

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWER: Tammy M. Proctor
Place: Bushey, Hertsfordshire
MARCH 24, 1993

INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

Florence Cobb [1910-2003]

Lady Marjorie Stopford [1904-1996]

G. Winn Everett [1903-1998]
(daughter of Sir Percy Everett)

Q: What was your impression of the Chief when you first met him?

Wyn: Well, when I first met him I was just a little girl. What was I? I was born in 1903, so I suppose when Scouting began I was six or seven, something like that. And when he came to see us, I thought he'd come to see me... He was marvelous with children, they always went to him straight away. Well like I said, he'd come to see you. And then also he would arrive and he had this tremendous capacity for making you feel important or of consequence. When I grew up and used to go and stay there, stay at Pax, he would tell you when there were going to be visitors and he allocated one for you and asked you to find out what they thought about something. He made you feel as if you were somebody of importance. He drew you out and you said all sorts of things that you didn't even know you knew, I think. At the same time, he was a very good family man. He was a good father, making silly jokes and telling the children things, I know it sounds silly, but it was fun. He made everything fun. The children, of course, adored him.

Q: And what about Olave?

Wyn: She was lovely too. Well it was like, going for the weekend there was, well, just like any complete rest, restorative, you know, you were restored to your proper values and things. You stopped worrying about your troubles and you were immediately taken into a bigger, more interesting world. They were quite marvelous. And Pax was a very happy house. There was a wonderful mural that hangs in the bathroom. You never had, of course, you never had the opportunity to bathe at Pax Hill because the water was a bit short sometimes. You were not supposed to have your bath too deep. He'd done a wonderful mural of the poor fishes banging their heads on the ground because you'd taken too much water.

Cobbie: I remember seeing that.

Wyn: You remember seeing that?

Cobbie: Yes, yes, because Pax Hill was taken over by the Girl Guides, yes, for a handcraft centre for some time. A friend of mine...

Wyn: It was open for a time, wasn't it, for a time?

Cobbie: Yes, for running?, so I was able to have a bath in the bathroom. Yes, the poor fish bumping their heads from taking too much...it was very clever. Very clever.

Wyn: Of course, when she, when he died and she came back and went and lived in Hampton Court, we had seen a great deal of her there. She was again enormously alive and again again making you talk. As I say, making life seem worthwhile.

Q: They must have both been incredibly energetic, considering all the travelling they did?

Wyn: They did, they travelled for many years. Both together and then she travelled for ever so long. Of course, she was a very energetic person. Do you remember perhaps when she was coming remember that coming to Hertfordshire? And they were planning her, what she was going to do. At the county executive I remember. And the county commissioner, who didn't know her, said, "But will she be tired at the end of all this?" And Nancy Green, whose father also knew her very well too, we both said as in one breath - "She won't, we will!" Taking her around was always difficult, wasn't it, Marjorie?

Marjorie: It was!

Wyn: She stopped and talked to everybody. And you were supposed to get her to a certain place at a certain time.

Marjorie: And you hoped you'd get there before it rains. You were watching the clouds.

Cobbie: And people were waiting for you and you couldn't get her past it. I remember at one of the dos we had in Hertfordshire, the county commissioner lined the Guides on either side of the path so the Chief Guide could walk down, so that they would all see her, you see? Not a bit of it, she stayed up there. C'mon, c'mon, we'll all shake hands together, we've got about thirty or forty guides all would like to see you, all waiting. Then she'd go on a little bit further. It took ages to get through. Quite disorganized, she was.

Marjorie: Yes there was always a tremendous anxiety.

Cobbie: Oh years ago when we used to see her at headquarters, she was having a meal at the restaurant at headquarters. She'd suddenly see somebody, and so, pick up her plate, go and sit by them. She'd be eating there and then somebody else [makes hand motion of picking up plate and moving].

Marjorie: Yes, she was a tremendous personality.

Q: And how were her speeches, when she spoke? Was she a good speaker?

Marjorie: Wonderful. And a wonderful memory for people.

Q: Really? Remembered names and faces?

Marjorie: And where she'd met you last?

Wyn: Well, all you had to say was where did you meet last, not when. Where. Then if you had any doubts, you'd get the clues. But she was wonderful at remembering.

Marjorie: When she spoke, you were just enthralled, weren't you?

Wyn: Yes.

Marjorie: And she made you ?? , were you sitting comfortably, she held you from the moment she started to speak, didn't she? And so did he.

Wyn: Betty speaks very much in the same tone of voice, doesn't she? Betty, her daughter.

Marjorie: It is her mother's voice, exactly.

Wyn: And when she writes, as probably she wrote to you the other day when I sent her the book...

Marjorie: She underlines, underlines.

Q: She looks like her father though, Betty?

Wyn: Heather was much more like her father; she was his coloring. The red hair and the freckles. I asked my, this shouldn't go on the record really, I asked my partner whether he remembered, he'd been a cub, the Chief Scout. He said, "Well really all I remember is the freckles on his knees!" But I think anyone who ever met him was tremendously impressed.

[short discussion about sources]

Wyn: But with all this public work they were doing, there was still a very splendid, close family life. Which I think was very clever of them.

Cobbie: It is wonderful to read of their journeys how they went miles on the train and stopped at little halts every now and again to enroll somebody.

Q: And you said you'd met Agnes as well?

Wyn: Well, I just met her, you see. I wouldn't say that I really knew her. Because she...I don't ever remember hearing her speak or anything, she was a...I think he felt he had to bring some woman in when the girls came in. That was before he'd married, so he brought his sister into it.

Cobbie: I can remember even as a young Guide, we went to a rally at Hatfield, where Baden-Powell was coming. And we were all sitting around and he was telling us yarns and my company was going, but I didn't want to go. And someone didn't make me go, and I was left there, by myself. But you see, as the companies got out, I got nearer the Chief. So he must have thrilled me, even at that young age. I got nearer and nearer the Chief. And then of course I had to get back to Bushey by myself. My mum was pacing up and down, "Where have you been?" It was hard for people to get home by themselves from Hatfield, so I don't know how I, I think I got on a bus or a train.

Marjorie: Probably got a bus at St. Alban's.

Cobbie: But I can't think that these days anyone would leave anyone there. I can't think how I managed to stay, but I did. But I was next to Chief Scout. Mind you, next was probably he was over there and I was here, but there was nobody in between.

Wyn: Where was this?

Cobbie: Hatfield. A big rally or something. I can't remember quite what it was. It must have been about 1922, '23.

Marjorie: It wouldn't have been the one, no, it would've been earlier than the one where the Queen Mother was.

Cobbie: No, it was earlier than that. I guess I was more sensible then.

[discussion of Queen Mother and picture]

Q: Can you each tell me again how you got involved in the Guides? Was it a friend or a brother or sister, or did you just read Scouting for Boys, or what made you get involved?

Wyn: Well, I was brought up in it. I couldn't possibly not have been involved. You were brought up in a code of conduct, really, because the way, it was your ethics and it was fun.

Cobbie: I think my mother had heard of Guides, because there were no Guides when she was young, and she'd heard of Guides, and thought what a very good thing it would be for me to join. So directly a company was formed in Bushey Heath, my name was sent forward. But they wouldn't have me at first, because I wasn't quite 11. So I had to wait a little while. But I joined in 1920, but I wasn't enrolled until '21. I had to wait for my 11th birthday.

Q: And they didn't have any, oh they did have Brownies, but not in Bushey Heath?

[discussion of start of Brownies/Rosebuds]

Wyn: Now, Marjorie was in Gorey. You began as a lone guide didn't you?

Marjorie: I was a lone guide, yes.

Wyn: What got you involved?

Marjorie: I was a lone guide because I had a cousin in England who was a lone guide.

Q: Was she in England or Ireland?

Marjorie: She was in England, I wasn't, I was in Ireland. And when I was twenty-one, I started my own company.

Q: And how old were you when you became a lone guide for the first time?

Marjorie: I'll work it out and I could tell you, but I was about 16 I think. No, 15, because if I had been 16 I should have had to go into branch B. My friend was in branch A, I requested it. And that was before Rangers. Then I was twenty-one when I started my own company.

Q: And what were they called?

Marjorie: 1st Gorey.

Q: And when was the first time you were actually in a non-Lone group?

Marjorie: Well, I visited a cousin's company in London, in Battersea, for a while, when I was a Guide, I mean only for a few weeks. And I first met the Chief Guide at my relations' rally in Buckinghamshire. It was a county rally, but I was invited because I was a relation of them, you see. It poured and poured with rain and everybody was sent home and the Chief Guide was, typical of her I know now, was walking around talking to all the bedraggled people who were walking around trying to collect it up. And she spoke to me, and I didn't know who it was. And after she'd gone, they all crowded around me, "What did she say?" "Well, who was it?"

Wyn: I never knew that. That was your first encounter.

Marjorie: That was my first encounter. I mean, I knew all about her, but I suppose I hadn't looked at her pictures or wasn't observant. Anyway, that was my first encounter with her.

Cobbie: Well my first encounter with her was walking down Buckingham Palace Road with my mother. I think we were going to headquarters, and I saw this person in front and she had a gold cord round her hat, you see? And our Guider was very

keen on us knowing the distinction marks. I think we had to do it in 1st class or something. Anyway, that gold cord... I looked and thought that must be the Chief Guide. It must be the Chief Guide, so I started getting a little faster, and my mother saying where are you off to, where are you going? [whispers and points] So I got nearer and nearer and then she said, "Hello dear, and where are you going?" OH, my day was made!

Q: Did you talk to her then?

Cobbie: Oh yes, we talked. I said I was on a visit to headquarters, my first visit to headquarters, my mother was taking me to headquarters, and she looked round and said, "Is that your mother?"

Q: Can you tell me about some of the things you did?

Marjorie: Well as a Lone, you did it all on paper. I passed my 2nd pass on paper. And I had to tie the knots and put them in an envelope.

Q: And where did you send them?

Marjorie: To my captain. My captain was in England. Later on, that company became Irish. But to start with...

Wyn: You tied your knots and sent them off?

Marjorie: Yes, I tied my clove hitch around a piece of rolled up paper. And there was a pair of scissors at home that never recovered from cutting the rope. And I remember four or five knots it was that I tied and put in an envelope and sent. I forgot what else we had to do, oh I had to make a Morse signalling flag.

Cobbie: 24 x 24. Do you remember that, a Morse signalling flag? Did you do that for your second class? We made a Morse signalling flag, 24 x 24, with a [Marjorie joins in] 4 inch blue stripe down the middle. Then you did the dots and dashes.

Marjories: And I did my sewing part, and I was quite, reasonably good at sewing. I liked sewing, but ... Oh yes, and I had to run, oh it was 100 yards in so and so. And I had Dad out with a stop-watch in the front path at home.

Q: And then did he write to your captain?

Marjorie: Yes, somebody had to say you'd done it. I think in some ways we were quite well-tested, on the whole, we were because they were fussy about it.

Q: And did you ever meet with other Lone Guides?

Marjorie: Yes, there was one that I used to meet occasionally who lived not terribly far from us. We used to shopping in the same town and I always hoped we'd go that day. They always went Saturdays or whatever day it was, I don't know, and I always hoped we'd go the same day. And then, much later on, I enrolled my mother as a Guide. And she became County Commissioner, and I was the only company in the County. So we were quite a family party, and we went to a big Guide concert and conference in Dublin. And we both went. That's when I finally got her to something, then. Oh she was very cooperative. And I went to something, an entertainment, in one of the big halls in Dublin in the evening, and I said I didn't think she could come. She said, alright I won't. It's alright. And I said, oh but you could come, there are lots of people there, they'd bought tickets.

Q: When you two had meetings, how did they start?

Cobbie: Roll call, and in fact roll call went on until I retired. When the new program came in, I thought now this is where we change our style a bit. So I suggested that we left out roll call and started out with patrol time, so that when they came into a meeting they would go to their leader and start with patrol time, see. But after a few weeks, oh Captain, as they always called me, we want to start with roll call. They liked it, it was...

Marjorie: It was a time to all get together, wasn't it?

Cobbie: And they said the patrol wasn't so good at getting there punctually because on roll call, you see, at 6:30 or whatever it is, patrol leaders blow the whistle and leaders fall in. And then if Mary Jane was late, and if they were going into patrol call...they asked for it. They didn't like not having it. They really thought it was something worthwhile. I liked it, because it was a definite start to the meeting and you had them all there to give out notices. And you had inspection to keep them up to date, and they were always trying to beat the other patrols. There was much competition on that, you know? And I think it was good for them. Oh, we had a very good reputation -- I'll show you the pictures. The 1st Elstry and the 1st Bushey Heath Guides, I think we run on the same principle. Good old fashioned Captains. Both companies, when we went in for competitions, were neck in neck.

Wyn: Well, of course, I did my practical guiding, I should tell you this really, at school. Having been brought up as a Guide, as a Scout almost, then I went to boarding school, we had a company there which survived. It wasn't like St. Margaret's Bushey where the headmistresses...

Marjorie: And then the whole school was run on Guide lines.

Wyn: where they ran the whole school on Guide lines. We were running, rather, in opposition to the rest of the school. And

when you came to guides, you probably missed a lacrosse game or something like that. But we did run quite a good company for a time. That was where I actually did my 2nd class. The 1st class, which was pain and grief to me mainly because of the sewing I'm terribly bad sewer, I had to do, I can't think what you had to do. Make some garment. I sweated blood over this. I was determined to be first class; I was quite good at the other things. Very good, those tests, you know?

Marjorie: You had to do them, you couldn't choose them.

Wyn: Now you can choose what tests you do...things you're good at. You had to do the things you were bad at, and that in my case, sewing.

Cobbie: I never would have been able to patch, or done my first class, or made a knot, or anything like that because I didn't have to do it, you see. But I do know how it's done now, and I can patch things now, and I'm sure I wouldn't have. Although the person who tested me was the person who lived here in those days, Mrs. Curry, a wood craft trainer. Very very good at natural history, very very good at sewing. She didn't like my sewing, she said to me one day, she kept sending it back, if you don't do it right the next time, you have to do the whole badge again. So I drew threads to get the patch.

Wyn: off tape -- stickability.

Q: So tell me about some of the badges you did get?

Marjorie: I never even got my first class because I couldn't swim. And then you were allowed to do a badge, some badge, a cross badge or something instead, and then I couldn't swim, and that had been changed. You still had to swim, and I couldn't swim 50 yards.

Cobbie: Yes, unless you were physically handicapped in some way, and then you got a green first class.

Marjorie: Yes, there was a green first class.

Cobbie: But the first badge that I got was Domestic Service badge. And the badge, when I first had companies all the Guides went in for domestic service badges, and believe it or not, the floor that I polished the lineoleum I polished is still on the dining room floor. We've got a carpet over it now. Domestic Service badge, laundress, knitter, cook, needlewoman, child nurse, sick nurse -- you went in for the badges you wanted for your first class and all around cords. So you had to get so many badges automatically for first class, and so many extra ones before you got your all-around cords. I didn't get all of them, I'm afraid.

Q: Did you have choices for your cords, or did you have particular badges you had to get?

Marjorie: Well you had to have first class.

Cobbie: Yes, you had to have first class, and then a couple more, then you were left to choose. A long time ago.

Q: Well, tell me about camp?

Cobbie: Yes, I've been to loads of camps. Wyn can tell you a lot more about it. My first camp was a district camp, which as you see, there were 70, 80, 90 Guides at a district camp there, with all the thousands of more houses we have now.

The first thing we had to do was fill our palliasses. We had to take those palliasses, and then we led to barn to fill those. That was one of the first, after your bell tent was up. And then of course the tents were never tidy in those days because of all the straw from the palliasses. We usually slept about 8 to a tent.

Wyn: Feet to the middle.

Marjorie: That was the army way of sleeping to the bell tent, feet to the middle. My brother was very tall, so his head always stuck out the end.

Cobbie: We always had to wear our full uniforms to prayers.

Wyn: I can't remember as Guiders, did we have a bell tent?

Cobbie: I can't remember. I should think so.

Q: Did you cook your own meals at camps?

Cobbie: We cooked our meals, yes. I was always hungry; I never got enough to eat at my first camps. We were rationed: one piece bread and butter and two pieces of marmalade (half pieces). And I was always hungry. I remember one day, it was a very cold day, a very cold place, and they made go run to the sea, which was about two miles, before breakfast and back to warm us up. Oh, agony. I can't think why I ever went to camp again. Another camp, I remember we were given cords. We had a red cord for orderly work, a green cord for tent inspection, a white cord for keeping the law, and a gold cord for something special. We had to walk quite a long way... (rest of story: to go swimming. Got there and the place was too low to swim. One person laughed, others grumbled. The next day a patrol got a gold cord. captain finally told them it was because that person had laughed. Later, another patrol got a gold cord because a person picked up a spade on the ground that the others had just walked over.