



Marian Helen Simpson Gray
ROBS History Project
January 25, 2001 **66**

Marian Helen Simpson Gray has been married, divorced and living with her name longer than she'd been married. Her mother had seven sisters, one of them had a middle name Marian and another had a middle name Helen. That was how she got the names. Today she lives in Montpelier, the Capital of Vermont. Her daughter resides downstairs in the same condo and her son Arthur Gray, resides nearby in Montpelier with his third wife. They live close to one another. Marian has two grandchildren for whom she credits Arthur and a great granddaughter, currently a five-year-old little girl. Her son Arthur worked for the telephone company for years. He retired at fifty-five and is an expert in the new consumer technology and advises the telephone company with everything having to do with advertising and marketing of products pitched to the phone company's customers. She's doubly glad to have him as a son because he's a talented "*handyman*" for when anything stops working in her own place she's able to call him and have him come over and fix it.

Her daughter who lives downstairs has been a nurse on Long Island for a long while. She graduated from college the same year as Marian. She worked in a teaching college in Brooklyn, from which she retired last year and moved to Vermont, "*she insisted, to take care of her mother*". She gave Marian two grandchildren, both in the telephone company business and a five-year-old great granddaughter who Marian described simply as a "*lively young lady*".

Her youngest grandson will probably become an historian. She said he's a great storyteller and has a marvelous sense of humor with the same quality of getting along with people she so admires.

When I asked about her parents she said she'd prefer to talk about was the fact that she's a sixth generation Vermonter, something that right now is very important in Vermont. Her mother's family, rather, three of her great grandmother's families came up the Connecticut River from Cadillac and settled in Linden in 1797 or close to that. Her father's side of the family (Simpson) came in so they say, from Quebec as runaway kids from the orphanage as a new generation in Vermont. They arrived in 1840. We're old time Vermonters. Today in Vermont when we say, *"Take Back Vermont"*, they say, *"What do you want to take it back to?"* How long have you been there? Recently everybody seems to be interested in the topic. How long you've been there. *"I've heard about it my whole life. Actually, I knew my great grandfather who was born in 1832 which was the second generation. When people get old like I am we go back a long way. It wasn't that long ago someone in the family lived during the time of the revolutionary war. That would have been on the Hoffman branch of the family."*

Had any of the grandchildren yet shown interest in family history? She didn't think so. But they were interested in antiques, *"whatever they are"*, she said. She sees her children everyday but not her grandchildren because they are usually busy doing what kids of their age generally do. Marian knew her grandmothers but when she was born her grandfathers were already deceased. Her great grandfather lived to be 92. He taught her to tie her *"shoe strings"*, and all those *"important"* things. We thought the relationship that existed between grandparents and grandchildren could become very special if you were fortunate enough to be able to see them live long enough. Marian agreed, but added *"Sometimes it works itself out better than at others."*

My mother was one of ten children. She lived on a farm that was sold in 1803. Once upon a time, they had money because they lived in the part of the state where the *falls* were and they had brick works and a saw mill and all that stuff but she was far enough down that family road where the farm had run out. Actually, the wheat field had run out after the Civil War because they were raising all these potatoes to make whiskey to sell during the Civil War and the farm was not unusual, by the way, for a Protestant family in Vermont, because most of the Protestant families were small. She was born in 1890, so they were born and brought up very poor. She went to school in Providence, Rhode Island. She was a schoolteacher. So, her people thought they were intellectuals – ha! Were they not? When she came along her mother had to raise ten kids.

“Had she served in any way as a role model for you”? She didn’t know but said – “I think she did but, I had an Aunt – one of my mother’s younger sisters - who went to New York in 1926-27, and went to work and was (by the time I came along), one of the Vice Presidents of Norris Savings Bank. She was a younger sister and one of two professional women in the family out of eight who worked. They went to school in Linden in 1880, and I don’t know why, but then went to school in Montana graduating from college and continuing to Los Angeles, where one of them became a doctor and the other a Chemistry teacher”. These were women who were never married and when they died owned a lot of property in Los Angeles. They succeeded as professional women at a time when few if any unmarried women were allowed to succeed in a world dominated by men and whose success was severely and unfairly limited by traditional norms of behavior. They were the courageous trailblazers for future generations of Americans. “How many doctors were educated in 1880?” Marian asks us to consider. “I came from that kind of woman that was supposed to do things”, she said.

Then she said, “On my father’s side, this great, great grandmother of this great grandfather, she was born in 1832 in Irasburg, Vermont and went to Lowell, Massachusetts and worked and made professional button holes for tailors sometime around 1850. She married my grandfather who had gone down there from Linden to live. He was a butcher. She was almost thirty when she got married and she just had a couple of kids. I haven’t the faintest idea how she got from Irasburg, Vermont that is way up on the Canadian border, to Lowell by herself or with somebody else, but she went. My father was one of three children. His father died young. My father was one of the greatest men who lived in the world. He was a farmer but he was also very much a politician. He went to the State Legislature and gave me the assignment as one my first experiences to pass the petition around the neighborhood for Herbert Hoover to sign so that he could run for the President of the United States. That was my first political assignment by my father because of course he didn’t want to do it. He ran for Governor and was the one who set up the Old Age Assistance Program in the State of Vermont for Franklin Delano Roosevelt cause her father always voted Democrat. My mother voted Republican. My father was very much interested in politics. He ran for Governor several times but never won. He ran that program until it became the Department of Social Welfare and he was one of the very first people who had that kind of job when Roosevelt started up his program during the depression. He made the rules according to what the law said. He said, “They mean what I say they mean until the Courts say they don’t”. Of course, they started those programs in small states,

(And, Vermont is a small State) so that they could monitor it better. *"I would listen to this as I went along".* I told her, *"It sounds like your father had a very active business as well as professional life."* Was he around enough for you to spend time with him? *"Oh yes. I spent a lot of time with him. He judged in Waterloo. He judged in a lot of regional agricultural competitions and national cattle shows in Chicago".* Was it accurate to say you did have a farm? *"Oh, yes! My brother is still on the farm. It's been there since...."it's a little over two hundred years"*. This was your father's family farm? Uh, uh! It's still an active, working family farm then? *"Well no! My brother doesn't do anything but sell the hay"*. You must have some wonderful farm stories. *"Well, listen. I have cows". When my children were small my father wouldn't let me.... girls didn't go to the barn in my father's time. Then I married a farmer who didn't have these same compulsions. The more you worked the better off you were as far as he was concerned. It was not one of these happy marriages, but I learned a lot. One thing I learned was that I was much more interested in farm husbandry than I ever thought I would be. Because I thought I wasn't that interested. I found out that once you get involved in these things, you could become very interested. You look at this new calf that was born and you feel this is going to be the greatest cow that ever lived, if it was a heifer – bulls you don't care about".* Well, you had an early education then? *"Oh, I went to High School in an Institute and then I got married"*. Tell me did your father have a sense of humor? *"Oh, my father had a wonderful sense of humor, but he was a kind man"*. What made you say he was one of the greatest men that ever lived? *"The judgments he made. When my daughter was going to nursing school in Hanover, New Hampshire, and they were talking about psychology, she'd taken some courses and discovered that the basis for many of the decisions discussed in those textbooks cited judgments made by my father, in his work for the Department of Social Welfare. If he couldn't help people one way he'd reach in his pocket and help them in another and give them \$10. One of the things that happened when I was a girl, was one of his uncles was killed and they had four kids, actually he was killed by his wife, and they came to live with us. One day there were four of us, and the next day there were eight of us. Not everybody does that and of course we had room, because we lived on the farm. My mother's way of settling disputes when we were arguing was to tell us to take it outside. Argue it out there because we were all talkers"*. Your father's generosity reminds me of an old saying, *"When there's love in the heart, there's room in the home"*. Did your mother who came from such a large family have to scramble to be heard? Marian said she thought she held her own quite well. According to Marian her mother wasn't as brazen as she was being, she was more her father's daughter than her mothers. *"She did alright and she had a great sense of humor and she loved teenagers... Can you*

imagine that? She had six teenagers at one time in that house and she loved us all. It takes a lot of thinking. But she was good. She was a housewife”.

Tell us about your brothers and sisters. “Okay! There were four of us. My brother is still alive on the farm in Linden and he is a Republican, as much a Republican as he ever was. We don’t agree politically. I have a sister who lives in Wisconsin. Not only is she a democrat, she’s an atheist. We have a mixture of everything. My younger sister married a potato farmer from Maine who died several years ago, probably from the poison they used on the potatoes. Who knows? My sister had cancer. Three of us are still alive. My brother is 86 my sister is 83 and we’re still alive. We’re long lived people ... healthy...and lucky”.

“One of the things I learned from my brother and I complain about it all the time is that you can’t make everybody happy. Now I’m perfectly willing to go my way and make a lot of people unhappy. I don’t believe in sitting on the fence. My brother wants to make everybody happy. Everybody says he’s the kindest man in the world. The kindest man in the world is not the kind of person who makes everybody happy because you can’t do it. That’s what I’ve learned from my brother”.

It sounds like growing up and being a teenager in your life was almost idyllic; a time far removed from us today. “Yes, I think of the things we used to do at night. In the wintertime, we lived on a hill and you could slide for two miles on a sled. Of course, you could only do it at night because you had to see the lights coming up through the valley. My father really did not like us to do this. We’d have to do this when he wasn’t around. We’d have a travis – do you know what a travis is? Think of a long board with a sled on this side and a sled on this side. This is something that sixteen-year-old kids did. If you slid two miles down you’d have to walk two miles back. So you didn’t do it except on a moon lit night or with a flashlight. My kids couldn’t do it when they came along because by that time they had put salt and sand on the road and before that they were plowing the roads. So we had that window of a few years when we could do this and I graduated from high school in 1935 and it took a big boy to hold it and about eight of us to do it at night. Wonderful! It was something you had more control over than a toboggan. You pulled it with a rope and I was behind the first person and holding up the light over his shoulder. What would summers have been like on a dairy farm? I had a lot of work to do. I did some horse raking and raking hay and stuff like that.”

“Other than my immediate family members, there was one individual in my life growing up that perhaps had the greatest influence upon making me the

person I am today She was that woman in our community who could do almost anything but the one thing she couldn't do, was be compassionate. I think it was something I perversely most admired about her. I really admired her ability to do things. I learned to make judgments because she was so unequipped to be compassionate. If you were down and out she could be the nicest person in the world to you. She really was and if you were not, she had the most vicious tongue I ever knew. She was a real influence on my life because I admired so much what she could do and hated so much what she couldn't do. She was so skilled but I couldn't understand how she could be so jealous of someone else doing well. I think she probably had the most influence about how I think as an adult than anyone else outside my own family and she was just a neighbor, and she was so good. For instance, I didn't know this for years. My children used to come home from school and they had a long walk to come home from school and my son is the social one, and he stopped every night to see this woman on his way home from school and she fed him. She fed him! She always had something for him to eat. And he always told us, my goodness she was the best cook I ever had, and she was. She was a marvelous cook. But I never knew she did that. They didn't tell me. My daughter told me (Inaudible) but these kids father was much of a drunk but it doesn't make any difference, she was so good to those kids. Every single night... I never knew it. But once I got to where I graduated from college and I was doing well, she couldn't keep her tongue away from me. That's the kind of person she was".

Well, who influenced your choice of career then? *"I was a farmer when after the war my husband and I had a farm I really did the farm work. I did a lot of it. I learned to do a lot of things that I never expected to have to do. But when I found I needed a career and I had to leave this experience of living with a drunkard, in the first place I always thought I would make a great school teacher because there were school teachers in the family and there was Linden College right in the town and you could be a school teacher then and it wouldn't cost you a thing because the State had a program and they needed teachers in 1950. I started college in 1953, I think, and I graduated in 1958 and it was right there and it was free. This happened as a result of a marriage that didn't work and you had to make some decisions about what you were going to do with your life and I had my kids. I had them when I was young. By the time I graduated from college my daughter was graduating from Nursing School in Andover and my son was in the army. He didn't want to go particularly but unfortunately his behavior didn't help him. So I was free...free to get my own education".*

"She didn't maintain any of her early friendships and that included high school friends as well. Nevertheless, she always seemed lucky to be able to

manage making new friends along life's road. Neighborhood friends disappeared over time but family, including cousins always seemed to be there. Marian was always able to find new friends. She was assigned housework and was a 4H Girl. Some people take to Club work like ducks take to water well, that was she, and it happened when she was eleven. When she was eighteen she won the trip of a lifetime. She thought she would never do this again. It was two girls and two boys from the state of Vermont that went to Washington DC and tented on the lawn in front of the Washington Monument, for a week. Kids came from all over the country. There were four from each State and she came as the girl with the most personality from Vermont. That was the highlight of her life and knew that nothing like this would ever happen to her again and this was BIG at the time. It was in 1935 and she was on top of the world and Roosevelt was in the Whitehouse and while she was there, the light was on top of the Capital because Hughie Long was making one of his great filibusters and you could see it almost all night long because as long as they were talking on the floor of the Capital the light was on. That was history and she had seen some of it and if you live as long as she had, you will have seen a lot of history."

"She never had a paying job until after she graduated from high school. When she was going to college in Linden, she cleaned mansions over the summertime. But up until that time, here she was almost forty, and she'd never had a paying job. The biggest family holiday in her family every year would have been Christmas. They always did Thanksgiving too. Her mother always did big family dinners with cousins and aunts and uncles. As a youngster besides 4H what else was she interested in? Once she learned to read, and she was a very slow learner, she didn't learn to read until she was in the 4th grade for some reason, and she could not keep her nose out of a book. One of the things they had, because they lived on the farm and didn't get a chance to go to the library very often was - her father subscribed to the Saturday Evening Post. She read the Post from cover to cover. You read everything, which was a very good experience. "You read the jokes, you read the editorials, you read whatever they were saying about international life and you read the short stories and you start thinking of an education. Occasionally you'd get to learn from your exposure to a Norman Rockwell original on the cover, and the magazine was delivered every week. There were great short stories in there. I wasn't a very fast reader but I read all of them; Edgar Snow with his experiences in China, that's when I read, I wasn't a very fast reader but I read all subjects and I read about Senator Norris trying to get the Boulder Dam Project going, and what Roosevelt did when he came in, I read it all. The Saturday Evening Post was definitely a Republican publication, but they printed a lot of non party line stuff. Edgar Snow said he couldn't imagine them printing a lot of the stuff he sent in. But they did and I read them. I thought of

myself as older than women who are forty today think of themselves. When we asked if she was still a morning person having lived on a farm for so many years she explained something that people don't usually know about. You don't have to milk your cows at 7 am. She saw her husband get to a point where he didn't. You can milk them at 9 am if you start milking them tomorrow at 9 am. It's a schedule that you keep. He didn't like to get up at 7 o'clock, so I did." So that's still your personal preference? "Yes it is. I still get up at 7 o'clock, just like I always did. And as long as I taught school, which was twenty-four years, I was late only twice. Once my car didn't go and once I didn't wake up and that's the only time I was late in twenty-four years. I'm one of these people, when I say I'm going to do something, I do it. I asked if she has certain aromas that trigger past memories and associations for her... Oh, my goodness, yes! I tell stories like that all the time. I once had a little girl in the fifth grade in my class in Brentwood and she was a collector. When we went to the music Department, they'd pass down music books so that everyone had one. Then the music teacher started to notice when the books were being used every book had a different page missing. Eventually they figured out what was happening. That little girl with the angelic face was a "collector" She had decided that if she cut out a single page from every book eventually she could have her own complete copy of the music book. She was creating her own copy of the music book. When her mother found out she was not happy. I was a trustee of the library and finally got to the bottom of all the missing pages". I asked her if she remembered her first day of school. She said she and her brother went to all of the same schools but he was two years older than she. Naturally, he started two years before she did. She thought that she was just as smart as he was and she should be able to go so she went every time they would let her go to school, for two years." She couldn't remember if the first time she went was as a visitor or as a legitimate student in the school who really belonged there. It was a typical one-room schoolhouse, grades 1- 8, with a potbelly stove and benches screwed into the wooden floor. She and her brother were supposed to be walkers but it was such a long way to walk to school that they let them get a ride on the school horse and wagon in the morning. She described the driver as an old man with Parkinson Disease something terrible whose twitching she observed all the way up the hill to the school. She attended that school first and then the little red Village School next which was only about a mile away. Next she attended Linden Institute and then Linden State College from which she graduated in 1958. She matriculated from the Institute in 1935 so there were quite a few years in between high school and college – a period when life got in the way – nature, she said, "two children". She took a whole lot of courses when she was down in New York, but she always loved History. She still did. She gets by in math. She admitted to being terrible in the Language Arts.

Having admitted to living through a lot of history, I asked if she remembered the day that Franklin Roosevelt died. She did indeed remember; FDR died on April 12th 1945. Her father had gone up to the State House because they had put a rider on a Bill indicating that his old age assistance people could not get a free burial. So he went over to the State House from the farm to do some last minute lobbying to get the rider off his Bill. I was sitting there in the car waiting for him to come back so we could go home. He came down and said, "President Roosevelt died!" That's where I was. It was almost the same as my memory of when President John F. Kennedy died. I was teaching a class in Brentwood and I remember that as well. She told me she had vivid memories of World War II because her husband had fought in that war. He had been a replacement for a young man killed during the Normandy Invasion. He was wounded and ended up on the Czech border. He was in Patton's Ninetieth Army and saw as much action as any other outfit. Did he ever talk about it? Oh yes! Every time he was drunk, and that was often enough. Tom Brokaw said that the generation never talked about it but I said you should have been here on the farm with me every time he got drunk and talked about how they crossed the Moselle River, how many people went over and how many didn't come back. That group had over two hundred go over and only twelve came back) It was a terrible slaughter and I don't blame him for talking about it.

Marian taught Reading for two years in the State of Vermont before she came to Brentwood in New York. She took courses and became an expert reading teacher. Then as she was preparing to leave where she was teaching, she still didn't know where she'd go when there appeared an ad in the paper. Dr. Eugene Hoyt had placed an ad in the Vermont paper. He was looking for teachers. Someone showed her the ad and she went down during Easter Vacation and had what she called, this "*perfectly wonderful*" interview with John Meade. It was her intention to be interviewed in Morristown, New Jersey a district also looking for a teacher. First, she stopped in Brentwood and while offered a contract on the spot and to sign here, when John Mead learned she was an experienced reading teacher, refused to commit to accepting a position until she had investigated the NJ offer. Once she learned she would be expected to finish teaching her reading assignment in exactly the same place every other teacher of reading in the school was expected to be, she turned down their offer of a job after telling them – "*You can't do that. That's no way to teach reading*". She returned to Brentwood and accepted John Meade's offer to teach. She previously had told him, "*If you offer me a position and I sign your contract, I'll promise to give you a full year of unconditional service.*"

Just to recap a little bit, this had all happened at a time when your two children were on their own, your life was now under your own control because you decided to make a move perhaps even leaving Vermont with all options open, your parents no longer needed you, both of them were healthy, your father was still working and your mother was well. You were absolutely as free as anybody could be.

She had a second cousin living in Bay Shore so she had a place to stay. So, she said, she had hardly ever been away from the farm. Oh, I'd taught in St. Albans, you know, but St. Albans is St. Alban's. I don't know. It was just something I was going to do. She'd been divorced for five years and out on her own. She hadn't just been kicked out of the nest and her children had been away for two years. So, she was ready for re-interpreting the world. She thought a lot of things about herself. She thought she was compassionate and she could understand other people and she'd hardly ever seen a black person, you understand, and she thought that she was tolerant and she thought that she could do all right. Did she think of Brentwood at that time as being similar to Vermont in its rural makeup or was it...? Oh! I thought of it as a Big City. I mean I came from a farm. Of course I'd lived in St. Albans for a couple of years but that's, I thought of Brentwood as being developed...I lived with Ivy for a year. Do you know Ivy Covey Ramsey, Yes? Ivy Rosenthal? Well, I lived with her for one year and she kept talking about being out in the bush, I looked around, you know, heck, this is Big time.

One of the very first people I met was a man you wouldn't know. His name was Harry Hobart. He was a real conservative; a religious person – as stingy as could be. I met him my first day. I learned that Harry was a different kind of Christian than I, one that I had never met before. Nobody's ever going to hear this I hope, is because...the reason he stopped preaching was because the wrong people were coming to his church.... that meant Blacks! *"I really wasn't brought up to go to Church anyway"*. That anecdote tells us volumes about the way Brentwood already was at the time you arrived in 1960, because that, in many respects, was Brentwood. There was a major clash of cultures taking place. We were living through a revolution in real time. *"That's what made Brentwood so wonderful" I mean, come on now. Everything was happening"*. What school district on Long Island was hiring black teachers? They were few and far between. *Also, and how many female teachers were being hired to teach high school level classes, or even classes from the fifth grade and higher? "I know". "See it was interesting, when I talked to Hoyt, his uncle was the Principal of my school at Linden Institute when I taught in Vermont. His name was Matheson. Dr. Hoyt was related to the Matheson's. Dr. Hoyt felt very familiar to me, because he came*

from Vermont. But it really took me a while to appreciate how much different Brentwood was from any other district because Dr. Hoyt didn't care. There was a famous story that Dr. Helen Smith told again and again about when she talked with him and she said to him "you know, I'm Black" and he said, "Did I ask"? That was typical of him. But I didn't realize at that time how we were rapidly becoming a district that was going to be so very different from all the other public school districts on the Island. I don't think that in most of the districts you would have found the diversity Brentwood had and one of the other things that was so marvelous was, you know I was forty and if you went to a party there, a lot of the teachers were kids in their twenties, but we were all the same. They didn't think of you as being old. I thought I was old. I thought I was ancient. When anybody asked me for a date and they were decades younger than I, I had to wonder, "What are they thinking"? What's with that kid? But I did think of myself as being older than women think of themselves today who are forty. The experience of living in that early Brentwood Community for me was transformational. Do you think that it is fair to call Brentwood a microcosm of the United States of America, because of changes that have taken place here prior to them changing throughout our country? "Yes. I still think this community has been ahead of the times. And I was telling a story today about some guy that I worked with that had been picked up from the dance program for soliciting at the railroad station and none of the parents in that dance program ever pretended that they knew anything about it. It was in the papers so I'm sure they did. But today in Vermont you wouldn't have that sophistication. So I think a whole lot of things were different in Brentwood".

The first year here I taught fourth Grade and the next year I taught fifth for years and then sixth for one year, went back down to fourth and then to third. I taught the whole time I was here. They told me what I was going to teach, I didn't tell them. I tried that a couple of times but it didn't work. I didn't particularly want to teach third grade but when they were closing down the schools they gave the men the fifth grade class so I had to go down. The year I taught sixth grade, which was the second year I was here, I was the only woman sixth grade teacher in Brentwood. Yes, that would ordinarily have been assigned to the young men coming out of the service. Did you come out of the service? No I did not, but many of them did. So they were getting what they wanted at the time. John Meade was my boss for nine years. Did you work with any other Principals? Oh yes! I worked with Frank Hall, Lou Lotito, and Helen Miller. After John Meade moved Frank was there and I worked with Gerrity one year in the overflow school. Enrollment was growing like crazy during those years and then it fell off and started to decline. Were you ever involved in any other programs besides your teaching? Well of course, there was the dance program. Tell me about the

dance program. When I came, the third year I was here, I was the Treasurer of the Brentwood Teachers Association. (I'd been living in politics, you understand) – I went to a meeting and I think it was Mr. Stewart who came in but it might have been somebody else that came in and said we have this program that we've been running and we want to turn it over to the Teachers Association, and it's a Dance Program. The Dance Program had been started by the sister of someone who was on the Board, the name escapes me and the money had been turned over to the Administration and they had given it to the Brentwood Teachers Association – to give out scholarships. So they wanted to turn it over to one of the teachers. And I said, I guess I could handle it – and so I handled it. I took it over. Now, I had never done anything with Dance in my life, but here I am. I worked with Daurice Snyder and I ran it for nineteen years. I dare say it was a successful program. Well the first year we set up a program where we would set up ...with Tom McDonough, a program for colleges but not for academics but we only did that for a couple of years. We gave away an average of ten thousand dollars a year for the ten years I ran it, for the Teachers Association for students which was pretty good, and she used to say, *"Marian what do you think we should do about this idea,"* and I would say, well you tell me what we should think and that's what I'm going to think, and so we worked very well together. But one of the things I really insisted on doing, I insisted on paying the girls and the people who taught the Program money, I mean pretty good money. I mean we had to go to court and to go through a lot of stuff before we got it all straightened out. They said, I think we could get these kids, these new people, especially these first year teachers, cheaper. We're paying them a good salary...a decent wage. But of course, they have to do...what we expect them We had one person who was chronically late and I told Daurice, you have to tell her if she doesn't come to work on time for these kids I'll replace her with someone who does. She has one last chance. I had to be a good employer and one of the things a good employer does is pay well and the other thing was to insist that they come on time. I insisted that if these kids paid for lessons, they were going to have a teacher there. Being in charge of all this I had to be a good employer. One of the things was to pay well and the other was to see that your girls who were paid to teach dancing did it right. I felt that my purpose to these young girls just starting work was to see to it that they did it right. I already had a good work ethic. If you say you were going to do something that's what you did. I felt that my purpose was to help a child grow up and one of the ways you teach them to grow up is teach them to take care of their obligations, to be there on time, and since the role modeling of that is very important you have to do as you say. I mean that's your education. Everything you had done prior to coming here prepared you for what you were expected to be able to do when you arrived.

You came to Brentwood before there was a teacher's contract. Back then teachers received an automatic raise of two hundred dollars per year. There was no bargaining with the Board. Your annual raise was whatever they said it was going to be. As an employee you had no recourse to accepting their offer except to leave your employment; ie., *take it or leave it*, until the Teacher's Association or the Union voted to indorse the first contract with the Brentwood Board of Education. Only then did you finally have any right to refuse the Boards offer.

You've got to remember, here I am, forty-two years old, and absolutely in perfect health. What am I going to do with my day after I get through teaching? You know. So if somebody says, "*Do you want to do this*"? I say, "Why not"? So I did that. So I joined...Let me tell you. I was a born politician. I went up to the State House the other day in Vermont and I thought – I do this so well." I'm so modest, you know. There I am shaking hands with everyone and remembering this one and that one, and somebody comes over to you, it's like breathing. It comes natural. It comes natural to me. Marian you've been very generous with your time. But did there ever come a time when you needed the organizations help, either BTA or NYSUT and they gave it to you? What do you mean, you mean like financially? No, I mean in any way. You've been so generous with your time. Did you ever find you needed to ask them for their help in some way? No. I've been very fortunate. Life has been very good to me. I do remember a very important decision that I was involved with making. I once went to a retirement meeting and at that time, I suppose you don't remember it, but all the teachers retirement money was put in McCain's Bank and he was "*giving*" the teachers one percent interest on their money and a whole lot of people were trying to make them take the state retirement fund out of that bank and put it where they could make some real money on it. And there was a woman from the Islip Town Board who was one of the nicest people in the world but she didn't understand finances one single bit. She kept saying, "*He's so good to us. He gives us One Percent*". And they wanted to get her off the Board. And these young guys didn't have the...really want to get up and attack this woman for being stupid and they chose me to do it. They believed I could get away with it without hurting her. And I had quite a lot to say and I got her off the Board. Once they got her off the Board they began to put the money where it could give them the return they were seeking and this whole thing fell into place. It was a real important place that I was in at that time, even though I've forgotten a lot of the names of people who were in powerful positions back then. These people just didn't want to attack her because she was a nice lady; she was sweet. It was an economically bad policy. It was crazy! Here's this man had all these teacher's retirement savings in his banks and he was "*giving us*" one percent interest? This must have been in 1962 or 1963. And I was there at the time to take the burden.

That was only one issue you took on that was of seminal importance to teachers. You also took a strong stand on your belief at that time that teacher's had to organize. Oh Yes! And I was one of the people at the State level when we voted to join the AFT – American Federation of Teacher's. I cast my vote. I went to the State Teacher's Meetings very early. I was there at that time.

I was a friend with Bob Farina and Nick Siciliano, I was a friend of Shirley Seiden, and I was in and out of having a part in making all of these decisions. And that was well before Guy DiPietro had initially come to the District and begun his ascent to the position of Superintendent following in the footsteps of Louis Naninni (1974 -1975). When we mentioned the name of Jack Zuckerman, one of the early organizational leaders of the Union movement in Brentwood, she came alive and asked, *“Do you remember we had a working group of regular people, and do you remember when we had meetings at my house that I rented with Shirley Sieden, and David Martz was involved with this and they put eight Jacks in that house and they called all the parents getting them to vote on some contract that we had? That was a great day. That was a great week! One of the great highlights of my life was when one of the guys from the high school, I can't remember his name right now, said, “If Marian Gray is on the Teacher's Executive Board I'll never join it”. She said, “Hooray! I've made it. Marian was always more concerned with being right than she was with being popular. That was because she wanted to achieve our objective without having to strike. She did not want to strike to achieve our goal. She always believed that strikes could be avoided if you could employ successful negotiations. When she was asked if she remembered Tom Brush, she said, “I think he was the one”. We thought so. Such rhetoric sounded like his style. “I hope I've made a better impression on the world than to have everybody like me.” “I really thought we could get this without striking.” “One of the things that made me the most angry was when we were voting on the contract differential between Teachers and Guidance Counselors. Do you remember that Guidance people used to get more money than Teachers and David Martz was trying to get everyone on the same salary step? David Martz was President of the Teachers Association at the time and he was trying to get agreement on a salary step for everybody and he cast the deciding vote to go with it and while Marian had always heard about seeing red, she had never experienced it until the moment she looked up at the lights and she was so angry, she literally saw auras of bright red around all the lights in the room. He voted in support of the motion to keep the differential for guidance counselors.*

"I want to tell you another great story that most people don't know. Dr. Naninni was all set to appoint Vincent Presno in charge of writing the curriculum for the Districts Kindergarten Curriculum. The Curriculum Council had held a meeting with the Superintendent and all his associates and every time Vince Presno's name was mentioned she repeated, "If you wanted him to do something why didn't you give him something he could do. I went on and on about how incompetent he was to write this curriculum for the children in the Kindergarten.

If you wanted his wife to do it, let her do it at least she's certified in Elementary Education. She's a fourth Grade teacher and probably knows something about it. He's a High School Teacher and all he ever did was write the curriculum for the High School Social Studies Program under the Ford Foundation Grant that nobody will ever use. Any way, they decided not to do it. Just as I got through speaking, an Assistant Principal came in and announced a decision had been made for Vincent Presno to be writing the curriculum for the Kindergarten and Foster Hoff (Assistant Superintendent) said, raising his hand up, Just a second here. I think Marian has just explained to all of us why we are not going to have Vincent Presno write Kindergarten curriculum. And they didn't. Can you imagine something so stupid? She added, "They don't want him at the High School why should that have him teaching Kindergarten? Did she remember Joseph Dionne? Oh yes, I had a great fight with him" she said. His tests for reading were so off the wall...and I do remember what Manny Vega did when Berle Nott retired from the District. That was one of the most enjoyable retirements I have ever attended. He had these great art works with Berle's picture on all of them. One of the first ones was when the Pilgrim's landed and she's walking around looking for a place to hang the swing. Next he had a Picasso picture called The Lovers and he had Berle Nott and Fred Weaver (of course they couldn't stand each other), it was one of the funniest retirements ever.

"One of the things I did for a fifth grade class...I put down on my floor in my classroom a map of the United States eighteen by twenty four feet... on the floor. It was absolutely a fantastic map. We cleaned the floor and painted the squares. When you walked in the door you could step on Maine. California was right over there. Florida was as big as this. We painted them the colors from the map. It was absolutely the greatest Social Studies lesson I ever taught. And the cleaning people hated it. We shellacked it to preserve it right on the tile floor. I was half way through the project when I went down and told John Meade what we were doing. Anyway, they took it off in the summer. The Building and Grounds people told me a half dozen times that it took them three days to get it off. Couldn't understand why they wanted to take it off. Only thing I did was stand up and I pointed. The kids did it all. All we did was put it on graph paper and transferred it to the floor. It

was a great experience and I'll bet you there wasn't a kid that was in that class that doesn't remember it. Anyway, I wanted to do it again but I never did it. I didn't have the right class."

You became sixty-five years of age in 1982. "I was feeling pretty good but I knew I was getting old, so I went home to Vermont". "I lived in Barre, Vermont which is outside the Capital. I would have gone home to Linden but my brother was a Representative and I knew I couldn't run against him besides which he would have beaten me. Yes, I was considering running for Town Representative but my brother was there and I couldn't do that. So I went to live in Barre, where my son was living at that time and I got involved in the political world. Her last teaching assignment in the Brentwood School District was Third Grade in Laurel Park. Lillian Fagen was in that building, and so was Lois Rodriguez, She taught for twenty-four years in Brentwood and two in Vermont. I went to a couple of Summer Schools one in Hawaii and one in Colorado but I traveled in the summer and I went home especially toward the end because my mother needed me. Marian made five thousand four hundred dollars her first year in Brentwood and three thousand, seven hundred in St. Albans and that was one of the reasons why she wanted to leave".

Weren't you involved with the very first Union Contract negotiations? "Oh, sure. I remember working with Sam Weitzman. When Sam and I sat side by side, I was taller than Sam. Because Sam didn't have anything but legs and when he stood up he was six foot four. And he had this arm that reached out when he pointed it he would almost put it on the negotiators nose. Of course, he had been a labor union negotiator before he came to Brentwood and he had brought that experience with him when he became a teacher. It was interesting to work with Sam. These were very controversial times... very explosive times. That was a revolutionary idea that teachers ought to think that they should have a union. Unions were considered working class and unprofessional by some people. You know what did it? It was the fact that they educated the men when they got out of the army and so many of them went into teaching. We had a lot of young teachers who were professional, who had been in the army and then came and said, well, we want to be paid. And once they started.... You know, I think this was when with NYSUT teachers only got one percent on their retirement monies, it was typical of that group. Whereas, older teachers thought it was their responsibility to do it for nothing; it was like motherhood to them. You were a public servant. You don't get paid for being a mother. Why should you be paid for being a teacher? And then of course, you had these young men who came in and they had

been doing it in NYC, it was almost as if, if you loved your job that should be reward enough. You shouldn't expect to be paid in addition".

So you decided it was time to leave and you put in your papers and ended your active service and then began another life really; which was almost completely political. Right now, I'm the President of the Older Women's League If they want to know the opinion of older women then they ask me. It has a big name in the State of Vermont, politically. I worked for fifteen years on the Coalition of Vermont Elders, which is really and truly a group of people who have done a whole lot at the State House for Elder Issues. I mean like last year we did the laws on funerals and we got hearing aids and we got this and we got that, a Patient's Bill of Rights, Meals on Wheels and all that stuff for the State. I was the President of that organization for several years and then I was on the Board up until last month. I'm one of the Trustees of the Library. We just raised two and a half million dollars for this absolutely gorgeous new wing of the library that Vermont is dedicating as the *Marian Gray Wing* of the Library something about which I am very proud. The library is over a hundred years old and it really needed a lot.

What book had the most influence on your life? *"I think it would have to have been the Saturday Evening Post".* (Very good answer.) *"Yes! I am still very much involved in all women's issues. I was on the Governor's Commission on Women for several years, and Women's issues and the ones I spent so much time on lobbying for the State House. I used to go to the State House maybe three days a week. I used to testify on, I don't know how many bills – I'm a good testifier – I'll go in and I'll say it fast and they will remember and up until this year I knew almost everyone of the State Legislators. One of the things that made me a good lobbyist is that I lived five minutes away from the State House. But women's issues and children's issues and elder issues are the ones that I spent my years lobbying for. Have you been active on any issues confronted by teenage pregnancies? "I testified just the other day. Up until now the State of Vermont has been very liberal on the matter of abortions. But this new legislature – Republican – are going to require that you have to put in paternal notification – It just doesn't need to be there. I just wrote to the newspaper about the importance of keeping prochoice".*

How old are you going to be on your next birthday? Eighty-four. God Bless! You're not slowing down any. *"You won't say that if you watch me walking".* Do you see vouchers as a threat to public education? *"I think if they ever try to put them in, in the State of Vermont they're going to find out that you can't do it. I*

have a sister that lives in Wisconsin, and she says that Charter Schools in Wisconsin, particularly in Milwaukee, have been a failure, they find that people walk off with the money, and they didn't have any control of them and they've been a complete failure". What words of advice might you offer to people just coming into the profession? "I think you have to be fair to the kids. If you are going to be fair to those kids in your classroom you have to see to it that they're going to be doing something that's good for them and they better enjoy it." ... "But, it can't be fun all the time. If you take a job you are obligated to do the job that you've taken. Don't spend all your time in the teacher's room showing everybody how smart you are. I've enjoyed my life." Yes. We can tell. It shows.