

December 17, 2020 – MARY Hesselgrave

KG – Kayt Gochenaur

MH – Mary Hesselgrave

KG – I'd love to have the interview audio online. Are you ok with that?

MH – Sure.

KG – Wonderful. Let's see, I'm just looking at the audio levels now and they are all good so the recorder is on and let's just get started. I do want to apologize in advance. I have two cats and I've locked them out of the room so I hope the audio does not pick up their meowing but I'm working for home these days. Can you just state your name and age for the record?

MH – My name is Mary Hesselgrave. I'm 77.

KG – Right now are you... where are you right now?

MH – I'm in West Orange, New Jersey, at home.

KG – So tell me about your history with Eagle Island. When did you first visit Eagle Island?

MH – I first went to Eagle Island in 1954. I was a Girl Scout at my school and they had information about Eagle Island and I went. It was quite different then. We had to send our luggage two weeks ahead of time. It went on the train to Lake Clear. Then we got a bus from Orange up to the camp, up to Gilpin Bay. One of the funny things was that we stopped that year at Red Apple Rest which is in New York. This was before the thruway was built. The next year they built the thruway and we didn't stop at Red Apple Rest and everybody was so disappointed on the bus trip up. Things changed when they built the thruway. So we took the bus up to camp and I don't think I had any idea really what to expect. I was in the Hilltop unit, which is not what is now Hilltop. It was out next to Adirondack – it was a tent unit. I went there and I enjoyed it. It was a general camping unit and when we went swimming I was the only good swimmer in my unit so I swam with my counselor while the others had to swim in shallower water. What else do I remember about my first year... I liked it and I went back for ten years.

KG – Wow.

MH – I was a camper for seven years and there was an in-between year where I was too old to be a camper and too young to be a counselor so I did a national Girl Scout thing and then I came back for three years as a counselor in the Mariner unit.

KG – How old were you that first year you attended?

MH – I was going into 5<sup>th</sup> grade so 10 I think. Well in '54... yeah I would have been 10.

KG – Tell me a little bit about any stories that you remember from your time there. Anything that comes to your head.

MH – Well, let's see. We used to have one night a week where (I forget for the moment what it's called) where you could choose what you wanted to do at night. After dinner, the evening program, they had a lot of different choices you could do. You could go to arts and crafts, or you could I don't know go folk dancing or the sort of activity you like. I used to sneak out and walk around the island by myself, which is something that I always liked. Just being out in the woods on the island – I liked to walk all the way around and discover places that I didn't see ordinarily, like on the far side of the island there was an area that later became what was called the Wilderness Unit. There was a moderately large rock, I'm talking 3 or 4 feet out of the water, with a plank that went out to that rock and you could walk out the plank and sit on that rock. I liked to do that.

What else do I remember... Then I enjoyed all the waterfront activities: swimming, rowing, paddling canoes. Later on we did overnight canoe trips. We tried to do a 10-day canoe trip from Old Forge up to camp but it was interrupted in the middle because we had extensive rains that year so we went back to camp one night just to dry out the sleeping bags and then try again. But I still like all the canoeing and I'm still paddling. I paddled on 24 trips this year.

KG – Wow.

MH – Eagle Island really got me started on paddling. It also got me started on sailing. I taught sailing in New York City and years later in the 1990s I was working in Holland and I ended up skippering a boat for my team from Bell Labs for a Bell Labs Regatta on the IJsselmeer in the Netherlands. Another year I was on a boat and we won. Some of the things from Eagle Island stayed with me all my life literally.

KG – Had you ever been exposed to anything like that before?

MH – I hadn't done paddling and sailing before. I went to an overnight camp when I was younger, which was not a super great experience and then I went to day camp for a couple of years but I didn't have anything where I slept out in tents until I went to Eagle Island. That too - I biked across the country, I've paddled all over, I've done a lot of camping, I've done hiking in the Adirondacks. A lot of the things that we did I have kept doing considerably all my life.

KG – So Eagle Island really sparked a love of the outdoors in you?

MH – Yes. It's not something from my family although years later when my mother was perhaps 70 she started to go on walks outside but it was not something I grew up with at my home. It definitely came from Eagle Island - my interest and love of the outdoors.

KG – Tell me a little bit about what it was like as a kid to go somewhere new and start doing these new and different things that you'd never done before. Was it exciting? Were you ever nervous about doing them?

MH – I don't remember that but I had an unusual childhood. My mother like to travel so I had been to a lot of places and done a lot of things. I got lost in Zurich when I was 9 years old because my mother was sick and I was out walking. I was so proud that I was able to ask a German how to get back to my hotel. I tend not to be nervous about doing new things. I just enjoy them. I still like to try new things, to experience them. I think you get a lot of confidence when you try new things and you become proficient at them such as paddling and sailing. I loved the singing at camp. I used to... we sang after meals. We sang at general campfires. In the end I was.... One year (I'm Catholic and I used to go to Catholic mass from camp) but one year they didn't have an organist for church isle, Chapel Isle, so I went and I also went and played the organ for the choir. I loved singing at camp. It was one of the great things that we really enjoyed a lot. And the poetry. When I first went it was Vera Davis who was the assistant camp director, program director, and she used to read poetry at general campfires and the poems that she read had a great influence on me. I still can recite a number of them.

KG – Did you end up meeting people who became friends?

MH – We were camp friends. I didn't go to school with anybody. I went to a different school so I didn't see people so much during the year but after 50 years of not being together we got in touch. It's amazing. I have pictures of the same people, the same group of people, 50 years apart and still together.

KG – Wow.

MH – That's pretty impressive. We have memories of things that we did together from back at camp.

KG – What would you say that your fondest memory is of your time at camp?

MH – I think I liked the singing and the poetry and just being out on the island walking on the trails. I liked sailing and paddling but I really liked the things that shaped who I was more than the activities per se. The poetry and the experiencing of just being on the island were really wonderful things.

KG – Do you remember any of the poems? Can you tell me what they were or recite any of them?

MH – Oh yes. Let me think. "If you think my dear you are quite grown up and become so worldly wise that the one day the campfire will come to your eyes" or something like that. Mary

Carolyn Davies - Prayer for Every Day: "Make me too brave to lie or be unkind. Make me too understanding, too, to mind the little hurts companions give, and friends. The careless hurts that no one quite intends. Make me too thoughtful to hurt others so. Help me to know the inmost thoughts of those to whom I care, their secret wishes, all the load they bear, that I may add my courage to their own. May I make lonely folks feel less along. And happy ones a little happier yet. May I forget what ought to be forgotten; and recall unfailing all that to be recalled, each kindly thing, forgetting what might sting. To all upon my way, day after day, let me be joy, be hope. Let my life sing." That had a big influence on my life.

KG – Tell me a little bit more about the influence it's had.

MH – It's a prayer that I say almost every day literally. I was talking to someone once about how I thought about something and I realized well gee if you're saying the same thing every day for 50 years you've probably pretty much internalized it and that's who I am.

KG – Yes that sounds like a very significant verse that's made a pattern throughout your life. One thing I was curious about is that you said that you went to the Chapel Island for mass.

MH – No we went for Catholic mass - at that time we went to Saranac Inn. They had a Catholic mass in the employee rec hall or something it was. It was a long time ago. At some point later I think they went to Fish Creek campgrounds but that was after my time. But I used to – when I was on staff – I used to arrange my time so I would take Saturday off so I could go to mass and be free on Sunday to go with the girls who were going to Chapel Isle so I could play the organ. That was just one year that I did that but I found it interesting that I could do that.

KG – For sure. You said it was in the rec hall at Saranac Inn?

MH – I think that's what it was. It was a big old open room. Big room in a wooden building. If you were looking at the inn from the lake it was off to the left somewhere. We used to take the boat to the mainland and I think go by truck up to Saranac Inn to go to mass.

KG – Did you ever end up going in to Saranac Lake, the town?

MH – Oh yes. On our days off. As staff members on our days off we went to Saranac Lake and we used to go to Teppers to buy jewelry, the seagull pins and other things. I bought several things from Teppers and we used to go to the Dew Drop Inn right along that little creek there.

KG – Tell me again, did you say Teppers?

MH – I think it was called Teppers. Wasn't that the name of it?

KG – There was a Temmings.

MH – Temmings that's it. Sorry I got it wrong.

KG – That's fine. I know exactly what jewelry you are talking about. I've seen that seagull pin. It's beautiful.

MH – So our skipper pins came from there and I had a charm bracelet and a number of charms and the seagull pin. Yeah Temmings.

KG – What was your impression of the town?

MH – It was a place where we were comfortable going on our days off. We didn't have that much time. We had one day off a week and you could drive and spend some time, go to a couple of stores, go out to eat and then it was time to go back and get a boat back to the island. But I certainly enjoyed being there. In later years I used to go there with my husband. We would go up to the Adirondacks for many reasons, my husband and I, for paddling and hiking for cross country skiing, snowshoeing, all sorts of stuff. We both loved the area. It was one of the things that we have in common.

KG – Do you remember noticing any of the other camps on the lake or recognizing certain boats from maybe some of the great camps going around?

MH – Well I remember the mail boat that used to bring our mail down from the inn. There was a boat that took people to Chapel Isle. I don't particularly remember any camp-specific boat. I remember the names of the camps. Over the years you see them and you look at them on the lake, you sail by them. I like to look at maps. I used to look at maps a lot but I don't particularly remember any specific boats. We had the Gwen. It was part of the gift of Eagle Island to the Girl Scouts. That had been part of Eagle Island when the Graves owned it.

KG – Do you feel like you've seen a lot of changes on the lake or specifically Eagle Island?

MH – Not so much physical change because it's really well maintained. Some things have changed. After all the last year I worked there was 1964. I've been back a few times since. I skied over one winter. I've paddled to it to visit. But, you know the world changes too and so what I hear about what the children like has changed somewhat but they are coming from a different place in their thinking. A lot of the things about Eagle Island are the same. But I think the most important one – being on the island and not being in the middle of civilization and that hasn't changed.

KG – When you were there did you... I'm curious if you were hearing news of world events or if you ever got news from back home or if it was really kind of a place of...

MH – No, we had no direct connection with the outside world. You wrote letters you know handwritten letters like people used to do. One summer I wrote my mother all summer. We

wrote back and forth in French. I remember that. I wrote to someone else who wrote to me in German script. I don't think there was so much going on in the 50s you know. All those changes like the Vietnam War happened afterwards so we were between the Second World War and the Vietnam War. You didn't hear a lot... After the Korean War. We didn't have all those things worrying us so much.

KG – Tell me a little bit more about beyond Eagle Island what role the Girl Scouts and your involvement with them played in your life.

MH – Well oddly enough as I said I went to a different school and we only had one year of Brownies and one year of intermediate scouts, which is how I got these xxx but after that the leader dropped and I wasn't a Girl Scout again until I was in high school when I joined a troop from West Orange. But I became a Girl Scout leader and I stayed a Girl Scout for 25 years. I led a Brownie troop. I had a cadet troop. I had a mariner's group. I was active - even when I was in graduate school I was doing stuff with the Girl Scouts. I did some xxx opportunities. I took a group of girls from the United States to Germany for an encampment with the Girl Scouts. So I stayed involved with the Girl Scouts as an adult more than as a girl because of the leadership team.

KG – Do you feel like you were maybe... that there was something that maybe you were trying to pass on, that maybe you'd learned on Eagle Island and were hoping to share? Or even not that, but just if there is anything you felt like you earned on Eagle Island that now you can tell me about?

MH – I enjoyed being outside. I still enjoy being outside. I worked with various groups over the years. I was a member of the Canoe Committee for the Appalachian Mountain Club. I was vice co of the American Canoe Association. I was a secretary for an orienteering group. I was chairperson of the Murray Hill Canoe Club, which was the outing club for Bell Lab. I've led ski trips, I led hiking trips, I organized trips for my friends, I encourage my family to go camping, to go paddling. I've taken them. I took them paddling this year. So I hope people will enjoy all these things in the outdoors that I enjoyed and I'm still going literally like within the week outdoors walking or hiking or biking or whatever with my friends.

KG – After your involvement with the Girl Scouts as a young adult have you been back to Eagle Island?

MH – I went to a women's weekend I think twice - once when it was still inside the Girl Scouts and once after that. I've gone as a volunteer a couple of times. I'm not able to leave my husband now so I haven't been in the last couple of years. But I can picture everything and I'm a secretary of the board so I'm involved but in a more passive role at the moment.

KG – Can you tell me a little bit about how Covid has impacted Eagle Island?

MH – Oh well we had such great hopes for 2020 to have children in residence again. We had day camp last year. We thought we'd have children getting the full experience this year so we had to call off camp, which was a great sorrow for all of us. We were all hoping to get children back to the island. There is a ceremony on the last night of camp and one of the things that is part of it is "May children always live here" so we always want to have children have the Eagle Island experience. We're hoping that that will happen again maybe in 2021. We're hopeful.

KG – I forgot to ask you. When you were there either as a camper or as a counselor how many weeks a summer did you attend?

MH – Well the first year I was a camper I was there two weeks and after that I went a month for several years and then the last three as a camper I went all eight weeks. As a counselor I was a counselor for eight weeks of campers plus before and after there were additional things like training people and some finishing up afterwards so I'd be there 9-10 weeks.

KG – Was it more common for the campers to stay there for two weeks or did most of the campers at the time stay they for an extended period?

MH – I think it varied with the age. There were some units – the long canoe trip unit from Old Forge to Saranac, and the sailing unit – where the programs were one month long so if you wanted to do those programs you were there for a month. But once you really loved the island you really wanted to be there all summer. Before that I used to negotiate with my mother (my father was dead) and I would say 'Well I'll go away with you for a month if I can go to camp for the other month.' Other children didn't have to negotiate.

KG – I'm just looking at my question list here. I think I've covered most of my questions. So tell me is there anything else that I've missed or that you want to say about Eagle Island?

MH – Well I thought of one thing I left out when I was saying that I was doing all these groups of outdoor activity. I think from Eagle Island I got the role of being a leader. Almost every group I was ever in I ended up being in some sort of leadership role because I wanted to help people do and enjoy the activities.

KG – Do you feel like... I'm wondering about what was available to you outside of Eagle Island like did you feel like there were any other outlets where you could be a leader or fulfill that need to be outdoors or was Eagle Island kind of the only thing available to you at the time?

MH – At that time, yeah, this is a different era. I went to dancing school 6 days a week. I traveled with my mother and I was very good in school so I did some special programs related to school. I went to college at night while I was in high school so I didn't do anything outdoors outside of camp really.

KG – So tell me a little bit about the rest of your life and your career and where you went to school.

MH – Well, I actually ended up going to 10 different schools at different times but I went to Newton College of the Sacred Heart and got my BA in mathematics. Then I went to the University of Wisconsin for an MA in mathematics. I went to Fordham University for two more years of grad school. Then I taught at Mount St. Mary College. I taught mathematics. Then I went to IIT for a summer. I went to Stevens Institute of Technology and got my PhD in computer science and ended up working at Bell Labs for 25 years. I ended up as a software systems performance and architecture expert and I worked on systems and then for my last five years I was mentoring people who were working as architects on various systems around the U.S. and Europe. I mentored a lot of teams in that role.

KG – So both you and my other interviewee Erna were at Bell Labs.

MH – I actually worked for Erna at one point but I was much lower than she was. In the 70s I worked for Erna but she was so far up I didn't personally know her.

KG – Did you know that she'd gone to Eagle Island?

MH – No. I wish I had but I didn't. I've spoken to her since then but I didn't know at the time.

KG – Well is there anything else you can think of, anything that I missed and didn't ask about?

MH – It's so much a part... if you go and you go it becomes part of you. Shapes the way you think. You do something and a song comes to mind. My husband is always making fun of me when we're going somewhere and I always have a song that's appropriate for what we're doing. I was a camp song leader one year. I knew so many songs. But it isn't just the songs, it's the ideas that stay with you.

KG – Tell me more about the ideas that stay with you.

MH – Being a good person I think. What is important. How you interact with other people. How you appreciate things. How you appreciate nature. I think those are the things that really stay with you.

KG – It seems like Eagle Island was really a special place. I actually grew up on the lake.

MH – It really was.

KG – It's been great to do these interviews and so many people it seems like it's really kind of changed their lives.

MH – I think it had a huge influence on me. I would never have experienced the life I had outside of camp. I had nothing like it. Nothing comparable in any way whatsoever. I knew my way around Europe but I didn't know my way in the outdoors.

KG – Oh do you remember any big storms or anything like that? The worst storms you remember at Eagle Island?

MH – I don't. My friend Kristen has mentioned them but I don't. We might have been there different months at that time. I honestly don't have any big memories of exciting storms passing.

KG – Oh and I meant to ask about electricity and water. When you were there did the camp have electricity or what buildings was it wired to?

MH – Well I think in the wash house where the toilets and the sinks were we had a light. There was electricity in main camp. We had electricity in the dining hall and I think in the main camp in the lodge. We had electricity in the mariner boat house but not in the tents and not so much in the units. You had to take a flashlight at night.

KG – Well that is it for my questions.

MH – Ok

KG – Thank you so much for taking the time to share how it's affected you.

MH – You're very welcome. I hope the rest of your interviews go well.

KG – I've been really enjoying them and I think it will be really special to be able to have some of these stories online and kind of be able to showcase what Eagle Island has meant to the community and to the larger country and just what an impact it's had on people's lives.

MH – Oh yes, I think everybody who went there more than one year was very influenced by what they experienced.

KG – Well I'm going to turn off the recorder unless there is anything else you want to share.

MH – No that's fine.

END