Mary Liddecoat
Interviewed by
Frances Lomas Feldman
At Miss Liddecoat's home
Los Angeles, CA
On December 11, 2001

Miss Liddecoat, 94 at the time of this interview, has had a distinguished social work career. Her father, Tom Liddecoat, in 1916, founded the Midnight Mission in Los Angeles to provide food and shelter to homeless men; he managed and supported it personally until the early years of the Depression, when ill health (diabetes and blindness) led to his separation from the Mission. Mary, a young child when the Mission was started, remained close to it during her school years. In 1931, she received a certificate in social work from the University of Southern California and was recruited at once by the public welfare department in Santa Barbara, where she remained for ten years, leaving to care for her father for several years. Afterwards she was recruited by the Los Angeles chapter of the Red Cross and held an executive position during the war years. A friend of his, Albert Mussey Johnson, aka A.M. Johnson from Chicago (for whom the famous Scotty's Castle in Death Valley was built) shared Miss and Mr. Liddecoat's wish to help people and to do so, he created the Gospel Foundation of California, which Miss Liddecoat then operated for 42 years, providing services for youth in various parts of California. This interview describes the founding, purpose, and operation the Midnight Mission, and Miss Liddecoat's own life and professional experiences in the field of social work. A friend of Miss Liddecoat, Mr. Henry Golas – who made her acquaintance when he was researching a contemplated film about Scotty's Castle and who has been organizing her papers and mementos from Midnight Mission, participated from time to time in this interview.

FELDMAN: This interview is with Miss Mary Liddecoat, who will be talking with us about the Midnight Mission and other activities in which she has been involved. Why don't you introduce yourself?

LIDDECOAT: I was born in Denver, July 21, 1907. I have lived in Southern California all my life because of my parents. In those days, it was important where you were born. You weren't born in flats. You weren't in hospitals, so it was proper to be born in their home. They had a home in Denver, and my mother went there for the birth, and then we came back to California. But my father…….

FELDMAN: You were actually born in Denver?

LIDDECOAT: Yes, but that's all. They brought me to California immediately. My father was born in Hale, Cornwall, England. His father had a friend who went to America in search of gold. He wrote to my grandfather and said, "You should come and maybe you'll find a gold mine," in Central City, Colorado. So, his father went to Central City, and he struck gold. He sent for his family: my father, his brother, two sisters and his mother, and they settled in this mining town of Central City. It was a city of poor miners, and there was a lot of poverty. Many people survived on wild game and wild berries. Indians were trying to make it so uncomfortable that the white man would leave. Custer's last stand was made from this location and the Indians were on the warpath all the time. They'd set fires to the houses, the barns, steal all their horses. They'd steal most anything. Then at night, they'd ride their horses – many of them – loud. They'd make as much noise as they could so the people couldn't sleep. They were determined that the white man would leave.

My father became very concerned about the poverty, because he saw many children weren't getting enough to eat. One day, when he was around eight years old, he went to the old church. Nobody was there, and he went up to the altar and knelt down and prayed. He said, "If I prosper, I promise that I will feed the hungry." He felt so responsible for that. Then, in later years, his mother told me he was always mindful of the poor children. When they were served, he had a pail, which had a lid on it. He kept the pail on the sideboard next to the kitchen table, and when he would be served whatever his meal would be, he would take half of it and put it in the pail to share with a boy that he knew didn't have enough to eat. He was the same way about his clothing. He would share everything. He had that feeling about the poor.

FELDMAN: Did he have brothers or sisters?

LIDDECOAT: He had a brother and two sisters. The brother, well he became a miner, as his father was. The mine caved in and killed his father. He's buried up on top of the hill, overlooking the mining town with other pioneers. I see that the Historical Society keeps up the cemetery, because it's become quite the place for people to go to for historical reasons.

My father was only 14 years old when his father was killed in the mine, so he had to drop out of school.

FELDMAN: Was he the oldest of the children?

LIDDECOAT: Yes, so he had to support the family. He was a volunteer fireman. That's before they used horses. Men would run with the fire equipment, and he found that he could run very fast. Those were the days when there was much interest in foot racing. That was the trend, and so he entered contests and won races, internationally.

But he decided that since the town – well, it was a wild-west town, and there wasn't much future for a young man, that he would move the family to Denver. He did, and he went into the wholesale produce business. He kept seeing the things coming in from California. He thought, "I wonder if I could get into the shipping business if I go out to California?" Well, he had just married my mother. That was in 1899, and they bought a home in Denver. Her mother was living with them, so he said, "I'll go out and see if I can establish myself, and you stay here with your mother." It took him two years to determine that he could get into business, and they'd visit back and forth. He established the packinghouse on 8th Street and started shipping all over the United States and Canada. He built up a big business.

FELDMAN: This was the wholesale food market at 8th and St. Julian?

LIDDECOAT: Yes, that's the one.

There was a Dr. Yokum, who had an accident in Denver. In those days, there was the feeling that if you went to sunny California, you would regain your health. Many people were doing that, so he decided that he would do that too. He was down to 100 pounds; he went to California, and his health improved. He bought a ranch house close to South Pasadena. Of course, my father knew him in Denver.

One night, when Dr. Yokum and his family were having dinner, there was a knock on the door. He answered the door, and there was a man who was coughing. He said, "Could I have a slice of bread? I haven't eaten for three days." Dr. Yokum said, "Surely, come in, come in. Sit down, sit down at the table for supper." He did, and then Dr. Yokum gave that man work and gave him a bed to sleep in, and the man worked around the place. He thought, "I should do that. My health is improved, and I should do something for poor people." Then came another knock on the door, and then many knocks on the door. And those were in the days when we had a lot of consumptives, or TB as they called it. There wasn't any place where they could go. Dr. Yokum put up tents – the tuberculous were supposed to have cold air, then, and Dr. Yokum put up these tents, and many consumptives came.

FELDMAN: Where was this?

LIDDECOAT: This was at the edge of South Pasadena. It was called Garvanza Tract. He called it Pisgah Homes. He was taking in all kinds of people with all kinds of problems, because no one was doing that. My father, having known him in Denver, he saw that Dr. Yokum was only serving – all he could afford to serve the people -- bread

and beans. My father started sending some of the vegetables that he was shipping. Some was a little bit too ripe to ship, so he would take them out to the Garvanza Tract. I was a little girl, and I was getting interested. That's when I really got interested. I would push wheel chairs, I would take things to the consumptive people, and I would play with orphans. I became very active there. When I was seven years old, I knew exactly what I wanted to do in my life, and that was to help people. I stayed with that to this day.

That inspired my father greatly, to see how somebody could think of others to that extent, to share what they had. My father had to go down to 8th Street every day on his business, and he'd drive through Skid Row. He saw the need there. I remember my mother and father going in our old car – it was a new car then: it was a Model T Ford. We'd go down at night and see the men who were sleeping in the doorways – hungry. My father said, "I have to do something about this. I just have to do it. There's need here." So he rented a building – this was 1916 – he rented a building at 121 South Los Angeles Street. He had space to put chairs in, and then he put in long tables and benches. There was a small room with a dirt floor, and he put a rug over the floor and made that into a kitchen. He decided he was going to feed the hungry men there, because they weren't getting anything. He bought stew meat and used the trimmings from the vegetables he was shipping. Always when you ship, you trim the vegetables, and those were the trimmings he had. My mother made a Mulligan Stew, which was very good. She was a good Swiss cook. Along with all those fresh vegetables and meat, she made rolls, and they had plenty of hot coffee with sugar and cream. Around midnight, men would come up from the riverbeds.

FELDMAN: That's how it got it's name: Midnight Mission?

LIDDECOAT: Yes. But he believed in rehabilitation, he didn't believe in just the soup kitchen or just a flophouse. No, he wanted to rehabilitate those men. In those days, the cause was mainly alcohol. Many of these men had families, but they were going to the saloons in their towns and drinking too much and would lose their jobs. They would hop a freight and come to Los Angeles where it was warm. But he would talk to those men heart-to-heart. He was not a minister, but he felt that if he could rehabilitate them, ask for a higher power to help them and get them out of their drunken stupor, get them rehabilitated and go home, get their jobs back and be with their families instead of trying to set them up here in some system. He thought they belonged at home. He sent many – I remember when I was a little girl seeing these boxes stacked in a storeroom there at the Mission. I said, "What's in those boxes?" They said it was letters received from families, mothers, wives, sisters and brothers and fathers, thanking him for sending their father or relatives home.

FELDMAN: Do you still have those letters?

LIDDECOAT: No, I don't. The Mission had them, and they said they had 6,000. These men were going home. That was the thing that my father wanted: not to set them up away from their families, but to return home sober. But that was a problem. For many years he did that. He didn't receive a salary and didn't pay any salaries. He used these men who were down and out to do the work in the Mission. No salaries were paid.

FELDMAN: How did he pay for the food and the shelter?

LIDDECOAT: Out of his pocket.

FELDMAN: Out of his pocket.

LIDDECOAT: In those days, it was a different situation. Nobody today may understand what I am saying, but his help came from his heart. People saw a need and they became concerned that something should be done. Somebody should do something and they didn't have public funds to do it. When the Depression of the Thirties came, the scene changed, as you know. What happened during the Depression – so many people lost their employment, and they had to look for where there was employment. The only place many could find work was in social work. So what did they do? Many had no background for it, no feel for it. Maybe they would go to university for a year and get some credentials – maybe one year and would have no trouble in finding work in social work. They'd lump that into social work, which is different from the way it was before. We had a social work or welfare revolution, because they turned away from rehabilitation to relief. There was such a need for food and housing and that's what happened. So the rehabilitation wasn't emphasized.

FELDMAN: During the – I recently did a study for the City of Los Angeles from its own archives. It was about what the city had done to meet human needs since the city became an American city in 1850. I was very interested when I came to the Thirties to have these minutes that show the City Council approving paying a flat sum to Midnight Mission to take in the homeless men. They paid for a number of years, $25,000 a year. I'm sure, and the City Council was sure that there were many more men than $25,000 could cover.

LIDDECOAT: I know what year that was, because that was after my father left.

FELDMAN: Yes. That was in 1932 until about 1947 right after the War.

LIDDECOAT: That's when the change came. Well, it was just a welfare revolution. Money was relief, relief, relief, and there were people on the board of the Mission who

wanted to see that happen. That was when Clara Baldwin Stocker died, and she left $150,000 to the Mission. My father couldn't believe it. That was a fortune. He couldn't believe it. Well, Mr. Harry Chandler, who was a close friend of my father's, called him up and congratulated him. He said, "I see you've been left $150,000." Then Mr. Chandler called him back a second time, and he said, "I want to say this to you: you've taken care of the Mission all these years out of your pocket. You haven't asked for anything. You've taken care of it, yourself – nobody bothered you – but now since money's coming in, your troubles will begin." And how right he was! How right he was.

There was a politician, chairman of the State Republican Committee from the Bay Area who came to Los Angeles. He wanted to run for office and he – I don't know how he arranged it, but he had a huge mansion in Hancock Park – one man. There were many sitting rooms, many bedrooms, beautifully furnished. He invited my father and me to dinner. He had a housekeeper who served us. Then he had a chauffeur. I said to my father, "I don't understand this. Where is he getting his money?" We found out it was just a front, just a front. But he wanted to become effective in mission work so that the public would know about him.

FELDMAN: What was his name?

LIDDECOAT: His name was Eric Fowler. He went on the board of the Mission, which was a mistake. He tried to cause trouble. In those old buildings, you never can get rid of cockroaches. Never, no matter what you do. Mayor Reardon has what he calls "The Pantry" on First Street. It's an eating place. And he's been closed down twice because of cockroaches. So, he decided he would take care of that. He spent about $100,000 putting in all stainless steel. Everything was stainless steel. Yet it was closed down

again for cockroaches. (laughing) You can't beat it. He'll never – he'll always have cockroaches because that building is 75 years old. Those cockroaches come out of the walls.

The Mission building was very old, so there were some. My father was fumigating and fumigating. I said to him, "Do we have to smell that all the time?" But you just couldn't stay ahead. This man who was trying to make a place for himself – my father had a call from him. He said, "I wish you'd come down. The Mayor is here, and all the heads of the Departments of Sanitation and Health and everything." My father got down there and said it looked like there were a hundred people there. They went all through and inspected everything, and they asked the Mayor, "What do you think, Mayor?" "Well, I think 90% to Brother Tom and 10% to you." (laughter) These were the officials from the Health Department and the Department of Sanitation and others. Men were coming in lousy (lice) and bringing things in the front door all the time. My father had to de-lice them and clean them up and sometimes he had to burn their clothing and give them second-hand clothing. It's hard to deal with that.

The first mission was demolished in an earthquake, and they had to put up a new building, so they don't have that problem now. But the old building……..

FELDMAN: That earthquake, was that in '34? Which earthquake was that?

LIDDECOAT: It was in the 90s, I've forgotten. It was when a hospital out in the Valley was destroyed.

FELDMAN: Oh, Olive View. Yes, that one was in 1987.

LIDDECOAT: Oh, 1987.

GOLAS: The first building had a dirt floor in the kitchen, didn't it?"

LIDDECOAT: The kitchen had a dirt floor even. Before moving from the first mission, men didn't stay overnight because there weren't sleeping places for them. One night I was down there with my mother and father, and it was pouring rain; pouring rain. My father said, "I don't have the heart to put these men out in that rain. I know they're not supposed to stay here, but I don't have the heart." So we got newspapers and put them on the floor, and the men slept on the floor. They did that for a time until my father received a notice that the building was going to be demolished. They had to move.

My father then found this building on Fourth and Los Angeles Street. There they put in bunk beds and had de-louser showers and reading rooms.

FELDMAN: And these were still primarily for men?

LIDDECOAT: Yes. But they found they were getting a lot of families again, and they were going to have to do something about that. What we did, we had this place where the man stayed at the Mission until he found employment. The family stayed on the Ranch Land.

FELDMAN: And the Ranch Land belonged to whom?

LIDDECOAT: It was given – the use of it was given to my father by a friend.

FELDMAN: So your father supported that as well as the Mission.

LIDDECOAT: Yes, yes he did. They grew vegetables. My father's long-term plan was to get an educational farm where he could send men out to this farm to learn farming. He said, "You know, many of these men are handicapped in applying themselves to work. If I could send that kind of man out to the farm and have him produce vegetables and dairy products for the Mission, for the jails, for the county hospital, I think it would serve a good purpose." That was what he was planning to do.

The trend then was relief, relief. It wasn't rehabilitation. They thought they didn't need to talk to the men about anything, but just get them a place to stay and something to eat.

FELDMAN: That was a pretty big job in itself.

LIDDECOAT: That was contrary to the hopes that my father had, so he left the Mission. Soon he lost his sight. He was blind for several years.

FELDMAN: When was this? Do you remember?

LIDDECOAT: Oh, it was in the Thirties.

FELDMAN: We were still in the deep Depression.

LIDDECOAT: I was in Santa Barbara.

FELDMAN: But we were still in the economic depression when he left the Mission.

LIDDECOAT: Yes.

FELDMAN: You said in the Thirties.

LIDDECOAT: Well, yes, and the Mission board was asking for public funds. He didn't want to get in on all that.

FELDMAN: Who took over the mission when he left? Who took care of the mission?

LIDDECOAT: He had a board. Of course, he was running it with men who were not paid salaries. He wasn't paid a salary. Everything was "no salary." He was providing food. He knew a man who had a famous restaurant on Eighth and Hill Streets.

GOLAS: Was it Mr. Herbert?

LIDDECOAT: Yes, Mr. Herbert. He called it Herbert's Restaurant, all first class. He knew my father for many years. He had asked my father and me – he knew I no longer had a mother, and it would be nice to invite us to dinner. We'd go down and have dinner,

and he'd join us. One night, he said, "I've been thinking. You have a truck. Why don't you send your truck up here every night at 11:00 o'clock, and we'll give you all the leftovers, and then we'll start fresh." And he did that! Oh, did he build a reputation. That got around. "If you want fresh food, go to Herbert's, because they – everything is fresh."

FELDMAN: Good publicity for him, wasn't it?

LIDDECOAT: Oh, it was, and did it help! They had turkeys and hams and soups and salads. In those days, French pastries. They were beautiful, beautiful! I'd never before seen a man sitting all unshaven in a suit he'd slept in for a month, lousy with lice, sitting in front of a beautiful French pastry. There were flowers and birds and they were just beautiful. Then all of the other restaurants heard about it. They'd say, "Send your truck, and we'll give you all the leftovers." That truck was going around the city every night, and people who would entertain in clubs and such places, would always call and send the leftovers down. We knew that they made more than they knew they would need because they wanted to send it to a good place. That was a big help.

My father was very modest. Nobody knew who was running the mission for about eight years. It was anonymously done. You couldn't do that these days, but anyway, he did. The way they found out, there were some men who were on the loose, here, wanted by the police. What the police did was to go all over the city, and wherever there were wanted men, they would take them in. Thus, they came to the Mission. It was then that they first found that my father was supporting that mission by himself. Nobody knew anything about it.

FELDMAN: That was quite a responsibility to take on.

LIDDECOAT: Yes, but it was something he did himself. It grew. Then when Mrs. Stocker left that money, the Board of the Mission – they were all businessmen. I think that was where the mistake was made, because they shouldn't have had all businessmen. He was a businessman, so he thought they would do right. But they heard through attorneys that other people were leaving their money in their estates to the mission, and they became greatly excited about it. "Oh, we can build something different here. It won't be like the old mission. We'll have our own "facility." That's what took place.

GOLAS: So your father left, really, because there was a divergence of views and they were at odds philosophically, too, right?

LIDDECOAT: That's right. And he was losing his health and his sight, too. He had diabetes, and he was totally blind for several years. I gave up my position in Santa Barbara to come home to take care of him.

FELDMAN: When he was no longer able to supervise the mission, this Board of Directors took it over?

LIDDECOAT: Yes, they directed it. Everybody gets a salary now.

FELDMAN: Your father had no further contact with them? Did your father continue with them, even then?

LIDDECOAT: No, no. I was in Santa Barbara, working at the County Welfare Department and he'd come up and spend time with me. Then I had to go to make a study for the American Public Welfare Association. That took me to Norway, Sweden and Denmark. It was a study on low-cost housing. We hadn't even started to talk about that here, but those countries were far ahead of us. So I went and made the study. They had an elaborate plan: they built houses out in the rural areas, big lots where they had trees.

FELDMAN: Who was doing this?

LIDDECOAT: Well, I made the study for the American Public Welfare Association on low-cost housing, because they thought the time had come that this country needed a plan.

FELDMAN: When was this? Do you recall?

LIDDECOAT: 1938.

FELDMAN: Oh, just before the Public Housing Authority was established.

LIDDECOAT: Yes. They'd show me these homes they had – a barn, chickens, fruit trees, a lot of space to plant vegetable gardens. Really nice. Well, they'd take me around to see them. They had some housing in town, too. Well, some housing; not much. Anyway, they were emphasizing that. Before I left, I said, "I'd like to ask you one question. Why are so many of those houses vacant?" They said, "They don't prefer that way of life." I said, "What do they want?" They said, "They want to live in an apartment where the mother can leave her children in the nursery and have a job." That's the way of life they wanted. So I reported that at this meeting of the American Public Welfare Association in Washington. Eleanor Roosevelt was there, and she came up to me and she said, "You know, what you said just changed our thinking on public housing in the United States. We're all for that nice home out in the country where they can raise a garden and milk the cows. But that isn't what they want."

FELDMAN: Who built these houses?

LIDDECOAT: The Public Welfare Departments; this was in Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

FELDMAN: But none here?

LIDDECOAT: No. I just went there to make the study.

FELDMAN: There was no study here?

LIDDECOAT: They never did it here. As Eleanor Roosevelt said to me that night when I reported, she said, "You just changed the thinking – because it wouldn't have worked here."

My father was with me – it was after he left the mission and his doctor wanted him to take the waters there in Carlsbad, Prague. It was when Hitler was there.

FELDMAN: Have you maintained any contact with the Midnight Mission since then?

LIDDECOAT: Yes, they call me to come to their events. They had an affair at the Biltmore Hotel, down at the Biltmore Bowl. I would have gone, but my legs were 94 years old. I was afraid to do it. I don't know – it's different. It's a different age, a different generation. It's nothing like it started out to be.

FELDMAN: Because it's no individual that's supporting them now.

Now let's back up and talk about your life. You said where you were born. You said some of the things you thought about when you were seven years old.

LIDDECOAT: That's right. A lot of people said, "How could you know what you wanted to do when you were seven?" One example, I knew what I wanted to do when I was seven, so I studied sociology; I went into the School of Social Work at USC, and I went to Santa Barbara during the Depression to work for ten years.

FELDMAN: But in between, you were doing something else. What were you doing before you went into the School of Social Work?

LIDDECOAT: I was in school, in high school, and I was going….

FELDMAN: You went directly on to college?

LIDDECOAT: Yes, I went directly from high school to 'SC. I was working in the mission, working with the home that my father had for wives and children, so I always, always remained in social work. I have to this very day. The Depression came and Santa Barbara was a very difficult place because……

FELDMAN: How did you happen to go to Santa Barbara?

LIDDECOAT: Well, I took field when I was at 'SC. I took my fieldwork at Red Cross, and Mrs. Jackson was the case supervisor. She knew somebody in Santa Barbara in the Welfare Department, Miss Brownlee. They said, "We need a trained social worker here, because there's nobody in that community who has that training. We just have to have someone. We have nobody – just the one (Miss Brownlee). Don't you know someone? Haven't you had students that you could recommend?" She said, "Yes, I have, I have the cream of the crop." So, she said, "They would like to see you." I said, I'm in the midst of getting my masters, and I'd like to finish that." Well, the Depression had hit and they called Dr. Bogardus and said, "I think she should take a leave, because we need somebody up here so bad, and she meets the requirements. I think she'll handle it." "Oh, but you're interfering with her education." Well, anyway, he finally relented and said, "Well, go up there for a year and then come back and finish your masters."

It was a most difficult political situation there.

FELDMAN: That was the Santa Barbara Public Welfare Department?

LIDDECOAT: Yes, the County Welfare Department located in the courthouse. The political situation was delicate. This Miss Brownlee was the head of it. In fact, she was it, because the department hadn't developed yet.

FELDMAN: Was that Aleta Brownlee?

LIDDECOAT: Aleta – you know Aleta Brownlee?

FELDMAN: Oh, yes.

LIDDECOAT: You do? She was with Red Cross. She's certainly not living now, is she?

FELDMAN: No, no, she died some years ago.

LIDDECOAT: And you knew Aleta Brownlee?

FELDMAN: Yes, I did. We were good friends.

LIDDECOAT: Oh, for heaven's sakes! When did you know her?

FELDMAN: When she left Santa Barbara, she went the State Department of Social Welfare, and I was a regional director. We began to have contact, and then became personal friends.

LIDDECOAT: For heaven's sakes!

FELDMAN: She and my husband did a lot of work together.

LIDDECOAT: Oh, I'm so anxious to hear this, because I wondered: I never heard about her later.

FELDMAN: She finally retired to a beach town north of San Francisco – Solano Beach. She lived there for the rest of her life.

LIDDECOAT: To old age?

FELDMAN: I think she must have been about 70.

LIDDECOAT: Oh, I'm so glad to hear, because I've often thought of her and wondered. I felt sorry because of the political situation that she was in there in Santa Barbara. She said to me, "I can't go to the Board of Supervisors anymore. You're going to have to go." I said, "I'm just out of college. How can I handle that Board of Supervisors?" She

said, "When I go before them, I freeze. I just can't say a word. You're going to have to go. I freeze every time." So there was this situation when Aleta Brownlee left, and I had to take over and appear before the Board of Supervisors. The Chairman of the Board was unrealistic about what was happening to families. The Depression was getting deeper and deeper, and it was something that Santa Barbara never had to deal with before. I would go before them and tell them there were families who had been evicted, their furniture was out on the sidewalk and they were sleeping in their beds on the sidewalk and they had no food. We had to do something. What could they do? "Tell them to eat grass." So, that was what I was up against. Little by little, I said, "I'd like to have a case committee appointed." That was, of taxpayers. Every Tuesday morning I met with them, and I would take the case files, discuss the cases, and little by little, they realized there was need and the public should do something about it. Then little by little I got through to the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, especially when I pointed out that the state was appropriating some money. Of course, I believed in people working for what they received, but the demand was so great that couldn't be done. But we set up work projects in Santa Barbara, such as cleanup, building swimming pools, building recreation facilities, and planting palm trees down on the front of Cabrillo Boulevard. Also, building schools. We did a lot of things. Harry Hopkins was in Washington – you know what an influence he was on Franklin Roosevelt. He heard about it and sent his friend, Ray Branion – I don't know if you remember Ray Branion. Aleta Brownlee was very close to him. He sent Ray off to Santa Barbara to see what we were doing. When he went back to Washington, he said, "Why don't you have that Miss Liddecut (that's what he called me) come back to Washington? I think we can use her to set up a work

program." "Oh," Ray Branion said, "she's too young." I was 25 years old, just out of college.

I didn't go, but Franklin Roosevelt remembered it. When they appropriated funds for children, he said, "You're going to get the first appropriation, and you're going to set up a model for the rest." He did that. We went all through those WPA days.

FELDMAN: How long were you in Santa Barbara?

LIDDECOAT: Ten years.

FELDMAN: Ten years. So, you were there while George Nickel was in Kern County, doing the same thing.

LIDDECOAT: Yes, yes. Mr. Hecht in Ventura County, and Charles Schottland – remember Charles Schottland?

FELDMAN: Yes, he was a good friend. The first oral history I did was with him. My first oral history was with Charles Schottland.

LIDDECOAT: He made great contributions. Those days; my goodness! Those were very, very difficult days, but somehow, we got through them. Of course, social welfare has gone through many changes. I can't imagine school today and how it is. Who enrolls in the School of Social Welfare today?

FELDMAN: Who goes?

LIDDECOAT: Yes. It appeals to – you want to go into social work.

FELDMAN: It appeals to people who want to help other people.

LIDDECOAT: That's what you have to have. We didn't have that during the Depression.

FELDMAN: No.

LIDDECOAT: You see, people who lost their jobs and then they went and took the year's training in social work and they got positions of some sort that never should have been there. That happened as a result of the Depression. I wonder, today – I'm glad to know that there are people who have feelings and not just an occupation or a paying job. They have more than that. They want to help people.

FELDMAN: Yes, I think that's an essential qualification for admission to the School, wanting to help people.

LIDDECOAT: That's good.

FELDMAN: What did you do after you left Santa Barbara? You said you were there ten years.

LIDDECOAT: Yes. My father lost his sight; he was totally blind. He had diabetes. I couldn't leave him alone; it was my responsibility, and I wanted to do what I could for him, because he had lived such a wonderful life – a selfless life. So I took a leave of absence from Santa Barbara to come down to be with him in his home. He was blind, but he knew how to get around, and I would drive him in the car. That was – he died in 1942, and Mr. A.M. Johnson and Scotty (Walter Scott) both used to go to the Mission for many years. Scotty would come to town and go in there and talk to the fellows. He'd say they were down on their luck and he'd like to cheer them up. Mr. Johnson would go and talk to my father, because he wanted to encourage him and he thought it was effective. He didn't give him any money; my father was paying out of his own pocket. Mr. Golas, with Frashers Fotos, issued a published, *The Partners*. It has an excellent photograph of Scotty and Mr. Johnson at Scotty's Castle. (Note: the photo is the in Midnight Mission collection of CSWA; a copy is attached to this interview.)

FELDMAN: That's a great picture.

LIDDECOAT: So Mr. Johnson would come and visit with him, my father. My father was still in business; he was shipping. He'd do the Mission work at night and conduct his business during the day. I had no mother, my father had no wife. Mr. Johnson would say, "When you come to Chicago, I want you to stay at our home." Mr. & Mrs. Johnson had a beautiful white marble home there in Chicago. He was president of a company. Can you see the date on that? It's about the building he owned there in Chicago. That's historic (pointing to picture).

GOLAS: It's this building right here on LaSalle, isn't it?

LIDDECOAT: Yes. In Chicago, he owned that building. It was a life insurance company. So we would go – is there any date that this was published.

GOLAS: It doesn't say, but it was just as electricity was coming in.

LIDDECOAT: Just when electricity was coming in.

GOLAS: Looks like 19.....

FELDMAN: Are those pictures identified? (Editor's note: the pictures are now in the Midnight Mission Collection of CSWA).

GOLAS: Somewhere, most of them are. It's just Mr. Johnson – looks like his office building and work going on.

LIDDECOAT: Does it show him?

GOLAS: I think so. It's embossed with his name on it, so it's something obviously prepared for him as a memento.

LIDDECOAT: Mr. Johnson was also in the picture. His father was 87 years old. He and his father were on a train, asleep in a berth, and a mule was on the track – it was a

one-gauge track. They stopped the train, because a mule was on the track. The brakeman didn't brake far enough back to stop when another train was coming – a double gauge. That train went right into the single gauge. His father was killed – many people were killed, and Mr. Johnson's back was broken. In those days they didn't know how to set backs. He was in the hospital for a year-and-a-half. They went there and dressed him. I said to him, "How did you feel that day?" He was 27 years old with his nurse and his wife there. He could hardly stand. He had been in bed a year-and-a-half with that broken back, in the hospital. This is referring to a photo of young Mr. Johnson standing flanked by a nurse and Bessie Johnson with crutches.

FELDMAN: And they didn't have physical therapy then as they have now.

LIDDECOAT: They didn't set backs. So he was crippled the rest of his life. There he was, 27 years old. He said, "I've been in bed a year-and-a-half, and they'd prop me up. My future was gone. Nothing can help me." Anyway, he went into the insurance business. He was a trained engineer, but he couldn't work at that. He couldn't sit in a chair and he had a terrible walk. He was badly crippled. But Scotty – Scotty came to town, and he met him. He said, "You ought to come to Death Valley. You'd feel better." Well, Johnson was raised a Quaker, and he had a special way of living, but he used to get these wild west magazines and read them. When he met Scotty he was intrigued. He went to Death Valley for a month and Scotty took him riding on mules. I'm telling you, that being out in the dry climate and the motion of the mule did something to his back.

FELDMAN: Better than a physical therapist.

LIDDECOAT: That's right. I take crippled children now – I have for many years - to where they have the horses. We put them on the horses – cerebral palsy. You know

those children want to get out and run. They feel cured. The motion, the warmth, the motion of the horse does miracles. Anyway, it did for Mr. Johnson. He could walk much better, and he just felt wonderful. Then he decided to remain, and he put up two buildings to house – they had to have supplies to be away, as they were, for a couple of months. So he put up two concrete buildings. He said, "Well, if I do something about the architecture and the furnishings, maybe Mrs. Johnson will like to come out." That was the start of the castle. They never expected anybody to go there and look at it, but they do, by the thousands.

FELDMAN: Yes, they do.

LIDDECOAT: It was just a home out in the desert, and he had the funds. People asked why he spent so much money. He said, "A lot of men spend it gambling on horses. I want a home in the desert where I feel I regained my health." He had the money then. While he was building the castle, he would come to the Midnight Mission and visit with my father. Then after my mother died, my father had no one to leave me with. He had taken me out of school and we went all over the United States and Canada to commission houses where he was shipping. He wanted me to go to Chicago and stay in the Johnson home. One time I didn't go, because the school people got after my father and said, "She has to be in the school. You can't take her out of school to travel." He said, "She's learning geography." They said, "She's not learning fractions, is she? There are a lot of things she's not learning. You have to have her in school." So he finally found somebody to stay with me, and he would travel. On one trip to Chicago, he became very ill. Instead of going to Mr. Johnson's home, he went to a hotel and called Mr. Johnson. He said, "I won't be there because I'm very ill and I think I should be in a hotel." Mr.

Johnson got his chauffeur and a blanket and took him from the hotel to his home. He was there for over a month. He didn't think he was going to live. Mr. Johnson came out and called me out of school and said, "Mary, your father is very ill. He's not going to live." Oh – my mother had died, my grandmother had died, and my dog had been killed, and now the only relative I had, my father, was dying. I went back in the room, put my head on the desk – I didn't want the other children to see me cry. I thought, "What's going to happen to me? Will they put me in an orphanage, or what? What's going to happen to me? Maybe I'll just be out on the street. I don't know." Anyway, Mrs. Johnson was a fine person. She was a very fine person. She used to visit my father in their home about twice a day. He had nurses around the clock, because his illness was very serious. She would go in and visit with him, and it meant so much. I always felt obligated to her. That's the reason I accepted being on the Board for the Foundation.

GOLAS: The Gospel Foundation?

LIDDECOAT: Yes.

FELDMAN: I want to know what the Gospel Foundation did.

GOLAS: One thing to sort of segue that maybe isn't clear is…..

FELDMAN: Say that again.

GOLAS: Mr. Johnson came all the way by train from Chicago to talk to Mary and to tell her about her father. Also, the other thing that's very cute that Mary has told me about him being a Quaker, and being raised a Quaker, having those wild west magazines, he had to hide them, secretly.

LIDDECOAT: But when Scotty came along (laughing), he took advantage of that.

GOLAS: (to M.L.) All right. Would you like to serve some tea?

LIDDECOAT: Yes, a little refreshment.

GOLAS: I've learned, with Mary, one does not refuse her hospitality. (laughter) What can I do to help?

(Interview was interrupted while tea was served).

FELDMAN: When you left Santa Barbara and you came here – is that right? You came to Los Angeles from Santa Barbara?

LIDDECOAT: Yes.

FELDMAN: What did you do then?

LIDDECOAT: I took care of my father who was blind.

FELDMAN: For how long?

LIDDECOAT: Till he died, which was in 1942, and the day after his funeral, I had a call from the Red Cross. We were at war. Having been known to the Red Cross from my field work at 'SC, they said, "We need you, we need you badly. We have to increase our staff." So, I was with the Red Cross for the duration: five years.

FELDMAN: Was that the Red Cross in Los Angeles?

LIDDECOAT: Yes.

FELDMAN: How long were you there?

LIDDECOAT: Five years – the duration of the War.

GOLAS: What was your title?

LIDDECOAT: I was the head supervisor, chief supervisor. I'm trying to think of the name of the lady who was…….

FELDMAN: That was Hazel Craycroft who was there?

LIDDECOAT: Who?

FELDMAN: Hazel Craycroft.

LIDDECOAT: Oh, yes. She's still living, isn't she?

FELDMAN: I don't know. I haven't heard anything about her for a number of years.

LIDDECOAT: She and Miss O'Connor.

FELDMAN: Oh, Catherine O'Connor.

LIDDECOAT: They lived together at this point in Glendale. At the end of the War, the Red Cross wanted to send me overseas for the half-American children that were being born in Germany. But Mr. Johnson – Mrs. Johnson had died, and he wanted to set up a foundation. They had an agreement that the one that was left would set up a foundation, so it was time for him to do that.

GOLAS: They had one also in Chicago, right, before they moved?

LIDDECOAT: Right. But, he wanted to set this one up in a way that it would be in operation before he died. He asked me to serve. I said, "No, I can't do that." He said, "Listen, I want to develop the properties I have and then sell them and donate the proceeds to the Foundation."

FELDMAN: What was the purpose of the Foundation?

LIDDECOAT: What was that?

GOLAS: The purpose of the Gospel Foundation.

LIDDECOAT: Helping disabled children. It didn't restrict, but we selected things that Mr. and Mrs. Johnson had been contributing to, and then added many others. We opened storefront youth centers in southern and northern California, and we had counselors go there after school and help children with their homework. I always kept huge baskets of all kinds of apples, and they enjoyed that. They disappeared quickly, because most of the

youngsters were hungry. Then the counselors talked to them about their schoolwork and played games and kept them off the streets constructively. The boys who had bicycles could come and work on them. They'd play ping-pong and basketball.

FELDMAN: Where were these located? Do you recall?

LIDDECOAT: In different parts of town, wherever we felt there was space and need and got local organizations to sponsor them, so they would continue. I'd say that all over the state we had about a hundred. Then, they sent children to camp; maybe thousands of children to summer camps, winter camps, and camps that would provide special services like Camp Fox in Catalina for children who were emotionally disturbed. We also did a lot of things for the physically handicapped. I thought, because Mr. Johnson was physically handicapped, it was in order. We'd buy buses, small transport buses down at the airport. What was the name of that actor? They named an airport for him.

GOLAS: John Wayne?

LIDDECOAT: John Wayne Airport. They would use those buses for 100,000 miles and then they'd sell them. We'd buy them for $6,000 a bus, and we'd take the seats out so we could put wheelchairs in and fasten the wheelchairs down. Those buses, today, are still in service. The children would go to camp that way, go to functions, go to school, go here and go there. They served wonderful purposes.

The Johnsons were interested in children who were thrown out of school. We found schools that would take them and paid for their tuition and kept them out of crime.

GOLAS: What's always impressed me about things Mary has told me over the years, it seems, is how the Gospel Foundation operated. She very much tried to let Mr. and Mrs.

Johnson and what their philosophies were and the activities in their lives dictate how things were run out of the Foundation. I thought that was unusual.

FELDMAN: I think it is unusual.

GOLAS: It made it highly successful. Also, the regions where the money was raised so even kids from Death Valley would be accepted to camp, because of the role of the Johnson's property there.

FELDMAN: So children from all over California came, or was it primarily Death Valley?

GOLAS: California, like the source of the – we have a paper we came across that shows Mr. Johnson identified where his assets were. One of the big ones was the ranch up at Walnut Creek, the Shadelands Ranch, which had been Mrs. Johnson's ancestral home.

LIDDECOAT: That house was preserved. They have a plaque on the place designating it as a historical monument.

GOLAS: What struck me when I went up there to take a few things up to the – it's called Shadelands Ranch, now – when Mary and Mr. Webb, under the Foundation's tenure, developed it, it was a really spectacular industrial development for its time. It's got jogging paths and lots of the green belt had been preserved. She saved the house, when she hooked up with the Historical Society. Now even that's being used. When the Foundation was operating, that house had many other uses as well. I think there was a time when it was a home or a school for cerebral palsy children.

LIDDECOAT: That's because of Mr. Johnson. Also, it had mentally retarded – not for Mr. Johnson.

GOLAS: No. So, there were a lot of uses.

LIDDECOAT: That house, which is operated by the Historical Society, next year will be a hundred years old. They're going to celebrate.

GOLAS: It's used now for a lot of educational purposes: school kids come over, a lot of people get married there; they have fairs and celebrations and other things. It's still in use by the community.

LIDDECOAT: Both places are restored and kept for historical ....

GOLAS: And public. They're open to the public and provide a lot of different uses.

FELDMAN: Are they supported, still, from the Gospel Foundation?

LIDDECOAT: The Foundation is dissolved.

FELDMAN: The Foundation is dissolved. Who supports them now?

GOLAS: I think the Historical Society of Walnut Creek is a community group, and they support themselves. The Park Service, of course, owns Scotty's Castle now, so the federal government takes care of that.

LIDDECOAT: Mr. Johnson didn't want it continued indefinitely because, he said, he didn't intend the Foundation to change, and he had seen the purpose of others lead to complete change. He said, "I don't want to see that happen. I'm asking you," I had just turned 40, " because you're old enough to have some sense, and you're young enough to see this completed during your lifetime. That's why I want you to have the responsibility."

GOLAS: Mr. Johnson was also involved in the Midnight Mission's changing of the guard that took place, and he saw how Mary's father was, in some ways, pushed out. His original concept wasn't what his heart wanted to do. A large board, a lot of infighting started going on politically, so that seemed to, from what I've heard, shade how Mr.

Johnson wanted the Gospel Foundation set up with a small board and not having it go on forever.

FELDMAN: So the Foundation is now out of existence, but you have the documents of the Gospel Foundation, too?

GOLAS: Some, I think. (to M.L.) You've gotten rid of a lot of the Foundation documents, right? There's a few here and there. There's some photos of the camps and the campers and some letters they've written, and some of those earlier things when the Foundation was formed with the estate.

FELDMAN: Those are the important things to hold on to.

GOLAS: I don't know. Do you have a copy of the articles of the incorporation? I think that also talks about the purpose, but you can get that from the Secretary of the State.

FELDMAN: Yes, that would be helpful, and I was wondering whether you have them for the Mission. Or are those at the Mission?

GOLAS: I think they're at the Mission.

FELDMAN: What do you think would happen if we asked the Mission whether they would turn their papers over to us?

GOLAS: I don't know. I haven't had any contact with them. I would think from their perspective it would be a burden to keep them. If they haven't gotten rid of them, I don't know why they wouldn't.

FELDMAN: That's what happens with many agencies, and we don't get to them soon enough.

GOLAS: I would ask. The worst they could do is say no.

FELDMAN: Is there any special person you think of?

GOLAS: Some person stands out. Is that same person still on the Board that……

LIDDECOAT: He was head of Forest Lawn.

GOLAS: He's gone?

LIDDECOAT: Smith, Myron Smith.

FELDMAN: Well, I'll see who is on record as the executive of it now and approach them.

GOLAS: There are some, like I said, documents that Mary has kept that had to do with her father personally, like writings.

FELDMAN: I think that's very interesting to have.

LIDDECOAT: He wasn't incorporated to begin with, but he was just doing it – every night feeding the men.

FELDMAN: Did you say it was or was not incorporated?

LIDDECOAT: It was not incorporated to begin with, because he didn't want – he wasn't building up anything. He was just feeding the hungry men at night. In those days, people weren't thinking of incorporation. But then, he was notified that he had to vacate, because they were going to tear the building down and put up a building for some company. He had to look for another location, and he thought, "I had better incorporate this time."

He had just been through this experience with Dr. Yokum, whom I previously mentioned, with his home when he died and hadn't incorporated. All the people were thrown out on the street, because the family didn't want it. My father took in some of them, and he didn't want the same thing to happen. He knew that he had just a daughter, and that was a man's work. He didn't think he should involve me in that. Since he had

that terrible example of people being thrown out, he didn't want that to happen at his death. That's when he decided to incorporate. He put on the board all businessmen. Of course, he was a businessman, but he should have had more than businessmen.

GOLAS: (to M.L.) One of the reasons you went to USC was because of a friendship of your father with – was it the head of the department or the president of the school?

LIDDECOAT: Dr. Von KleinSchmidt. He made that school, he really did. He traveled in foreign countries, made contacts with royalty. We used to have a prince, more princes in class from all over the world. He made that school.

FELDMAN: Yes, he did.

LIDDECOAT: Remarkable man. I knew his wife. When I was on campus, I worked on the first dormitory for women. I did a lot of work for them. Then Betty, their daughter – we were good friends. We shared textbooks together.

FELDMAN: Did you write a thesis when you were getting your master's? Did you write a master's thesis?

LIDDECOAT: I was in school when, during the Depression, a call came from Santa Barbara. They had to have somebody. I was writing a thesis, and if they could have waited for maybe four months, I would have completed it. Then this call came, and Dr. Bogardus didn't want to release me, but they finally convinced me – for one year, though I stayed to come for ten years – so I didn't get back to finish the thesis.

FELDMAN: Now, you brought us up to when you were 40 and working on the Foundation. How long did you operate the Foundation?

LIDDECOAT: Forty-two years.

FELDMAN: Forty-two years. You stayed there for the rest of your working time?

LIDDECOAT: Until we concluded the work of selling parcels of land over a period of time. The ranch was just $2,000 an acre. You couldn't even sell it, as Mr. Johnson said. When he was dying, he said, "Now, the ranch – you can't sell it, because it's farmland. You can't even get $2,000 an acre. But if you keep it, maybe you can get $5,000." And he said, "The castle – I don't know what you can do with that." He thought it would be just ruins, because the Park Service didn't have money to operate it. They couldn't take it over.

GOLAS: Johnson offered it as a gift to them, at one point, and they couldn't take it.

LIDDECOAT: It cost too much to operate, they way they operate. We couldn't operate that way.

GOLAS: (to M.L.) Before we go too far, and maybe I wasn't paying enough attention, but it's an important point – the way you accepted Mr. Johnson's entreaty to take over the Foundation was because of what happened with your father when he was so ill, right?

LIDDECOAT: Mrs. Johnson's. When a person is even near death's door, something is needed to bring them back, and she did it. She did it, and I always felt obligated. When he asked me to serve, I said "no," but then I got to thinking I was a selfish person. I should do it for Mrs. Johnson, because this is really what she wanted done with the property and the money. So I thought I'd do it for her. I think some good work did come from it. Little did I realize I was in for 42 years.

GOLAS: Mr. Johnson died sooner than anyone expected.

LIDDECOAT: Yes, he did. He died suddenly. He had this injury, and he had to use a catheter, which caused a cancer, which he didn't know. Suddenly, there was a stoppage, and he called me to come over to ride in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. It was

a quick meeting. He said, "You will have control of the Foundation, because I'm afraid I'm dying." He was dead in three weeks. They operated and found the cancer.

FELDMAN: Think of how much more we know now about medical treatment.

LIDDECOAT: He had it for a long time from the use of a catheter all day, many times a day. There was no healing. It was as though he was stabbed and caused an injury, and it developed into a cancer. They just didn't know until it was the end.

GOLAS: (to M.L.) What did you do immediately? What was your first thought now? It was post-War, and you were not going to Germany, and Mr. Johnson had passed away and you were now in charge of his estate and his Foundation.

LIDDECOAT: I didn't expect Mr. Johnson to die so quickly.

GOLAS: I know, that's why I'm asking. It must have been quite a shock to you as well.

LIDDECOAT: Oh, it was a great shock to me. A great shock.

FELDMAN: Did you have an advisory board or an advisory committee of some kind to work with?

GOLAS: Asking whether you had an advisory committee of some kind, one thing I thought was interesting that you told me: there was a fellow by the name of Walter Webb who had worked for Mr. Johnson in Chicago, in his insurance business. He then came out west and did various things for him. I think Mary called upon him to do a few things for the Foundation.

LIDDECOAT: He knew Mr. Johnson for many, many years. In fact, he was the executive vice-president of his company, an insurance company. I knew that Mr. Johnson had confidence in him. Of course, this all happened very suddenly. Mr. Johnson hoped that the Foundation would be operating these properties by the time he

died, but he died much sooner. I turned to Mr. Webb and asked if he could help in a business way, not in the social work business. He was a businessman, and he did. He brought a good attitude toward it, and he had ability. He met with the planning commissions up north and city officials. He was very good at that. He wasn't after a lot of money. He felt good about Mr. Johnson and what he was doing. That was a big help to me, because not all people think women have business ability. This one man said, "Women don't have intelligence, but they have intuition." (laughter)

GOLAS: Having known Mary all these years and having various conversations, it seems a lot of those relationships, because of what her father and mother did, always became resources throughout her life. It was quite a network of people. When you were developing Shadelands, weren't you talking to a fellow who had something to do with the Bullock's Wilshire property?

LIDDECOAT: Yes, you're right.

FELDMAN: When you were developing what?

GOLAS: The Shadelands Ranch up in Walnut Creek.

FELDMAN: Would you spell that for me?

GOLAS: Shadelands? It's S H A D E L A N D S.

FELDMAN: Okay.

LIDDECOAT: It's quite a part of the community, because it was there. There were 4,000 walnut trees we had to take care of, and harvest. We opened up the open land to the community - especially the children – to garden. It made quite an impact.

GOLAS: Was it a community garden?

LIDDECOAT: Yes, a community garden. I remember this caretaker we had. He said, "One night at 9:30, a mother and father brought their nine-year-old boy. He would not go to bed until he had watered his garden." They went on and watered the garden. So, especially children took a great interest in it.

LIDDECOAT: Aleta Brownlee, when in Santa Barbara, gave me much content to start from. When she left there, she was so deeply depressed, I said, "It's not your fault that Leo Presker – he…….

FELDMAN: I think she got over that Santa Barbara experience, and she really did some remarkable things afterwards.

LIDDECOAT: And she was where? First she went up north……

FELDMAN: She went up north and worked for the State Department of Social Welfare.

LIDDECOAT: In Sacramento?

FELDMAN: Yes, in Sacramento. She was field director for that northern region.

LIDDECOAT: I wonder what division she was in. Have you any idea?

FELDMAN: The State Department of Social Welfare. It was in the family and children services. Not just the children's services but public assistance, public welfare service.

LIDDECOAT: They had divisions. The American Public Welfare Association was backing me. There was an opening coming up. Miss Pope……

FELDMAN: Aleta was not with American Public Welfare Association. She was with the California State Welfare Department.

LIDDECOAT: Yes, but the American Public Welfare Association people were backing me to be appointed as the head of the Children's Division in the State agency.

FELDMAN: Lucille Kennedy became the director of the children's division.

LIDDECOAT: Children's Division of the State?

FELDMAN: Of the State.

GOLAS: There was another link to Mr. Johnson in Mary's time in Santa Barbara – I guess he had oil leases in Santa Maria, didn't he? He would pass through Santa Barbara and stop to watch Mary standing up to Mr. Presker.

LIDDECOAT: I didn't know Mr. Johnson was there: the board meetings were standing room only. People were crowding in, especially the "Worker's Alliance, as they called themselves."

FELDMAN: The Worker's Alliance of America – I remember them very well. They were a nationwide union of unemployed. They had me and my staff locked in my office (in the California State Relief Administration) for three nights once, because they were making demands that we couldn't meet. I remember them very well!

LIDDECOAT: Oh! They were Communist motivated.

FELDMAN: I suspect many of them were.

LIDDECOAT: Absolutely! They would come in the offices with their bats, break the furniture, break the jaws of some of the workers. Communists! These Communists came in and motivated the local people.

FELDMAN: That was quite a time.

LIDDECOAT: A terrible time that we went through.

GOLAS: This fellow, Leo Presker, was on the Board of Supervisors, and Mary would have to go and stand up to him.

FELDMAN: In Santa Barbara?

GOLAS: In Santa Barbara. Mr. Johnson would be standing in the back, watching, and that's another thing that impressed him.

LIDDECOAT: I didn't know he was there.

GOLAS: (to M.L.) You would take a stand, and once you did, you wouldn't let go.

LIDDECOAT: He thought that was important, and that was one of the reasons he asked me later to serve. But, those were very difficult times.

FELDMAN: Yes, I'm glad to say we've not had them repeated. Sometimes you wonder whether they will come back.

LIDDECOAT: I'm so glad to know about George Nickel.

FELDMAN: Oh, George, yes. I'll send you the little book about him.

LIDDECOAT: He kept active until the end?

FELDMAN: Oh, yes, he…..

LIDDECOAT: He was born in 1906. I felt much younger than he.

FELDMAN: George not only started our archives organization, but he remained as president for ten years, and then I took his place.

LIDDECOAT: Oh, he did?

FELDMAN: Yes, he was president for ten years. Then, he also did a lot of things with the California legislature.

LIDDECOAT: He was Dr. Bogardus' protégé?

FELDMAN: Yes. George did many things with the legislature. He got various programs through that everyone had given up, like Lanham Act child-care centers after World War II. He spearheaded that effort. Then my husband went into mental health. He was determined we were going to do something about mental health, but he needed

legislative help. He would turn to George, and George would go see all the assemblymen, and so forth. He did that right up to his death. He really was a very important figure.

LIDDECOAT: Oh, yes! He stayed with it. Was he active in the last years?

FELDMAN: Well, the last year, he didn't get around very much. He had Parkinson's. When he just had a tremor, he could manage, but then the Parkinson's began to affect his throat and speech. But he would still come to committee meetings right up to the very end. The last couple of days, he could not talk at all. He was fading very fast. I had gone to see him, and he died the day after I last saw him. He lived in Arcadia for many years.

LIDDECOAT: Was his wife alive then?

FELDMAN: She's still alive. She's in a rest home. Their daughter lives in their house.

I want to ask you two questions. Is there some way that you can identify some of these pictures and write on the back of them what they are?

GOLAS: Yes, sure.

FELDMAN: I think that would be very helpful. And the other question I want to ask is whether you would say a little – you told me earlier how you and Henry Golas came to know each other, and I'd like you to repeat that for the tape.

LIDDECOAT: (to Golas) You do that, you do that.

FELDMAN: Start with your name.

GOLAS: It's Henry Golas, and my wife and I have always loved Death Valley. In the course of our researching – I'm in the movie business, so when I learned of Death Valley Scotty, I thought he'd make an interesting movie. I heard that Mary was still living, I

thought here was someone who knew Death Valley Scotty. I think I'll try to meet her. She was very cordial, but of course, discouraging about doing anything in the movies. That sort of set the tone of our relationship. Over the years, we've just been good friends and talked a lot about Death Valley and Scotty and the Johnsons and her work. Part of what I do as a sideline is to preserve photographs. It's nothing I make a living on. I just do it to help raise funds for preserving them, because a lot of them are nitrate negatives, and they have them vaulted here in L.A. in cold storage. I like having them seen again. We came up with that interpretive boxed note card set, where we talk a little bit about the history of the photograph and the history of the photographer. So, most of the images I have been involved with Frashers Fotos, Pomona photographers--Burton and Josephine Frasher--, and Stephen Willard, a Palm Springs-based photographer whose work was donated to the Palm Springs Museum. He has a studio in Palm Springs and a studio up in the Mammoth area, and has photographed the Death Valley quite a bit as well.

FELDMAN: How did you happen to get in touch with our School?

GOLAS: Mary had told me about her exploits at 'SC.

LIDDECOAT: But it was his idea to get in touch, not mine.

GOLAS: I was just going through her papers, and I didn't want to – she was saying, "Well, maybe you should throw that out," and I thought, "It seems to me…."

FELDMAN: Oh, I'm very grateful that it seemed so to you.

GOLAS: It seemed to me that….

LIDDECOAT: I'm a low-key person, and I don't like to talk about myself. But it was his idea.

GOLAS: I thought there were a lot of interesting linkages. Here, even you have a link to Death Valley. When you look at her family's history and the Johnsons and Death Valley Scotty and the Midnight Mission and the Foundation and all the lives it has touched, I've always thought it's also inspirational. It's nice, too, to come across some selfless people. Some were affluent, some were not, but they all turned their attention to people who were less fortunate.

Well, we talked about the Midnight Mission, but my knee-jerk reaction in having dealt with some of the photographs in that they are not in the business of preservation. So, giving the materials to them – I've seen a lot of places like that lose them. As you say, all of a sudden these things are too much of a burden or somebody likes something and it's taken. So, I thought this material has a lot of bearing on L.A. history and a lot to do with USC, because Mary was in an early class of that school.

FELDMAN: Did you take work at USC too?

GOLAS: No, I went to Cal Arts, which is an art school. It was started by Walt Disney. We have a rivalry with USC's film school.

LIDDECOAT: I was in the first class, the first cinema class at 'SC. That was way back. I just selected it, you know, how you select music appreciation and architecture – I went to architecture school, and I was the only girl. Of course, when I went to 'SC, there weren't many girls.

FELDMAN: I know that.

LIDDECOAT: The only idea of the girls who went to college was to marry a college man and walk through the pansy ring.

FELDMAN: Who was the teacher of that cinema class?

LIDDECOAT: I don't remember. It was a young fellow that was.... He was very young. He didn't look like a professor. Of course, my father and I knew Sid Grauman very well, and I said to them, "Wouldn't you like for your class to have a visitor, maybe like Sid Grauman who knows motion pictures, and everybody knows him." "Would he come?" I said, "Well, I'll ask him." So, the next time we went to dinner, I said, "We're starting a class in cinema at USC. Would you come and say a few words." "Oh, no." "Oh," I said, "yes, do that. It will encourage them to have somebody in the field say something." "Well, if your father will go with me...." My father said, "Sure, I'll go with you, Sid." So, they both came, and he spoke. He said, "Now, coming here to the University of Southern California, now I can say I've been to college." (laughter) He wasn't a college man by any means.

Then, Harold Lloyd came, because we knew him. Harold Lloyd's mother and my father went together in Central City, Colorado, when they were very young and almost married, until my father decided no. So he went to the local undertaker and said, "Could I borrow your coffin?" "To use it here? What are you going to do?" "I'm going to get into it." He powdered his face, put his Sunday suit on and got in the coffin. He said about Harold Lloyd's mother, "Tell her that I have been killed. I'm dead and I'm at the mortuary." He was trying to get rid of her, you know. He didn't want to go with her anymore. So she came in, "Oh, oh!" She carried on and said a lot of things she regretted saying. Then he sat up in the coffin. (laughter) That broke it up. Anyway, Harold Lloyd.....

FELDMAN: That's a pretty drastic way of breaking off a relationship.

GOLAS: Should have sent her some flowers or candy or something.

LIDDECOAT: When she moved to California, she would invite my father or me - she was still after my father – to dinner. He said, "My mother wants to talk about old times, so will you come to dinner?" We'd go, and she'd have a beautiful hair ribbon for me. Those were the days of hair ribbons. When she died, Harold asked my father to speak at her funeral. He came in his car and picked up the ones that built the house – Samuel Goldwyn, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Goldwyn, because he was with their studio. We all rode in the car together. That was the first time I'd seen them. They were still living.

GOLAS: This is the house on Camino Palmero?

LIDDECOAT: Yes, the next street, maybe. Harold said to me, "You know, Mary, my mother and your father should have married." I said, "It wouldn't be the same. It would not be the same. I think you got your talent, your acting talent from your father, so it would not have been the same, Harold." But that was the first time I saw the Goldwyns. They rode in the family car to the service, and we drove up, and I remember Mrs. Goldwyn saying to me when she got out of the car, she said, "I have a feeling you're going to do something in life. Do it!"

GOLAS: (to M.L.) When Mr. Johnson died, and the Foundation took over operation of that house, what were some of the things you did with it before you sold it? What did you use it for?

LIDDECOAT: Oh, we used it for young people – especially graduation night when they'd stay up all night. We had all kinds of meetings there; board meetings. We used it a lot.

GOLAS: Your father used to get a lot of requests for men who were to be executed to take the walk with them?

LIDDECOAT: What?

GOLAS: Your father, didn't he used to get a lot of requests from men who were on Death Row?

LIDDECOAT: Oh, yes. You see, he would help them down at the Mission, and many men he knew – they knew he was sincere. Several times, several times – I can't remember how many – a man would be on Death Row and would ask for my father to come and pray with him and walk with him to the electric chair. It was the electric chair then. I went up with him many times to San Quentin. They knew that he was sincere in helping them. It wasn't any feather in his hat or anything like that.

FELDMAN: He lived a very productive life, and so did you.

GOLAS: (to M.L.) Didn't the Foundation also – one thing I remember you told me that was an annual event. I guess there was a mother's day.

LIDDECOAT: He'd have lunch for mothers who had sons on Death Row – in prison and on Death Row, I should say. The Chaplain arranged for them to write cards or letters, and he would bring them down. He'd say see them in the morning on Mother's Day in the morning, brings them down and take them for lunch on Fairmont Street.

GOLAS: Clifton's?

LIDDECOAT: Clifton's. They'd read their letters from their sons. Many of them were on Death Row.

FELDMAN: That's a very poignant story.

GOLAS: That's what I like about hearing what the Foundation did. There were a lot of things that were very personal, almost surgical about how they were effective.

LIDDECOAT: It's hard for me to talk about what was done. It just isn't proper to let the left hand know what the right hand does, and here I am talking about it.

GOLAS: It might inspire someone else in a similar situation.

FELDMAN: Is there something else you'd like to have recorded? Either of you?

GOLAS: Is there anything else you'd like to make a point of?

LIDDECOAT: I've made too many points. (laughter) I talk too much. I believe in doing things but not talking about them.

FELDMAN: But if you talk about them, other people really are inspired to do something, too. So, your talking is also doing something.

GOLAS: That's what I liked about 'SC, too. (to M.L.) I know professionals will come across this and it might have some use. There's a lot there certainly. Also, as you mentioned, your father, too, was quiet

– and your mom, but she passed away when Mary was young. It's really sort of the fountainhead of her desire, and obviously, your family practiced it. You're always saying that example is really the strongest thing when you're dealing with somebody who's homeless or in your own family.

FELDMAN: I think what we have here is very valuable, and I appreciate your getting in touch with us in the first place. I hadn't intended to do the interview, myself, but when I heard that you had been in the School, I decided I would do that. I do thank you very much.

LIDDECOAT: I thank you for your interest.