah, I had helped teaching; I helped her for a lot of years, yeah.

ET: Um, so now, so your brothers went off to war, what were your sisters doing at this time?

ROK: My older sister went into the travel business. She took a secretarial course in New York and she went into the travel business which was really great, it was a story book job because she'd be invited to these different, like to go to Bermuda and they treated her with a red carpet because they wanted her to go back and send people to them.

ET: Right, right.

ROK: So it was really a nice job. My twin sister became a dietitian and she was the head dietitian in the hospital I was working in after.

ET: Really?

ROK: And I was very proud of her for that.

ET: Wow, now was this after World War II?

ROK: Yes.

ET: Well so then, um, when you went down to Tennessee and you got your degree, did you kind of know, have any idea about what you wanted to do, 'cause you've got your degree now what? Cause' that was after, had the war ended then? Or was the war still going on?

ROK: Well when I got home, the first job I had was in the veterans' hospital

ET: Ok.

ROK: And that was a good job and if I hadn't been so young, and single, and stupid I should have stayed there 'cause the benefits were so good. But after a year, there were two of the other nurses and myself left, just curious about what we were missing and then my sister and I went down to Florida for a year, just join the Navy and see the world type of thing.

ET: Now, did you officially join the Navy?

ROK: No.

ET: Oh ok, ok. Where did you go in Florida?

ROK: Um Miami, Miami Beach.

ET: Wow. And what year was that, do you think?

ROK: Oh, I don't know what it would have been. I graduated in... I'm not good in years.

ET: Like '47 or... before the 50's?

ROK: Yeah, I graduated in '47 so, '48 or '49, would've been about '50, yeah.

ET: And how did you like Miami?

ROK: Very much, we had a good time there, we were on Miami Beach. Working was hard because the patients were very, there were a lot from New York and they were very particular; if one had oxygen, the other one wanted it.

ET: And was this at a regular hospital or the VA?

ROK: Yeah, it was a regular hospital

ET: Regular hospital.

ROK: Yeah, on Alton Road. I don't know if it's still there or not.

ET: And you worked as an RN there?

ROK: Yes.

ET: And so uh, you liked it, so why did you leave Miami? Why did you decide to leave?

ROK: Only because my older sister was still home and she had a, well not home, and she had an apartment in New York and when we left we told her we would only be gone for a year. So, at the end of the year she was anxious to have us come back with her and it was fun to have, to be with my two sisters in an apartment. That was probably the best time of my life; we were all single, we all had lots of friends, lots of fun and that is when I met my first husband and I put him off for a year because I hated, hated to leave my sisters, we were so happy but he was patient and he waited for me.

ET: Were you in New York at this time?

ROK: Yes.

ET: And still in Long Island?

ROK: Yes, Kew Gardens.

ET: Kew Gardens. Now how did you meet your first husband?

ROK: Uh, his mother was a patient of mine. She had had her gall bladder removed and it's funny I had been on a cruise up Hudson River, just a day cruise, with another fellow that I knew, and Jack was on that same cruise with another girl; and I kept looking at him thinking, I wonder what kind of girl he'd marry. [laughs] Then when his mother was in the hospital, he'd come and she would say, "Oh you just missed him, he was just here!" Well, finally he came down to the desk and we got talking and he said, "Meet me down the coffee shop when you get off from work," and at that time my sister worked there in the coffee shop, she was always interested in food so, we went down there and then we just started dating from there; he took me everywhere games, movies, whatever was going on he just didn't let me stay home long enough to wash my hair.

ET: Oh, wow. And how old were you when you met him?

ROK: Oh, probably twenty-four or twenty-five.

ET: And how old was he?

ROK: He was older than I was.

ET: By just a few years?

ROK: No, more like nine or ten years older.

ET: Oh, that's not too bad. Now, what did he do for a living?

ROK: He worked for his family; they owned a parking lot near the railroad station in Manhasset and it was very profitable so, he was working there.

ET: Um, but you said, so he wanted to marry you earlier and you were kind of like, "naw, that..."

ROK: Yeah, I was so happy with my sisters.

ET: So what, what prompted you to get married?

ROK: Oh, we didn't go out for a while and one he called me to go to a huge wedding in New York, it was Sam Levinson, he was a big comedian at the time, and it was so much fun and he kept making jokes and saying somebody explain it to O'Connell over there and I started thinking, you know maybe it wouldn't be so bad to be married to this guy [laughs] and so I started thinking more about getting married and Jack was so patient that it was easy.

ET: And once, when you got married, you got married in New York?

ROK: Yes.

ET: And then where did you go from New York?

ROK: Bermuda, for our honeymoon.

ET: Oh, for the honeymoon, did you like Bermuda?

ROK: Oh, yes! We were treated royally because my sister got the rooms and reservations for us and they all knew who she was. We had a great time. Picnic lunches on the beach.

ET: Oh yeah?



ROK: It was beautiful.

ET: Wow. Well, when you got back from Bermuda, what did you guys decide to do, as newlyweds?

ROK: As newlyweds, we lived with his mother and dad for about three months and then we bought a little house in Long Island and, I had Jack! And then Nancy, my two kids.

ET: Do you remember what year you had Jack?

ROK: Oh yeah, I had Jack in '51, Nancy in '52.

ET: Ok, so no twins?

ROK: No twins, nobody else had had twins.

ET: Were you thinking you might have twins?

ROK: Oh I went to sleep saying, "How many? I won't do anything you tell me to until you tell me how many." [laughs]

ET: [laughs] Oh my goodness!

ROK: Yeah he was the first one, so I was very concerned about that. Mentally I was, only wanted one. By the time Nancy came mentally I could have handled two. But uh...

ET: Well, the first one is always scary.

ROK: The first one, yeah, the first one I just kept saying, "Hold your fingers up, how many!" [laughs]

ET: [laughs] Oh my gosh! Well sure, with your family. So now um, um... your, uh... then you were in New York, what brought you, what prompted you to come way across the country?

ROK: The Dodgers moved out here and my husband and my son were *big* Dodger fans and he had a change at work at the same time so we just decided, and my two sisters had already moved out here so everything kind of came together and, we came; followed the Dodgers.

ET: Oh wow, I haven't heard of that before, that's pretty loyal. Boy o' boy. And so then, where did you settle, what part of California?

ROK: Uh, we lived in... Great Nick? No, that's in New York. Oxnard.

ET: Oh, in Oxnard? Ok, ok so you moved to Oxnard.

ROK: Bought a motel - the Flamingo Motel and we owned that for five years.

ET: How'd you like that business?

ROK: It's very confining, but you meet a lot of people and, it was good experience.

ET: And then what happened after that? What did you decide to do after that?

ROK: Uh, let's see. Then we went back, I went back to the hospital, went back and worked at Saint John's.

ET: Ok, at Saint John's Hospital?

ROK: Yeah.

ET: Ok, ok.

ROK: And then I left Saint John's to go to... Camarillo Hospital.

ET: So Cam.. Ok and what prompted you to decide to make that move from Saint John's to Camarillo, 'cause it's obviously two big different entities?

ROK: Yeah, I had worked in North Port Long Island so I was familiar.

ET: Oh, so there was a psychiatric hospital over there?

ROK: Yeah.

ET: Ok, ok so.

ROK: I was familiar, a little bit; they weren't exactly the same but, a little bit with that type of hospital.

ET: Um, well I always hear that Camarillo really, I mean, was such a big part of this area when it opened back in the '30's. Did you kind of get that impression before you went to work? I mean, it seemed like everybody knew everybody and it was like, really a lot of the economy revolved around Camarillo

ROK: I know when I first went out there I thought, "This is where everybody is, I am so glad I'm here!" I was so happy to be there.

ET: Well, it must have been really beautiful, huh?

ROK: It proved to be everything I hoped it would when I first saw it. Oh, I really enjoyed my work out there. Did you want me to talk a little bit about that?

ET: Yeah, lets... When did you first start working there, what year?

ROK: Let's see, I'm not good on years.

ET: Was it, well we can go with decades - 60's, 70's?

ROK: When did I retire? Can you see on that book?

ET: Let's check, '84!

ROK: '84 so, I must have gone out there, in the 70's of course

ET: Ok out in the 70's. So when you drove on campus it must have been really beautiful with the... 'cause it's definitely...

ROK: I loved it!

ET: It's pretty now but the agriculture must have been really stunning.

ROK: I loved it out there, and when I first went there, they were self-contained; the patients did all the work. They worked out farming, they planted and raised all their fruit and vegetables and they had their own fire station and even a security police station.

ET: Did they have the farm there with the cows and the pigs and all of that?

ROK: Yes.

ET: They still had that?

ROK: Still had that.

ET: Wow.

ROK: But they were just making the change.

ET: What prompted the change where they didn't do that anymore?

ROK: I think little by little, they wanted to become part of the community and so they started...

ET: Letting the outside entities come in and handle things more?

ET: So when you first went up to Camarillo who interviewed you, do you remember? Do you remember your initial interviewing process?

ROK: I do know that I worked there for a year and then Governor, I think it was Reagan at the time, was anxious to close the hospital and they started cutting back very much so and so it was hard to work there because the technicians felt like well, we RN's could go to any hospital and so they wanted us out. So I worked that year, and then I left because of the stress.

ET: Really? So you started and they interview... when they interviewed you they interviewed you for a nursing job?

ROK: Yes.

ET: For RN, and where did they have you work, on the campus?

ROK: I worked on the medical surgical floor, Unit RT.

ET: At the old hospital, in the RT building?

ROK: In the RT building, yeah.

ET: And how was that for the first year, before everything started to go a little kooky?

ROK: I loved it. I loved working there, all the time that I was there. I truthfully, even later on in my opinion, those patients got better care than the ones at Saint John's, and I'll tell you why; their technicians were so well trained, which the nurses aids in the regular hospital sometimes are not always. And so, they would do, they called it "specialing," every three hours they'd go around and turn the patients, change their beds if needed, see to it that they had enough fluids and every three hours they'd go specialing, so those patients, really got very good care and I liked that.

ET: And most of those patients then, got better and then.

ROK: Yeah, and then they'd go down to the other psych units, we called it.

ET: What was your, so did you get to meet, did you make any friends while you were there

that first year at the hospital.

ROK: Yes, sure I did.

ET: And did you, did you get to socialize with them after work hours?

ROK: Afterwards yes, I met a woman named Billie Freedline, she and I became very good friends and I used to go visit her or she'd, we'd meet somewhere.

ET: They had a bowling alley there, did you ever get to play, go bowling?

ROK: I never was much on bowling but yes, it was there and the patients enjoyed that

ET: Um so your, you would say your overall experience for that first year was very positive?

ROK: Very good, yes.

ET: Now you had, I know that they had, The Canteen. The Cantina or The Canteen?

ROK: Canteen.

ET: Canteen, now did they have other lunchrooms or places you could go in and socialize?

ROK: Yeah, they had a cafeteria up on the hill and we'd go up there and eat.

ET: Was that just for employees?

ROK: Yes. And then after the year, when they were trying to close everything...

ET: With Governor Reagan.

ROK: With Governor Reagan, he came by and that's when it was said we painted the grass to make everything look good; we put on all white, clean night shirts on all the patients and they all looked good but that was all just exaggerated, we didn't do anything different it was just, that's the good care they got.

ET: Right.

ROK: But they did start closing down so I went back to Saint John's for another year and I kept missing working out there so a friend of mine, I can't think of her name right now, anyway, the two of us went back and applied and they were so good to me that they reinstated me, gave me all my benefits back so that I had retirement, my pension and everything renewed, I thought that was so good of them. My vacation time, I got it all back from the first year I was there. Wasn't that nice of them?

ET: yeah, well the people, you said the psych techs, were concerned about you leaving, that's why they put a lot of pressure?

ROK: yeah, they couldn't work in the hospitals as well as we could or if they did, they didn't make much money so they preferred working out there, so they were a little...

ET: Were they afraid of the competition?

ROK: Yeah

ET: looks like you two did different things though, you didn't do, you did different jobs though.

ROK: That's true but, they just didn't like to have the RN's there somehow there was a lot of stress. I know I had met one girl that worked there and she told me that and I thought, "Oh, that can't be true," but then when I was there I realized it was true. They were, I hate to say it but, they were jealous of the RN's because we made more and could work other places and they couldn't, and they wouldn't make as much if they worked somewhere else. So, they were jealous of the RN's so they gave you a hard time but, somehow after a while I managed to get along really well with them and I enjoyed working with them I felt so good that they took such good care of those patients 'cause I could never work where I thought people were being neglected or mistreated, I couldn't handle that. I couldn't lie or cover up or any of that sort of thing so, I felt really good about what I did, I went home feeling that, truthfully, our patients got better care than, I went by the nursing home one time at Saint John's and there was such an odor, urine odor, and we didn't have that, on my unit anyway or any of the units that I worked on 'cause they were so well cared for. They turned the linen, took the laundry out and just, I was very happy working there.

ET: Well I always get people who ask me if there was a graveyard there, and to my knowledge there was never a graveyard there because there was one just up the street right.

ROK: Nothing I knew of.

ET: Yeah. Um, do you remember any of the doctors whom you thought were the superintendents, any of the heads of administration that you liked?

ROK: I think McMillan was one that was a favorite of ours and I don't remember too many of the others.

ET: Did, you, when you were being in the hospital were you able to ever see other things that were going on at the hospital in different units or were you pretty much segregated

into, you know, where you were?

ROK: Well one year, I worked immunizations and we had our own office where we had titlers files, they called it

ET: What's it called?

ROK: Titler files and we went down through all the units we'd program what shots people needed; tetanus or flu shots or whatever it was. And we'd go through all the units and I never saw anything that upset me in any way.

ET: And this was sort of a, what was this like a, a database kind of thing where you'd mark in what shots people had and what they would need the next time?

ROK: Yeah.

ET: Was that like an electronic kind of thing?

ROK: No, we did it ourselves.

ET: Just by hand?

ROK: Yeah, I worked there a full year and it was probably the best job I ever had because it was weekends off. It was day shifts; it was everything you'd want.

ET: When you did the RN work were you pretty much on call or...? Was there, were your hours at night or...?

ROK: No I worked the evening shift, because it helped me at home so that, at that point my kids were teenagers so they needed to have one or the other of us home, so that worked out.

ET: Right, right, and then when you did that immunization than you could, you had more of a break.

ROK: Yes.

ET: Well that's, and so you got to see all of the campus during that job.

ROK: Yes I did, yes I did. I've been in every unit out there. We went through, I worked with a girl named Laura Taylor and she was African American and her husband was a minister in town and she was just so wonderful to work with she ended up, after we had left immunization, she got into teaching and last I heard she was teaching a class over at Wilson, is it Wilson Grey? A middle school.

ET: Ok.

ROK: But I was proud of her to go into teaching; that's hard to change professions, I think, but she did. And she, the two of us, would go from one unit to the other we went, yes all through that campus I've been in every bit of that campus.

ET: Now, did you ever feel apprehensive when you were, did you have somebody with you when you saw the patients?

ROK: The, the technicians there were always good, when they'd see us come, they'd come along with us in case they thought there was any problem but actually no, never had a real problem.

ET: Never had a problem?

RO No.

ET: Now when you started, when you were there, when you started there did they have um, a ward for the criminally insane?

ROK: Hmm... probably, yes. I remember thinking you couldn't tell any difference in those people or anyone else. It's very hard to tell if somebody murdered someone, they look the same as we do.

ET: Um then, was that eventually, then everybody got moved? Would that, did that unit, did everybody get moved? 'Cause I don't remember there being any, any of that in the 80's, I don't know, I could be wrong. When they started shutting down, did they start moving them I wonder?

ROK: They, a lot of those went to Atascadero I think.

ET: Ok, ok but they had the courthouse there? They still had the court, they had the courthouse right? Over on campus, I think they used to have the courthouse, a courthouse or like a room where they would do advocacy for the patients in the hospital right? And then eventually it moved to the to, what we call the courthouse room on campus.

ROK: I don't quite remember that.

ET: Ok, ok so, it sounds like you have pretty good times there, it seems like it was a good place to work.



ROK: I liked it very much, I was very happy there. They were very good to me and I still have a good retirement.

ET: So now how many years about, did you work there, twenty?

ROK: No, not that many, twelve I think.

ET: Ok twelve, and um, what prompted you to leave?

ROK: Uh...

ET: So you went to, you did immunization and then what did you do after immunization?

ROK: I went back to RT1, which was the geriatric unit

ET: Ok, how did you like that?

ROK: And I liked that, I liked working with the older people you feel like, some people would say, "Isn't that depressing?" but I always felt like whatever little bit of happiness we could give them even if it was just for another hour, that it was fun. I, I enjoyed it. I never looked at the depressed side of it but sure, we're all going to die someday. They were older patients but, I enjoyed it.

ET: Wow, and was that the job that you held up until the time that you left?

ROK: Yes, yes.

ET: What prompted you to decide to leave?

ROK: I was able to get my husband's social security by that time.

ET: Ok, had he passed by that time?

RO: Yes, yes.

ET: Ok.

ROK: And you could only work a certain number of hours and still get that and they, at that time they didn't like part time help; It was that much more book keeping. So, at first they kind of talked like maybe they would let me come a couple of days a week but then that kind of fizzled out and then I got used to not working and that was, then I found I didn't need to work so, so I really didn't go back.

ET: Um, and they had a retirement party for you and...

ROK: Yes that's what this is, my book; my daughter put this together, a book on my retirement party. She wrote, "You've escaped."

ET: That looks very nice.

ROK: Isn't that cute? There's the hospital.

ET: Well now um, I always heard that the Bell Tower was a bunch of different, housed a bunch of different functions or, you know? It was an administration, it was all these different, you know it was always changing it seems to me but the, the...

ROK: It was information for a while, uh my neighbor worked there in the information booth and I think she ended up in the Bell Tower too, she worked right underneath it and she was with information but I don't know many other things it was.

ET: Well when I started there, when I first started there they still had the um, the administration building you know? Now that's gone but they had the administration building, the one that looked like the old plantation house, you know?

ROK: Yeah.

ET: And uh, I remember the very, very heavy doors you know? That you'd have to open and then they had that bullet proof glass behind where the admissions was and I remember they had that old time phone booth do you remember, did you ever see that? One of those old wooden phone booths where you go in and you close the door. Do you remember that one?

ROK: Yeah.

ET: That was pretty interesting, and of course now that's gone and um, and now we have the library there. But um, the old hospital, the receiving and treatment building, that was built in the 50's right? So it was still pretty new by the time you got there?

ROK: Yeah.

ET: That was a big, big hospital, so it was, how many floors was that, three or four floors? That seems to me...

ROK: I thought it was just two floors but maybe it was three.

ET: Oh wow, I just, I do, I just remember thinking, of course when I was there it wasn't functioning really so, a lot of things were dark and everything always looks scarier in the dark.

ROK: RT5 was the main unit that I worked in the receiving and treatment and it was medical surgical so we received patients from all the other units that were both mentally and physically ill. And then the unit right next to us was geriatrics, and across the hall there were two more units plus the admission and departure centers.

ET: When you started in the '74, or when you, approximately whenever it was that you started in the 70's to when you left, did you see um, administration change its views on how they decided to treat patients? Was there ever a change or um, 'cause I know that they sort of promoted that they'd changed uh, in the 80's that their attitude and their idea about how to treat you know, the clients. Did you ever notice that, was there anything different that you could say, "Oh yeah that happened, that change happened,"?

ROK: No, not really I don't remember any. I know we started sending more to Atascadero and some of the other state hospitals, 'cause we knew they were getting ready to close.

ET: So that was kind of on everybody's mind?

ROK: Yeah.

ET: Were you surprised about, when it actually did close?

ROK: Oh, yes.

ET: Because they tested very well, right, when the, they would come out and evaluate?

ROK: I was there when Governor Reagan came by and...

ET: Did you get to see him, physically?

ROK: Oh yeah, I went with him on the tour and you know, a lot of people criticized us, said we just spiffed it all up to impress him but we really didn't, he saw what we saw every day. We might have put a few little white shirts on a couple of patients that they didn't always, but he saw what we saw and at that time I wasn't sure that, which way to go. Whether he really was interested in keeping it or whether he was thinking of closing; of course, quickly we found out he was thinking of phasing it all out, closing all the hospitals, the state mental hospitals.

ET: Was he very, did he seem very friendly, or amicable?

ROK: Yeah, he was very friendly. He was with a team that were, probably four other people with him but, he was very nice, very pleasant.

ET: But we didn't know what his intentions were?

ROK: I wasn't sure which direction he was going.

ET: And then eventually, well, then that of course didn't happen for a while.

ROK: Yeah, no.

ET: Um, and then of course it started picking up again back in the 80's when things started, they started looking at closing.

ROK: Yeah, he started phasing it out.

ET: Did you know people who were there until the end?

ROK: No, not really probably, I wasn't there that long after that.

ET: Ok did you see the um, because you know, you lived in the community, did you see how, that the impact of the closing was having on the community? Were they aware of the closing and were they aware of how it was really going to affect them in all these different ways?

ROK: I think so but somehow, I think most people were in favor of it.

ET: Why do you think that was?

ROK: Well they knew that if a college came in it would be, probably more beneficial to the whole community. Actually, I went to a forum they had at the court house on a debate that was going on as to whether people preferred a college, and there was a talk of a prison coming in there and that's the one reason I went because, I didn't want a prison to come in. I thought Camarillo deserved a little better than, the prisoners could be out somewhere in the desert or somewhere, this is a beautiful area right near the beach and, you've got everything to offer. So I was very much for a college so I did go to this meeting, spoke up in favor of the college and how much better off we'd be with having professors and teachers in the neighborhood, shopping and living with us than we would with prisoners.

ET: Um, do you feel that, do you think it was the right thing to do to close Camarillo or, I mean just on its own what with regards to what happened to the patients?

ROK: No, I felt very bad for the patients and their families, 'cause a lot of the families had moved here to be near their, their family and it was very hard to see them all so disrupted and either having to move or travel that distance to go and visit them, it was very hard. I felt like they should have done a little better dispersing their patients than just, kind of, they let a lot of them out on the street that shouldn't have been out on the street that's when we first had homeless.

ET: Oh, is that what happened?

ROK: Yeah, I don't think anybody had heard that word before that.

ET: Well, they've denied that, I mean, I think that they have denied that and said, "Oh well, you know"...

ROK: You know, there were a lot of the patients that just ended up out on the street and I thought that was terrible, truthfully.

ET: I'm wondering if they had went into homes, group homes and they had left voluntarily and that was it.

ROK: Little bit of both, but...

ET: And then, I guess a lot of the patients who were transferred went to L.A. right, they went somewhere else?

ROK: Yeah, some of the other state hospitals, yeah.

ET: Did you, were you ever familiar with any of the other state hospitals, like how they functioned or operated?

ROK: No, not really.

ET: I was just wondering if they were comparable to Camarillo.

ROK: I don't know, I don't really know.

ET: Interesting, then um so when you left, you decided to retire and what did you decide to do after? Where did you go after you left Camarillo physically, 'cause now you're in Camarillo did you decide to move to Camarillo or were you still in Oxnard at the time? At the, when you left the hospital...

ROK: I had moved over here to Leisure Village 'cause my husband died and kids, we had

already been broken into twice in Oxnard so they wanted me to move and so, I moved to Leisure Village to a smaller house than this one is but, I had two dogs at the time.

ET: And then you met your second husband?

ROK: Yeah.

ET: How did you meet your second husband?

ROK: Here, in the Village.

ET: Oh yeah?

ROK: Yeah, he lived down the street a ways.

ET: Oh wow, and what year was that?

ROK: Boy, I'm so bad at years

ET: Was it in the 80's or the 90's do you know?

ROK: We were married fifteen years, so I think the 80's.

ET: In the 80's, ok and um, so he was retired. What did he used to do for a living?

ROK: He was an engineer and he was from, um I want to say Kentu... Kansas!

ET: Kansas? So that was kind of nice that you got to start a new life.

ROK: It was very nice we both sold our Delmar houses and bought this one.

ET: And meanwhile, so then Jack went to, the Assembly first or the State Senate first?

ROK: Assembly.

ET: The State Assembly first, and then...

ROK: And then the Senate.

ET: And then the State Senate, and then, and got...

ROK: He was term limited out, or he'd stayed in those.

ET: Yeah, yeah that's too bad. and then... So Jack actually got CSUCI on the map.

ROK: Yes.

ET: I mean, we have him to really thank for that.

ROK: Well, yeah we do. While I was working there I used to say to him, "Wow, this would make such a beautiful college," and he remembered that and he told me. He said, "Mom if I ever get a chance to get a four year school in Ventura County, I'm gonna do it." When he got in the Senate, I think, was when he was able to get the money to appropriate that they needed. That's why I have that declaration up there that says, "Jack and his mother Ruth championed the University to change from the, Hospital to the..."

ET: Proclaiming Jack O'Connell day off in Ventura County.

ROK: Can you read that?

ET: December 10, 2002, yup. Well, as you, you know when we talked earlier, you mentioned that he had to go to school down in Orange County, right?

ROK: Yeah, he went to Long Beach. There wasn't a four-year college in Ventura County; there was Northridge but that's...

ET: Still not in the county.

ROK: Yeah, no.

ET: So, this was really a good thing. I think it was meant to be, I think you were meant to come here because if you hadn't then I don't, I wonder if Channel Islands would have actually, who would have taken up the cause?

ROK: I still have such special feelings for Channel Islands, and so does he.

ET: Well, you mentioned he would come and play with the band, his high school band.

ROK: Yeah, when he was in grade school and high school.

ET: And I remember, well I've read newspaper articles where, a lot of things like that went on especially at Christmas time and the holidays when the community would participate

ROK: Yes, and play for the patients.

ET: And that must have been a really nice thing to see.

ROK: Yeah, and now he's going to receive his doctorate from Channel Islands University, May 31<sup>st</sup>.

ET: I read that, I read that.

ROK: I'm supposed to go.

ET: That's coming up.

ROK: Yeah, it is.

ET: Has he discussed with you anything he wants to do after, since he's gotten out of the state superintendent?

ROK: He has two jobs now, but I don't know the titles, I really don't but he's very happy with both and he does more traveling now than he did before. He's already been back to Washington D.C. once and they're both very profitable so, he's fine.

ET: He's doing well?

ROK: Yeah.

ET: And I talk to Doree every once in a while in the email, and she's doing well which is nice.

ROK: She's a sweetheart too. I think she's going to retire so to travel more with him; she might already be retired now while we're talking.

ET: Well I think if you have that opportunity, I think you gotta take it.

ROK: I think she should.

ET: So now getting back to you. You, I think, are definitely the link that we, I think we definitely need to salute you because, I really do think if it hadn't been for you and your coming to California and working at Camarillo, you know, you really set a whole lot of dominos in motion, really.

ROK: That's nice, thank you.

ET: Yeah that's quite an accomplishment, wow.

ROK: Well I never thought I'd live to see it, truthfully; but, you never know.

ET: How old are you now, Ruth?



ROK: Oh, you... put that on there?

ET: [laughs]

ROK: I'm 86.

ET: You are! You don't look it. I would have never guessed in a million years.

ROK: I think I said earlier I was born in '24, so you had to do the arithmetic

ET: I'm actually blonde, I don't do the math.

ROK: [laughs] so is my twin sister.

ET: Well I mean, you've seen so much in your lifetime, really a lot. What has impressed you, either negatively and positively about what you've seen in your lifetime, with just anything and everything, you know what I mean? Is there anything that has just impacted you, helped to guide you?

ROK: You mean besides the hospital and now the university? I have such special feelings for all of that but I think that's...

ET: That was the key?

ROK: Yeah

ET: Would have never guessed, coming from New York and all of this and coming out because of the Dodgers that it would start you out on a new life, a new journey.

ROK: Yeah, and two great kids. My daughter's a teacher

ET: Oh yes, is she in California?

ROK: Oh yeah, she's teaching at Thousand Oaks High School.

ET: Oh she does? Oh my goodness, I live just down the street from there.

ROK: Really?

ET: Yeah.

ROK: She teaches a mass media class, editing and producing...

ET: Oh wow.

ROK: Films, yeah.

ET: Oh that sounds like fun.

ROK: Actually, she used to anchor the news when Jack first started out.

ET: Oh really, what news station?

ROK: Uh, channel 9.

ET: What's her name?

ROK: Well at that time it was Nancy O'Connell, now it's Schroder she's married to Hank Schroder. My two granddaughters

ET: Oh, that's kind of nice.

ROK: That's very nice.

ET: So did she provide coverage on her brother when he was up and coming?

ROK: She really started him, to tell you the truth and he kind of took off past her but, she was very much involved when he first started in getting, you know? Getting him used to the media and getting the media used to him, she was very helpful.

ET: I would imagine that would have been very helpful because, it really is nowadays it's all about visual, really, and I mean audio obviously too but really making them both work cause so often you see people who don't look comfortable on television so you automatically feel uncomfortable with them, you know? Or appearing too confident and that doesn't really make you feel so hot either so... I think that, yeah that was the way to go then. So you must be very proud. You have two very successful children, and how many grandchildren do you have now?

ROK: Four. She has, Jack just has the one girl and Nancy has a son by her first marriage and then the two girls.

ET: And you have a kitty?

ROK: And I have a cat.

ET: And you have a kitty kitty.

ROK: And I have two great granddaughters, which that's their picture on the front there and They... My one and only grandson is married and they adopted the first little girl and then they had their own little girl.

ET: Oh wow, so you have a nice family.

ROK: Yeah.

ET: But, where do you go for family dinners?

ROK: They live in Marina Del Rey.

ET: Do you do, do you guys...

ROK: More to my daughters, she lives in Westlake.

ET: Ok, ok. Well Marina Del Rey is very nice for, probably for the summer time especially. Well that's, so everybody is local. And now, are any of your brothers still alive?

ROK: No, only my sister and I.

ET: Well, did they all make it back from the war?

ROK: Oh yeah.

ET: Well that's good, that's good.

ROK: That was good, yeah.

ET: And um,

ROK: Only my sister and I left, and I just talked to her this morning, I told you that.

ET: Where is from, she's in where?

ROK: She's in Texas with her daughter. I wish she was here, but...

ET: That's right, that's right. That was quite a big family that you grew up with.

RO: Yeah.

ET: And everybody, it sounds like, really became very successful it's interesting how you and your sister both went into the medical field.

ROK: She was a dietitian.

ET: You're twins and you went into the, you both had an interest in science.

ROK: She was head dietitian in the hospital I was working in, in New York. I was very proud of her.

ET: Well so are you, do you have any plans to take on any adventures in the upcoming year, are you planning on going on any vacations?

ROK: My husband Charlie was a doer and we traveled all around the world.

ET: Where did you go?

ROK: Oh just name it; there are very few places that we didn't go.

ET: What was your favorite place?

ROK: My favorite, Ireland

ET: Oh, Ireland?

ROK: Yeah, it's a beautiful country. We did all kinds of cruises, I loved cruises. I think I loved every one of them. We went to Rome, we went everywhere. I haven't been to Australia; it would probably be easier to tell you where I haven't been. But Charlie, we would no sooner get back from one trip and he'd have the next one planned, it was really nice.

ET: Um, it seems like both of the men that you married, really liked to go out and do things so that must, that says something you too

ROK: I was lucky I had two good husbands; they were very good to me.

ET: Well you know, you might as well travel now while you can do it.

ROK: I can't do that much now because of my sore back but I did.

ET: You did when you were... was there any place you went to that you weren't so thrilled with?

ROK: oh, that's hard to think. I don't think so; I just enjoyed every bit of it. We did so many tours. When you go on those bus tours, sometimes you go through kind of fast and you feel like wow, you're missing things, but then there's the advantage, they know where to go so they know what to show you so you can see a lot more than if you were on your

own and didn't know. So, it works both ways.

ET: And then you can pick places where you liked and that you want to go back and see.

ROK: Yeah, that's true.

ET: Have you been to Hong Kong?

ROK: Yeah, I'm sure we have.

ET: We were just there two years ago, and that was really fun.

ROK: It's a bigger city than I thought.

ET: Yeah very, I really enjoyed it.

ROK: Yeah, very colorful.

ET: I'd like to go back; I really want to go back. It's really interesting

ROK: Yeah, it's a good place to go back.

ET: And we went to Beijing um just...

ROK: China, they didn't let us in China, we didn't get there 'cause there was a lot of destruction at that point. We got right up to the wall where they showed us, "See, there's some of the guards," [laughs] but we didn't get there.

ET: And that was as far as you could go?

ROK: Yeah.

ET: Have you seen the Camarillo community grow I mean, it seems it has just since I've been working really, it still maintains that old town feel though.

ROK: Yeah it does, I love Camarillo. I love the weather, I love the people here.

ET: And I think with the, I'm sure you're, you know, out and about and you've met people who have their children or grandchildren at Channel Islands and that must be kind of nice that you can say, "yes, I've..."

ROK: I'm very proud when I hear anybody that went to Channel Islands, very proud.

ET: That was, yeah, you had a big, really a handle in establishing that so...

ROK: I just hope they keep doing well, so does Jack he roots for them all the time; he always tells me that.

ET: Well, it seems like you had a really positive experience at Camarillo, you know, as you've indicated. That's a really nice think to hear because, sometimes you hear people, and I think it's more or less people who haven't been there who are going on the whole mystique, the negative mystique of a state hospital, you know? And they...

ROK: Yeah, with mental illness right away they think, "How could you work with all of those crazy people?"

ET: Or that it must have been a bad place to begin with.

ROK: Oh yeah but, I never found it that way. The brain is an organ the same as a heart and some people have injury to the brain or portions that are, you know, not well and they need to be treated; and I never found it as crazy people, I just, I never thought of it that way ever. They were people and we did the best we could to take care of them. So yes, I had a good experience there.

ET: Did you, I don't know if you were in the position when you were there, did you um, notice that there was a lot of intake of people volunteering to come in as patients or as clients?

ROK: Any time we had volunteers they were always appreciated, always, 'cause it meant a lot to the patients. So we were always glad to have them, but there could be more of that not less.

ET: I heard that they had a very, a really great drug and alcohol program there, that was very successful. I know that they worked with UCLA um, for many years but I heard that they had a very successful drug and alcohol program where people, or uh... clients would uh, you know from the community would actually check themselves in, you know to be patients in the program, so did you ever, familiar with any of the drug and alcohol program?

ROK: I'm not too familiar with that, no but I'm sure you're right that they did.

ET: And so from what I understand, they just, the decision came down that it was gonna close, the hospital was gonna close, then they basically just gradually started shutting down units. And they, did they shut down units when you were there?

ROK: They sent patients to the different hospitals.

ET: While you were still there?

ROK: Yeah. Jack, and I want it on record, had nothing to do with closing that hospital. He was not even for that, neither was I. But we did get on the bandwagon when it was time to decide whether to have a university or a prison come in. But we had nothing to do with closing the hospital; absolutely nothing. And I didn't think it was a good idea at the time. There were too many people that actually were appreciative for the work we were doing and when we had to start sending patients out to other hospitals we knew right away their families missed them or had to make that long trip to visit them or had to move, that was, that was hard.

ET: Yeah, very traumatic.

ROK: It was very hard.

ET: For everyone. Well, we look forward to seeing you in May so that you can be there for Jack when he gets his honorary degree.

ROK: Will I see you then?

ET: Yeah of course, I'm definitely coming to the graduation.

ROK: Oh, that's nice.

ET: So I'll wave and say hello, and I thank you so much I'm gonna take a look at your book and we'll get some pictures if that's ok.

ROK: Oh, sure.

ET: I thank you again so much for talking about, talking to me about the hospital because I don't have a lot of information about what it was like in the 70's or you know, as early as we go back, I'm losing information so you've been really helpful.

ROK: Oh thank you. I do know a lot of people don't, they laugh if you said you worked out there but after I started working out there. I couldn't see why, because to me those patients, I have already said it, but they got better care than some of the private hospitals; they really did and they were happy there, most all of those patients were very happy to be there.

ET: Well so there was a few of the, well actually quite a few of the, of old Camarillo workers who transitioned on to Channel Islands and they always seemed to have a really good feeling about the patients and just really enjoyed, I've never heard an employee, and I have met a few in my life since I've been there, I've never heard an employee say, "Oh that was a horrible place," or blah blah blah blah you know what I mean, so and they

always really missed their patients. You know, they became attached to them and they, they missed them and I think that says something.

ROK: They were well cared for, they were nice to work with and appreciative.

ET: Wow I am very appreciative, thank you for taking time out of your day to spend with me today.

ROK: You're welcome, you're welcome.

ET: Ruth, now one thing that I forgot to mention, I forgot to ask you was have you, did you hear about anybody who was famous or infamous who was there at Camarillo because it's kind of hard to find information out, like that.

ROK: Probably Jane Russell was one that used to get mentioned; she had been there as a patient.

ET: Do you remember, there was one of the actors that he based, he used to play it was either Bela Lugosi or Ron Chaney. Somebody had said to me that one of them, they were there. Does that sound familiar? I don't remember which one. I know that they played, you know, in the horror movies but I don't remember. Did you ever hear anything about that?

ROK: I don't recognize those names but I do know we had a lot of people from L.A. that we were able to help. We'd get their medication straightened out so that...

ET: Like the Hollywood stars?

ROK: Yeah, so that they could function on their own.

ET: When they brought, if they did come in would they be put in a separate area away from everybody else, do you know?

ROK: Not really, no but... actually tranquilizers were just coming into being when I was there and that is what eventually ended up closing the hospital because they were able to treat the patients so as long as they took their medication they could function on their own in society.

ET: But, is there a problem with some illnesses about getting the patient to remember to take medication?

ROK: Yes, there are problems with that. Yeah

ET: Ok um, do you ever remember any movies being filmed on the hospital grounds? I



mean, we always hear about *The Snake Pit* and all of that but...

ROK: I don't remember it because by that time, now I'm repeating again, we had tranquilizers.

ET: Well no, like movies. You know like movies actually being filmed.

ROK: Yeah I know but, I never saw snake pit type of situation.

ET: Oh well I mean any sort of like, there were um, let's see there were different, I hear about these different, cause it might have been after you left but there was *Snake Pit*, there was um a Debra Winger, remember Debra Winger? She was in *Terms of Endearment* um, there was a movie that she did that I think was there in the 80's. um, did they ever film any commercials or anything on those beautiful grounds?

ROK: Oh yeah, when like president Rea... Governor Reagan then, came to visit there was a lot of media there.

ET: And news people and all of that.

ROK: Yeah.

ET: 'cause I know um, even now since it's been opened as a University, we've had people coming in, movie people coming in and doing filming and all that sort of thing

ROK: It's such a beautiful campus.

ET: Very pretty yeah, very pretty. I'm trying to think of the other movies, I can't think of any right off hand but I know there were a couple, three that were filmed in the 80's. I don't know where they would have been filmed so they could have been filmed on the other side of the campus and... ok that, I just wanted to find out. Oh, I have one last question that I have to ask you 'cause everybody asks me, all the students always ask me. Have you ever run into any ghosts?

ROK: Ghosts!?

ET: Uh-huh.

ROK: No.

ET: Ok, I didn't think so but I'm telling you they ask me all the time so I just wanted confirmation.

ROK: I can't believe it [laughs] no.

ET: Yes, yes. Ok, all right there you have it folks, the confirmation of no ghosts on campus.

ROK: Thank you!