

2008 RANCHO CAMULOS MUSEUM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW: SHIRLEY RUBEL LORENZ

DATE: NOVEMBER 11, 2008

INTERVIEWER: MONICA DOLLISON, VCCCD INTERN

INTERVIEW STARTS AT TAPE COUNTER #50

SRL: Rolling Hills Estates is one of the four different city groups on the Pales Verdes peninsula. Do you know where that is?

MD: Woodland Hills? Is that what you said?

SRL: Pales Verdes, Rolling Hills Estates is name of the town, city I live in, but it's on the Pales Verdes peninsula. There are four different city town groups on that one peninsula that goes between the Santa Monica bay and the L.A. harbor, it's that big piece of property that goes out into the ocean.

MD: Yes, I was just actually out there yesterday with my friends. wWe had a day off of school so we went out to the beach, out to Santa Monica.

SRL: Well that was a nice thing to do.

MD: It's a bit of a drive from here, Camulos, to there.

SRL: Oh yeah, it is, its 65 miles. And I leave early, you know, to leave by 5:30 am anyway, to get through some of the traffic. And going home is another deal.

MD: It's a whole other beast.

SRL: But any way, I used to be able to spend most of the day here, but sometimes over night I would go up to the hill house, which was at the top of the hill across the way, which was built right after World War II, as soon as we could get materials to build with, in those days, which was probably little. It was probably built around 1947 or 1948, it's a modern adobe, but I kept that for the family, and they come here and spend time. We're having another family wedding in March, we've have one in August. Nieces, children of my sister, Boo, otherwise her Christian name is Nathalie, but she's been Boo since she was born. Generally I come up and go back on the same day because I've got a home of my own there and I've got a dog, and I've got birds, and I have koy fish, and peacocks live there too, wild ones.

MD: They have wild ones out there?

SRL: Oh yeah, they were brought in, in the 1800's, and there're still there, a lot of people don't like them, and a lot of people love them. They know that my dog won't touch them, so they come right up and they just sit down against my sliding glass door and just rest.

MD: That is so neat!

SRL: Yeah, it's marvelous. There's a pea hen right now who came with little chicks. It's at least more than a month past their usually time to have chickies, and they are the cutest darn little things.

MD: I've never seen peacock chick, just the ones in zoos, that would be adorable.

SRL: Well these are just beginning to grow a little top notch, its great. Anyway, you know my husband and I, we met at Thunderbird in Arizona which is a graduate school for international business and so forth. He went into international banking. And so we spent the first six years of our life in Mexico City, and then the next four in Columbia, and then he was in charge of the rest of South America. But he worked in an office here in Los Angeles, so we came back here, and bought the home in Pales Verdes. So I'm closer, there is only the two of us left, my sister, Boo, Nathalie, and I are the last of our siblings. She has four sons, married, and I have four kids, two women and two guys, and my number two son has two lovely children, so their all coming for Thanksgiving.

MD: Are you going to have it at your house?

SRL: We going to have it at my home, in Pales Verdes. But after my husband passed away in 1997, at first I didn't want the kids to feel they had to drag their children to grandmother's house on Christmas, I said you should have your own kind.

MD: Do they live nearby?

SRL: Well the closest one is in the valley, San Fernando Valley, and there's one, well I guess she's closer to me when I'm home, the closer to here is in Santa Clarita, and then my number two son, he's up in San Ramon which is south east a little bit on San Francisco. So, but, their all very interested in the ranch, and they have part ownership.

MD: Are they going to take up the mantle?

SRL: Yeah, they get down here. But you wanted to know about the early days?

MD: One thing Judy and I were discussing is what were the holidays like here, you had all your brothers and sisters and all the ranch workers, were holidays a big deal out here at all?

SRL: Well Christmas was always the biggest one, and the bunk house was full of single men, who were all, who had served in the first World War, as did my father, and so they all felt like a family. Christmas time was very fun because we would make up this, what we called a pie, a big basket and put all these little gifts in it with strings on it, and at the dinner table, at Christmas, on the big lunch table, they would you know pull it and they'd have a prize. And we would decorate everything and make special cookies and all kinds of things. There were some families living on the ranch in those days, there still are,

some. But we would visit them and bring gifts for the children and all that kind of stuff. Our own Christmas, well it was, we'd all get up and go into mom's and dad's bedroom and climb in bed, they had a big, big bed, and we'd sing carols in our squeaky voices, and then dad would go down and bring up the stockings, so we'd do the stocking and that was always great fun, taking turns around to go through the stockings. But nobody could go into the living room where the Christmas tree was until after breakfast. So we would rush down to breakfast, which was always nice, and it was lovely. There was always, in those days, there was the gramophone with records, which was marvelous, and so we always had some music and that was Christmas. And it kind of went on all day, but before Christmas, the weekend before Christmas, was our traditional open house for mother and dad's far flung friends, not just the ones here in Ventura County but friends would come from Santa Barbara and Los Angeles for Christmas. They'd come at noon and be there until the small hours, and we kids were all sent off to bed, but of course we peeked, and so it was always a big thing. That went on really until WWII.

MD: Were the people that came to the parties, were they other fellow ranchers?

SRL: Yes, yes, mostly ranchers. And so as far as having friends to play with, when we had our school here, there were the four of us, my older brother, my sister and myself and my younger sister. Boo and I are only a year and two weeks apart, so we are almost like twins, we are both in April. But were both different, cause I'm an Aries, and she's whatever the next one is. I can remember mother saying, "Get out of the house and stay out!" so we get out of the house and we'd confer, well what are we going to do? Well we could climb the trees, we could hike across the river, we could saddle up the horses depending what age we were, or we could play games, and we could roller skate, dad had build this cement here and so we kept busy. I never remember being bored about anything sitting around not knowing what to do. But then later when we went to grammar school in Fillmore, I was in second grade, Boo was in first, and of course then we had all kinds of friends that would come. But you know people, friends would come and stay the weekend, you just weren't rushing all these miles back and forth, they would come and later on when we were going to school in Santa Barbara even more so, the friends and sometimes their parents would come and we would just play kick the can or capture the flag, all kinds of wonderful games.

MD: Oh I'm sure you could have had wonderful games of hide and seek.

SRL: Oh gosh yes! And croquet, we always had a big croquet game going, whacking away, and that kind of thing, but we would do a lot of hiking on both sides of the valley, up into the hills and the back canyons, and that was great. And then sometimes when there was a group of us, dad would hook up this wonderful coach that he found, and hook it up to a tractor, the kind with wheels, not tracks and we would tear around the ranch in this coach, it was such fun. A cloud of dust, Hi Ho Silver! That was fun. Of course we did spend a lot of time in this big walnut tree, there was a big heavy rope that came from the very top of the tree all the way to the ground and we could get on that and swing from one big branch way over to another little branch. And if you notice a lot of the lower branches go out and they're supported, and we learned to walk and run up and down those branches,

so that was always fun. Of course, mother and dad would always keep us busy too. We would help with the gardening and all those kinds of things and knew how things grew and so forth.

MD: I know you guys were really young, but did you ever help out in the fields?

SRL: No, we were told not to get involved with the workers while they were working, and no we didn't. Later on when I was older I would help, well this was much later, it was after WWII, I would help herd the cattle from the low lands up into the mountains over here for feeding. But I was always very aware of what was going on, and when I was old enough, I would help in the office, and after my dad was killed in North Africa in WWII, mother was able to persuade her sister, Eunis Forbes and her husband to come to the ranch. And he was with Sespe at that time, he was one of the managers of Sespe, and he was a real citr-ologist, and so he came and became our ranch manager, which was a blessing. Because we still had a bunk house full of men and all the rest of the people who were still working and all, so he taught me a lot of things, he taught me how to test the soil and so forth. And I don't know why, but I was the only one doing these kinds of things, the others all loved our home, but they weren't all that interested or involved with the ranch itself, it was just one of those things that kind of happened, and so here I am. And I'm glad I had that background.

MD: Going back to WWII, what was it like living on a ranch, because I know that others, when I talked with my grandparents about it, they had the food rations and everything, was life likr out here different on your own ranch.

SRL: Oh yes, we certainly did! Well at that point I was in prep school. Boo and I were in prep school on the east coast, in Massachusetts. I remember Pearl Harbor came that year that I entered school there, I'll never forget the principle having us come in and listen to the radio while it was going on. It was very much alive to us, and then that happened in December, and then the next December my dad came and told me that he was going overseas to re-join the American Field Service. American Field Service was a volunteer ambulance outfit that was started in the First World War, dad had joined that when he was in Harvard, with a group of his friends, he was badly gassed. They all survived, he and his friends survived but they were badly gassed. So when they got back and finished Harvard and all, the doctor said, don't plan on a career in an office, get outside, go west young man! Dad married mother and they took off for the west coast and came up with Camulos. I very much remember the rationing and of course we had to take our rationing books back to school with us so the school could feed us. Those were very memorable days. When everybody finally came back, my brother finally came back from overseas, from Germany.

MD: Which brother served?

SRL: Jerry, Jerald, my older brother. My sister was married to a wonderful, wonderful man who just graduated from West Point. Dad was killed in April of 1943, and they were married in June of '43, because he was just, the war as still on and he had just graduated,

so they gave him time to get married, then he was sent over seas. It was awfully fine when he finally got back home. It opened our eyes when we went to school after we lived here, that people didn't live like we did, on a ranch. We all had our own dogs, we had a passel of dogs. Mother and dad had their own dogs, actually mother had two, and each one of us had our own dogs. Mine was a cocker spaniel, my sisters was a little doxen, but we were heavily into German shepard's, over the years, I still have a German shepard, a long line of German shepards. A year or so after they built, dad had this school house built, he built a home up on the Rincon, do you know where that is? It's on the border of the county of Ventura and Santa Barbara, the line goes right through there, and we were the second home evey built there. So we spent summers up there and dad would come up there on the weekends when it got beastly hot, but then I would often times come down with him here, for some reason the heat didn't really bother me so much. I remember all kinds of things like that, I remember one very hot day we came back from the beach house and it was so quiet, it was the end of a weekend and we came onto the long porch and here was this huge tarantula, I had never seen a tarantula before, I mean their huge, and they jump!

MD: Oh I would have been screaming and running off the property.

SRL: We didn't scream, dad always said, he hated a screaming woman, we learned you don't scream unless it's for real.

MD: That's probably a good thing though.

SRL: I'll never forget that tarantula, jumping down the porch.

MD: Did you move it away and off the porch? Did your dad to that?

SRL: Well it was on a screened in porch, that porch on the other side is still screened in, so we kind of opened the door for him and let him get out. But you know, we were taught about snakes, and thinks like that, our workers always had snake bite kits with them, so we were aware of things that could happen, and we knew what to do. We were also taught to drive by the time we were ten, for emergencies. And we learned to drive on a, gosh I can't remember the name of the tractor, the tractors with the big wheels on it and you could get up to twenty miles an hour on the thing, but it had a standard shift, which everybody had a standard shift in those days, none of these fancy ones that we have now. So we all learned to drive. We also learned to shoot. Not pistols, we shot rifles. So you know, we were just aware of what was around us.

MD: So tell me what school was like, because I know you had your schooling here and then you went to prep school and everything. How was school here, being home schooled with your siblings and then as I understand with your school teachers kids.

SRL: We had a marvelous, wonderful teacher, Veronica Casey, she ended up being one of the head of the education in Denver, Colorado. She taught all three of us and once a week we had a French teacher come and once a week an art teacher. Von, we called her Von, she

planned, oh two or three times a year to have an excursion, someplace that the whole family would go on, mother and dad would go and all of us kids together, and the one I remember the most, we went to the Bolder Dam.

END TAPE 1 SIDE A

SRL: Oh, a little more than half built when we were there. And of course you had to cross the desert and all of that to see it, it was incredible. Another time we went out into the desert because dad had some gold mine property that he owned, but then some others that he was looking into and we spent a weekend up there and going down in to the mines. And that was awesome, scary, but interesting. And there was a very special place out in the desert where there was a fairly large mountain out in the middle of the desert and it was flat all the way around it, but there was an opening in the base, there was a spring that came out of this, up towards the top of this hill, small mountain, so over the millennia it made a little water way that came down and we could climb up there and slide down, and it was really something. The water would go out into the desert and just disappear, but there was all kinds of wild things in there, plants, occasional four legged something or other. Then we went to Death Valley one time and saw all of that. We were taken to the opera in Los Angeles, and we had to be dressed in long gowns in those days. That was a big deal, and so we did those kinds of things.

MD: Sure beats the field trips I went on as a kid.

SRL: But then we'd have to write about it, of course, when we got home.

MD: Of course, it's not just a free trip. So you already told me some things you did with your siblings, you know, playing in the trees, what other, were some of the most memorable moments that you have as being children in your day to day life.

SRL: Well my older brother and sister had very close friends who had a ranch around Fillmore, and they were inseparable, there was a daughter and a son, so they matched my brother and older sister, there is four years between my older sister and myself. They were bigger and more grown up, and they had a club, and they had a tree house and, we wanted to join their club and they said, "Oh well, okay, you can join but you have to go through a testing" so we went through all kinds of horrible things for two years before mother and dad found out about it, it was crazy, it was crazy. They'd make us eat awful things. But then my sister Boo and I, we would read on quiet days, we would read to each other aloud lying on our tummies in the library, and it was just a wonderful group. The library was great, there were books there for all ages, and history and background and all kinds of things, so we would read to each other. And most afternoons we would have tea in the afternoons, all of us did, and as kids Boo and I were given what was called Cambric tea, which was half and half with milk and few drops of tea, anyway it was delicious. But mother would, oh that was fantastic, mother was a wonderful reader, and she would put expression into her reading and she would read to all of us, and as we got older, she would read adult books to us and we lie around and feed ourselves and listen to these wonderful books. Yeah I remember that a lot.

MD: The library was in the main adobe?

SRL: Yeah, yeah, but when mother would read it would be in the master bedroom in front of the, there was a lovely fireplace there, and lovely small couches and things, so we'd be in there and she'd read.

MD: In the adobe, did you guys each have your own rooms as siblings or did you share rooms?

SRL: Well, my earliest memories, we had a nurse, we had a nanny, and we were in these lower rooms in the back there, that's called Ramona's room, and Boo and I would have our meals there, but when we discovered, decided, that we were human enough to come to the dinner table, then we came to the dinner table. Dinners were always fantastic because there such wonderful conversation and we talked and sometimes there were friends there and sometimes it was just us, but they'd been listening to the radio and been up with what's going on in the world and there'd be discussion about all these things, and what's going on in our lives, but also what's going on in the whole world. Dad had friends he was in contact with, writing letters to, all over Europe, some of them even from the Philippines. So that was all very interesting, so we had a pretty good idea of what was going on in the world, without realizing that we did, you know? Of course we had to eat everything on our plate, and we had to have good manners, but it was always fun, there was always a lot of joking and so forth.

MD: Would a lot of, because I know a lot of the workers were your dad old friends, would they come in and join you at the dinner table or was it just mostly you and your family?

SRL: No, no, well there were enough of us to fill up the table, they had a wonderful bunk house, and they had a very fine cook, and I remember going with dad to Smart and Final before it was open to the regular people, when it was just for restaurants and businesses and so forth, and he'd get all of this stuff from Smart and Final. And of course it was during the Depression too, and no matter what, even though things were scarce, money was scarce, there was always a way of being able to feed the tramps who came through, and so forth and so on. And sometimes, if there was a something, a job for them to do, they could do that for a few days if they wanted to, but there was always no question about taking care of these people, because you know the ranch is in the boonies. Yeah I remember that very well, those days were really something.

MD: Would you get a lot of travelers coming through, just stopping through, not only during the Depression, I know there were a lot of Ramona seekers, did that continue after the del Valle family was gone?

SRL: Oh yes! We called them Ramona hunters and they would just peer. We'd just be sitting at the luncheon table and just look out and here are these people wandering through and you know dad or mother would go out and ask if they could help them in any way. The ranch was always open to visitors until after WWII, when dad was gone and mother remarried and then it was closed. And that's why so many local people never knew this was here. I

mean at least two generations went by, of people in Ventura County that weren't really aware that this was here.

MD: Both my parents were born and raised here in Ventura County, so was I, and my father and I used to come out here all the time and drove past this multiple times a month and I never knew it was here until I heard it from my professors.

SRL: Right, well exactly, and so little by little, by word of mouth, we're becoming more and more popular, we've had lots of visitors and tours, school tours, and weddings, various other organizations have been coming and will have barbeques and other things for their yearly whatever's, so we're doing more and more of those things, but it's a struggle, we did get some grants after the earthquake from the president, you know he set aside money for California after that earthquake for the historic buildings. So then we were discovered and it was Getty, who formed a committee to come around and see all of these buildings in Southern California, and they brought them here and that was the beginning of helping us. We didn't know whether we could ever repair it, it was a very tough time financially, in the agriculture at that time, and so we got the first grant was from them and then there was a second grant from the state and the county has given us some grants. So they retrofitted the adobe first and then this past year we had money, but they gave it to us, but they held it, for the small adobe, but they finally let it go, almost ten years after the earthquake, so it has been retrofitted but in the mean time it has deteriorated so much by not being retrofitted, so now we are in the process now of actually the Luvall family, have a family trust for worthy causes. So they came, and none of them, they always knew about Camulos, but they had never seen it, so they came just two weeks ago, and it was just incredible, and they all went through the small adobe and they saw, we pointed out to them exactly what had been done there, and then they came down here and they really enjoyed it tremendously, so they just recently gave us a wonderful grant, so that we can finish the small adobe. And so little by little, it's just taking forever, I've given up, frothing at the mouth and jumping up and down with impatience in getting things repaired and done, but I'm up here as you can see, I'm down on my hands and knees doing a lot of the grunt work. But we have wonderful docents and they all seem to be tremendously pleased and excited in what their doing, they fall in love with it, and they give marvelous tours. So its coming along, its just a, I feel that we've just past the point of no return as far as being a complete failure, I think we've done enough of restoring it and plans to restore it, with hopefully, we'll have to do a lot of fundraising, but we're becoming better known. But of course this is a terrible time to ask anybody for money, there are a few people, and the family has chipped in of course, and it's the next generation of course who wants it, cause Boo and I are the only ones of my generation, she still has a husband anyway. But I still have four kids and seven grand kids and she has nine grand kids.

MD: Big family!

SRL: So we're here and were trying to, you know it's taken me awhile in these years since the earth quake to ween myself from feeling this is my home, you know? I'm tremendously interested in it, and I love it and all but I don't have that feeling that I belong here



forever, that's not the right way to say it. Anyway, it doesn't tear me apart. But because I know it's going to be preserved. And one of the reasons that the del Valle's sold the ranch to my dad in 1924, is because they had long conversations with him and realized he was really caring about the history and all and he told them that he would preserve it and pass it on, and so we kids were brought up with that and that and so it was very much apart of it, of course we're going to take good care of it, of course we're going to rebuild it, and so forth and so on, and so I feel that with what little time I have left, I'm not going to see it completely done, but I know it will be done.

MD: I was reading in past interviews that your father had a museum here? What did he have in there?

SRL: Yeah, well all kinds of things he discovered, because the del Valle's just left, they took their furniture, but that was it, they sort of just left everything and so he found all kinds of things, there was a wonderful carriage that they had.

MD: Was that the same one that he would drive you in?

SRL: No, no, this was a real elegant carriage, black with glass windows and everything, we still have it and actually it's being restored right now, in Fillmore, and all kinds of things. The chapel, we've had to do a lot with the chapel after the earthquake it was almost off the risers it was just hanging on by about three or four inches on the risers, and we had to do a lot of work on that, and we'll have to do some more work cause there's always, termites, and of course I never realized that there are also ground termites, I just thought they chewed on wood, but no their under ground. Also we've had termite people come out and look at it and give us some bids, so we're going to have to do some work on that before it gets any worse. There's always something. I'm in the process of getting bids right now for restoring the whole south end of the adobe and around the south east corner needs help desperately, and we found some people who are working with adobe and have done work on historic buildings, so they are coming. And we're going to get a new cellar door cause that's about to fall apart, and all of these things, their going to happen, its just, as I say I don't jump up and down and have a fit anymore, I know it will happen

MD: Did your family use the chapel a lot, cause when I was reading the history that the del Valle's, they would have the community come to the chapel, did you guys use the chapel a lot when you were young?

SRL: Well, we not Catholics, we happen to be Episcopalians, so we were married here, but on the porch, and people stood out on the lawns, so we would walk up the stairs and there would be an alter there and so forth, other people had had weddings there and so forth, and once a year on all saints day they have a full service here, from the Piru church.

MD: Even now?

SRL: Yes, they just finished having it. It's very nice. So, you know it's a beautiful little chapel. We always felt there was something to do when we got up in the morning, there's always

a lot to do, there still is. You know were having the migratory birds go through now, a lot of them have already gone through, but they know about this pond, so the whole flock will come charging out of the sky and we have bird feeders and so forth, but they bathe under the little waterfall under here, so they'll spend an hour or so here and then go on, and then a different kind of bird will come by. It's really fascinating, we still have lots of coyotes, we have deer, we had wonderful bears, occasionally bears, but I haven't seen any since they put in this five lane highway, and they were eventually picked off on that highway, there's all kinds of critters. We all, each one of us had our own horses, we spent a lot of time on those horses, we used to play hide and seek in the orchards, at a gallop, dad didn't like that idea very much it didn't help the irrigation channels. So anyway I have great hopes that my children will be, well they own a part of it, they will carry with maintaining it, cause dad always said there will probably be a time in the future when what generation, its not this one, and I hope its not the next one, but after that what can you say, things change so much, with this whole agreement to keep all of this in agriculture for all those years we still have at least 15 years, I don't know exactly how many years left, but you can't develop this, we don't want to develop this! I'm sure at some point, but I want to be sure that preserving these 12 acres, now that we're a national landmark and were non profit, ect, ect, but no matter what happens around us this will be preserved.

MD: It really is too beautiful to let it get taken away.

TAPE 1 SDIE B ENDS AT TAPE COUNTER 365

BEGIN SHORT INTERVIEW ON TAPE 2

SRL: You know up in what we called the rose room, do you know about the rose room?

MD: A little not too much.

SRL: One of the del Valle daughters, collected, went out and collected rose petals every day, and she would stack them in that room on the floor and once a year a man with a donkey train would come through and he would buy them, those rose things and send them to one of the countries in Europe for making perfumes. So over the years the adobe absorbed the scent of the roses and even to this day on a rainy day you go in there and you can sniff the rose scent if you got a good sniffer, I'm loosing my sniffer. Anyway, and then as we got older my older sister had the room that's next to the garage up there, and Boo and I had the room that's just off of the big living room here, between the living room and the master bedroom, and the big bathroom is in between, and we were there for years, very happily. But as we got older and my sister moved away, and I was moved into her room and Boo was moved into this corner room here, that Von used to have when she was our teacher, and so we had our own rooms that really through our older teen years, but you know we were in each other rooms a lot. But as we went through different ages we were in different places, so that's what families do who have enough room to move around. But the master bedroom has always been there, and of course when dad and mother

bought the place they did take down some partitions as you noticed in the long adobe in the long living room where the paintings are you can still see where the wall was before, and in the master bedroom there's two doors on the screened porch there and its one big room, but it was two rooms with separate doors. The only other thing, well they did two other things, the long living room there was two windows looking out on the walnut tree, but they were narrow windows, so when they took off the division in that room, they made a connecting widow, they made that big window looking out there. And the other thing we did is from the library to the other living room that comes this way, and made the stair way, they put in the door way and made the stair way going down to where it connected, because that room, that room, the library and the one to the east, those were the original buildings, and as the del Valle family grew they kept adding on.

MD: Growing with the family!

SRL: But that's what we did, and that library was just fantastic, we really used it a lot; a lot of favorite things in there. I still have a lot of it in carton boxes.

MD: Were the books that you had, were they left by the del Valle family, or were they ones your family had collected over the years?

SRL: No, it was our family, dad had a lot of books in his family. And I still have them at my house, things that my grandmother read. Of course I never knew her.

MD: Oh did she pass?

SRL: She passed away during the first World War, so before my parents were married, but I have a lot of her books, she was very interested in India, the Raja, there are all kinds of books about the Raja. It was really fun to read those.

END TAPE 2