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This interview was conducted with Margot Casanova Wells over the telephone on May 14, 2007. The interviewer is Tamara Belts. Mrs. Wells lives in Ferndale, California.

**TB:** My name is Tamara Belts and I'm talking [on the telephone] to Margot Casanova Wells. You have read a copy of the Informed Consent Agreement, right, and you know you're being recorded?

**MCW:** Yes.

**TB:** Okay, perfect. Katherine Casanova was one of the well-loved teachers at the Campus School, and I just thought it would be kind of fun to maybe fill in some more information about her. My first question is where was she born? (I know she was born November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1900).

**MCW:** Well, she was born in a community called Grizzly Bluff, California.

**TB:** Is that near Ferndale?

**MCW:** Yes.

**TB:** Did the family then move to Ferndale, or was that just where they went to school?

**MCW:** No, my grandfather was working out in that area at that point. Well, that's my assumption; he had worked on some ranches quite a ways out from Ferndale, and she was born in Grizzly Bluff.

Her father was John Casanova, and her mother was (I'm going to spell it), Mariursula, all one word, Capaul. They were from Switzerland, and they spoke the language called Romantsch, and, in fact, the kids basically knew little or no English when they went to school.

**TB:** Really! Now, was there just the two of them – your father, Leonard, and Katherine?

**MCW:** No, there were six kids.

**TB:** Oh, six! What was the birth order? What number is Katherine?

**MCW:** She would be the youngest girl. There was a boy, Casper, then Mary, Dora, Katherine, and then my dad, Leonard, and then Johnny.

**TB:** One of the things I wondered about, knowing only the two of them, and that they both went into education, was if education had been a strong thing in their family?

**MCW:** Yes. Both her sisters were teachers, too.

**TB:** Where did they teach?

**MCW:** Well, my aunt Mary solely taught in little schools around this area. Dora taught in Paso Robles and Stockton and then ended up back in Humboldt County, and taught at several one-room school houses, and other schools, including a year up at [Hoopa], which was an Indian reservation here.

**TB:** So all the children went to college then?

**MCW:** Yes.

**TB:** I know that Miss Casanova attended San Jose.

**MCW:** Yes, it was San Jose Normal when she went there.

**TB:** And then she went on to, I think, Columbia Teacher's College?

**MCW:** Right. She was always a good student.

The family was quite poor, so they all had jobs from the time they were pretty young, even five years old, they weeded (carrots, sugar beets, etc.). She also ended up working at the grocery store, up in the office.

She was fairly athletic; she played basketball and tennis. She was all-county in tennis and captain of the girl's basketball team.

Then after high school she went to San Jose Normal. She had to go by ship from Eureka to San Francisco and then on down to San Jose. While she would be home from school or college, on vacation, she [sometimes] taught – I know of one instance that she taught in a little one-room school house. You didn't have to be accredited at that point, and then after graduation she taught in Lodi and in Stockton.

When she was in Stockton she and a fellow teacher decided to go back to school for a bachelor's degree and she applied and was accepted at Columbia, where she completed her bachelor's and her master's. I don't think she'd ever been out of California before. While she was back there, the stock market fell.

She was very brave. She'd been hired at New Mexico State Teacher College (I think that's in Silver City, New Mexico) and she decided to borrow on her life insurance, and go to Europe. She visited Switzerland, and met her cousins, aunts and uncles. [She] toured around. I know she was in France and Britain.

She spent one year at New Mexico Teacher's College, and the Depression hit, and she didn't even receive a final paycheck. Someone told her about the opening at Western Washington, and she applied and was accepted.

**TB:** Did she never desire to go back to California to teach?

**MCW:** No. She'd be here for vacation and she took classes after she got her master's, at both San Jose State, and at Stanford. Some place we've got some report cards [from] there.

**TB:** Oh, very cool.

**MCW:** She traveled. She and, I think it was Synva Nicol, went all over British Columbia. They took mail buses and boats, and toured the B.C. coast, and all these small towns and everything. She also traveled in Japan, Hong Kong, South America, Australia and Greece. And almost part of every summer was spent down in this area. Her sister Dora was married to a dairy man, and the other sister, Mary, was married to a sheep rancher.

At one point Dora decided she wanted a log cabin; she purchased some property adjacent to her sister Mary's place, and my grandfather felled the logs, and the three sisters peeled the logs for the cabin.

**TB:** Oh, wow.

**MCW:** And of course, she was a big football fan. My dad was at Santa Clara, Pitt, and Oregon.

She stayed up in Bellingham for a year or two after she retired, I think she taught a class or two, and then after she retired she returned to Ferndale, California. She became very involved with the whole community. She researched the history of all the different buildings throughout the town, and she spent time at the museum. She belonged to Our Lady of Assumption Catholic Church, the Village Club, and the Garden Club.

She always contributed to my sister's and my educations. We always had the latest and the best children's literature, and she took us to the ice follies and things like that. (I was hoping I'd hear from my sister for some more input on what she remembers).

Then when I decided to go back to school, to get into nursing, my son went over there everyday after he got out of school, and she took care of him until I got home from school.

**TB:** Nice.

**MCW:** She just was a wonderful, very neat, adventuresome woman. She lost much of her central vision later in her life, but it certainly didn't stop her. She continued to live alone until, oh, just about five weeks before she died. Since she couldn't see that well to read, why, she got books on tape from the library, she always was a voracious reader.

**TB:** I know that when she lived in Bellingham, she lived at the Bellingham Hotel. That was interesting to me because a lot of the single women did live in different hotels.

**MCW:** Right. The Bellingham Hotel, and then Mt. Baker Apartments, I don't know if it was the same building actually.

**TB:** They are close, but not the same building.

Is there any special reason why football was so special in your family? Is that because your father, Leonard, excelled at it?

**MCW:** Well, he got into coaching after he got out of college. San Francisco didn't have a professional team at that point, so he played for the Olympic Club. He was also coaching at a small boys' academy, and then he was hired at a local high school. He was asked to be assistant football coach and head baseball coach at Santa Clara which he was until World War II. He came back after the war, as an assistant football coach and about six weeks before the football season started, the fellow who had been hired as the head football coach decided to move back to Detroit, and my dad fell into the job at Santa Clara, as head coach. He eventually took Santa Clara to the Orange Bowl. (The year at Pitt you really don't talk about, because they only had one win).

We were here on vacation, when he was contacted by the University of Oregon. He went there and coached football for sixteen years, and then he was athletic director, athletic director emeritus, and helped with fundraising. He was at the university for a total of about fifty years.

**TB:** When Miss Casanova was in Bellingham, she would go to all the Western football games. I never heard of her going to basketball, just football.

**MCW:** Right, no, I don't think she was that interested in basketball, probably primarily because of Dad, she was a football fan. But when it was a tight score she couldn't stand to stay in the stadium. She'd get up and leave and go up by the concession stands and ...

**TB:** And wait until the game was over.

**MCW:** Exactly, or until she heard that Oregon was ahead.

**TB:** So she got down most weekends to the games down there?

**MCW:** Oh, no, she'd come when Oregon would play Washington, at Seattle. She'd go there.

Then my husband, Dave, was stationed at Fort Lewis, and so she came down several times and visited just us there. I had some surgery and she came down and took care of the kids. She was still teaching; I don't know how she – she must've gotten a substitute. She helped take care of the kids until I could get back from the hospital.

**TB:** How nice.

**MCW:** Yes, she just that kind of a really giving person. She contributed so much --straight education, but also culturally, to both my sister and myself, and then to my children, and my sister's children.

**TB:** Very good. From everything I've heard, everybody just loved her, and you've kind of just added more to that.

**MCW:** She was so fun to be with, you know. She just was always interested in everything. In fact, in our little town of Ferndale, why, our eighth grade kids take a trip each year and go to the bay area, to museums and baseball

games and things like that. All of the kids in my older daughter's class decided that they wanted her to go as a chaperone, because they enjoyed her so much.

**TB:** Oh, nice. Now, she did a lot of traveling, did she used to drive?

**MCW:** Well, I think she knew how to drive at one point, but she never owned a car. She was a great person to travel by bus.

**TB:** She never seemed to be sorry that she ended up at Western, up in Bellingham, so far from her family?

**MCW:** No, no. She thoroughly enjoyed her time there, and she was proud of the campus. I can't remember when the World's Fair was in Vancouver, sometime in the 1980s.

**TB:** 1986, I think.

**MCW:** Right. She wanted to go up there. So, she said, "I'll go, if you'll go with me," so I went with her. We were coming back from British Columbia, and came through Bellingham, and the bus driver said, "Well, let's take a detour and go over to the Western Washington University campus." And she was so thrilled to go back.

**TB:** Oh, nice!

**MCW:** I had never had the opportunity to be there. We took a quick tour and found the education building. She was just really pleased with how the campus still looked, and always had, very, very fond memories of all the time there.

**TB:** Excellent. So you never came up here summers, she always went down to visit you down there?

**MCW:** Well, my dad moved quite a bit between the Navy and coaching. And then my husband was a career army officer, so Ferndale was the place everybody came back to. Then my husband Dave and I ended up moving here in 1971. She only had a studio apartment, so there were not the facilities for her to put up many guests.

**TB:** That makes sense. So she'd usually come down there at Christmas time, too?

**MCW:** Yes. And she got marooned down here, [during the floods] in 1955 and 1964.

**TB:** Anything else?

**MCW:** I know I'll think of several other things after we get off the telephone, but ...

**TB:** Well, I am going to transcribe what we've just talked about, and I'll send it down to you and you'll get a chance to edit or make any changes, or add to it, at that point. So feel free to add something in. Do you have Word? I could send it to you on a disk, if you'd like. Then you could make any changes, and do it on the document itself.

**MCW:** Oh, well, that'd be nice. Why don't you send it in the mail, and then I'll go over it, and I'll be able to discuss it very easily with my sister. Then I'll get it back to you as soon as possible.

**TB:** Excellent. Well, it was very nice to be able to talk with you on the phone. I wish I would have known Miss Casanova.

**MCW:** She was a great lady.

**TB:** I'm really kind of excited that she got to come back and visit campus, too, although I'm sorry I didn't know what I was missing when she was here.

Anyway, I'll get this transcribed, I'll send you a copy and you can talk it over with your sister and make any other comments that you would like.

**MCW:** Alright, very good.

**TB:** Well, thank you very much.

**MCW:** Thank you very much, Tamara.