



## ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with  
Grace Lillian Schmidt Seifert, 1928-

February 1, 1999

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 [MP3 Audio File](#) [Length: 0:36:33] (16.7 MB)

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### PREFACE

As a child Grace Schmidt Seifert lived aboard the fishing yacht, Point Loma, with her father, mother and younger sister, Ruth, from 1933 to 1936. She tells of her experiences living aboard "our boat" during the winter months. The ship was used as a sport fishing boat in the summer, at which times the family lived in town.

Shirley A. Brandes, Transcriber

February 23, 1999

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## **INTERVIEWER'S NOTE**

This is an oral history interview with Mrs. Grace L. Seifert in regards to living on a large fishing barge, the Glendale, [which later became the Point Loma] and others back in the 1930s. Today the date is February 1, 1999. My name is Robert G. Wright. The interview is being conducted in her home.

**ROBERT WRIGHT:** Will you please give me your full name?

**GRACE SEIFERT:** Grace Lillian Schmidt Seifert.

**RW:** Where and when were you born?

**GS:** In San Diego on December 15, 1928.

**RW:** What schools did you go to?

**GS:** When I was little I started at Logan Elementary because I lived on a boat that was attached to the shipyard. Then I moved out to this area on 72nd Street and Mohawk Street. It is a block away from La Mesa. I went to a little threeroom schoolhouse that had two grades in each room. I went there for six years. It was still San Diego, not La Mesa. It is no longer a public school; it is used for something else. Then I went to Grossmont High School for four years, then San Diego State College for four years.

**RW:** What was your major at San Diego State?

**GS:** For awhile it was art, until I saw the competition and I switched to teaching. I finished at San Francisco State College.

**RW:** Then you taught school?

**GS:** I taught school for 26 years, on and off, mostly second grade and mostly in La Mesa elementary school area, La Mesa-Spring Valley.

**RW:** And, at this time, what was your dad doing?

**GS:** He was working in the shipyards.

**RW:** Which shipyards?

**GS:** He started out at a little one in San Diego. He and another man built a boat. Seifert - 2

**RW:** Do you remember what shipyard it was?

**GS:** No, but I know who he worked with. He worked on his first boat, which was the Roma, with his friend. I forget what his name was. Then my dad decided to work for the shipyards and he worked for Campbell's and others.

**RW:** There was a shipyard at the foot of G Street in San Diego and there was one at the foot of Grape Street. Do you remember those down there?

**GS:** No, because I wasn't very good on places. But the one I remember the most, of course, is National Steel and Shipbuilding.

**RW:** You were actually living ashore in your early, early years?

**GS:** Yes.

**RW:** So, how old were you when you moved on board the Point Loma?

**GS:** In 1933 I was about four years old and my sister was two years old. We were on there for three winters up until 1936.

**RW:** What was your dad's name?

**GS:** Olmar Schmidt. They moved here from Denver in 1927. My mother's name was opal at that time. It is different now.

**RW:** What brought them out here?

**GS:** I think to get away from his mother who was overpowering.

**RW:** What turned him onto working on a boat?

**GS:** He had already built homes; he had worked on wood. He started with the ship and thought that he would be a shipbuilder with this other man and the two of them would open their own shipyard. After they built the Roma, they figured out that was pretty hard.

**RW:** That was built on speculation, do you think?

**GS:** It was built to see if they could get the business and be able to work on their own. It was a fishing boat. I've got a picture of it.

**RW:** Oh, it was a bait boat because that is what they had in those days. Seifert - 3

**GS:** It could have been. It wasn't very big.

**RW:** He was doing this before you were born, I take it, if they moved here in 1927 and you were born in 1928. So your mother and dad were already married when they came here. And your mother was from Denver, also?

**GS:** Yes. She is almost 94 years old right now. I ask her questions, but she says she doesn't know.

**RW:** Did they sell the Roma?

**GS:** They must have. Do you know Bill Hall? He built himself a yacht. They used to go out on that. He worked in all the shipyards.

**RW:** He found out it was better to go work for a known shipyard so he could have a steady paycheck?

**GS:** Probably.

**RW:** And, also, don't forget those were Depression years, too.

**GS:** He was never bothered by the Depression because he was never out of work. However, he was able to move onto the boat and didn't have to pay a rent.

**RW:** Which boat was that?

**GS:** The Point Loma.

**RW:** When did you move on board?

**GS:** It was in 1933. We would move off in the summertime when they took it out to the Portuguese Banks about a mile and a half out of the harbor where the kelp beds are. That is where they fished. People came here by motor launch.

**RW:** So, to cut your expenses you were able to live on the Point Loma during the fall, winter and spring months. Then you had to move off because it was used as a deep sea sport fishing boat. Do you know any of the history of the Point Loma?

**GS:** Yes, I do. The Glendale was a schooner. It was built in Fairhaven in 1888. It was used for fishing in Santa Monica before it was brought to San Diego. Sometime in there they took the masts and the superstructure off and put cabins instead where people could sleep and then the dining room over here. They had room for 55 people, according to this folder. It was one of the best preserved wooden Seifert - 4 vessels afloat according to an article that I read in the paper down at the San Diego library. They gave me some of this information and I wrote it down. It saw service along the coast in a variety of uses. It was towed to San Diego by the tug, Cuyamaca. It was 170 feet long, 34 feet in the beam, with a nine-foot depth. One of the best things about it was that they took the stern and enlarged it all the way around so there was more room for the people with their fishing poles. Evidently, from what I have seen of the old Point Loma, it was nothing like this, it was just a barge. This was often described as a fishing yacht which was pretty fancy, I think.

**RW:** According to this brochure from the Star and Crescent Boat Company, put out by Oakley Hall, [it] says it was 40 minutes from Broadway. It was permanently anchored off of Portuguese Point, off the great kelp beds outside of San Diego harbor entrance. It was great for fishing for yellowtail, bass, barracuda, but only during the summer months. Where was it moored during the winter months?

**GS:** My father was working at the San Diego Marine Construction Company. The houseboat, the Point Loma, was connected at the south end of a long pier. It was connected by a swinging gangplank or bridge. My dad called it a bridge. You had to walk on it and if it was high tide, the water was over the bottom. So they put a box and a plank on there to cross. It was very scary to everybody.

**RW:** But not to you, being little.

**GS:** Oh, we were little kids; we didn't care much. During real high tides we all got our feet wet going to our boat. We called it "our boat" and everybody else called it a houseboat.

**RW:** So you and your sister, your mother and your dad had the whole boat to yourselves? What did you use for heat?

**GS:** We took over a couple of rooms. In the kitchen she had a diesel stove that she cooked on. There was a place where you could put sticks in one of the little places and make it warm there. She did call that the galley. Connected to that, of course, was the dining place where they had long counters, big stools, tables and chairs.

**RW:** You had to go to school from the ship. How did you manage that?

**GS:** When I was finally old enough to go to school I did go to Logan Elementary school. It is not there anymore. Seifert - 5

**RW:** Where was the school located?

**GS:** It was on Sampson Street. I went there for both the kindergarten and first grade.

**RW:** It must have been a very small, small school. And the teacher's name?

**GS:** My kindergarten teacher was named Mrs. Freidendorf. I have a book of all the names of all the teachers I ever had so I can pick it up and look at it.

**RW:** And where did you get the streetcar?

**GS:** It must have been Market Street.

**RW:** It couldn't have been Market Street. Market Street didn't have a streetcar.

**GS:** Wherever it was, it was not very far. We could just walk through the shipyard, down south a bit and get on the streetcar to go downtown. My mother might be able to explain that better, but that is what I have got. All of our friends and relatives liked to come to the houseboat. These albums are full of pictures of people in those days. Teas and birthday parties. She had the Local Number 1300 Shipwright's Auxiliary Ladies meeting come on board one day. My dad had the Local Number 1300 Shipwright for the men to belong to. Then the wives all became the auxiliary group. They would get together socially.

**RW:** So your dad was sort of a natural leader?

**GS:** He was a kind of a reluctant leader. If you tried to say something nice about him he would just turn around, and nothing. He was bald and all his friends called him "Curly." He was a good-looking man.

**RW:** Did you enjoy living like that, rocking around in the water, the storms and so forth?

**GS:** Yes. The storms were interesting. All the roofs leaked.

**RW:** Did the decks leak?

**GS:** I had no way of knowing about that because we were living on the main deck. Two of the staterooms were used for our family. Then this part [presumably showing pictures] was used for the cooking and dining room, or whatever you want to call it. Seifert - 6

**RW:** From the superstructure I see that you have extended the poop because of the fishermen.

**GS:** The canvas area up here, I guess, was supposed to be for the people who weren't fishing. It is a canopy above the superstructure.

**RW:** Was the ship ever used for gambling?

**GS:** I am not sure whether it was or not. I really don't know. That is something I would like to know, who lived on it after we moved off of it. We moved off after an accident.

**RW:** Does Ed Reese know? He would be a good man to ask.

**GS:** I'd like to ask him. I need to talk to him some more. He says he doesn't get out much; he can't walk. I did send him a copy of both of these boats and I sent him some of these pages so that he could, if he wants to, write a few words about the family with the two little girls who lived on the boat.

**RW:** What was your sister's name?

**GS:** My sister's name was Ruthie. We had fun playing all over that boat. We were just left to roam around. My mom was watching us, but we got into things that maybe we shouldn't have. She worried about where we would be. We had a playhouse. We played in the bait box with its slime and you know what. We used to go up to the bow a few times and we'd drop things down the anchor hole. It was shiny, you know, where they pull the anchor up and put it down. It was a nice chute.

**RW:** That is called the hawser.

**GS:** We'd go up there, took our shoes off, threw our teddy bears and stuff down there. One time my mom had to go get the rowboat. She doesn't remember how she did it. There was a way that you could winch it down and sometimes it was just tied down there. They could get into it, but I don't know how. She went out to retrieve those shoes and the other stuff that my sister and I threw overboard for fun. We played around there; we climbed up to the upper superstructure that had a captain's, cabin above the bedroom areas. Sometimes we would go up there. We could open the door and the ceiling was about three inches high. It leaked, so the rain was on the floor - it couldn't get out, so that was our swimming pool. Seifert - 7

**RW:** I presume the Point Loma did not have any auxiliary power, it was just towed into position. What did you do for bathrooms?

**GS:** It had nice bathrooms. They had a room for just the bachelors and then they had separate rooms for people who just wanted to sleep in the bunks.

**RW:** All the waste, then, went over the side?

**GS:** Probably, I have no idea, believe me. That is how our bay got so polluted. We really had a good time playing around there. our doctor came on board to treat us when we had the measles. We were quarantined like they used to do in the old days - put up the sign. A man in a punt that pa knew from the old Rowing Club brought us candy. He knew there were little girls on the boat. I've got a picture of the punt right by the side of our boat. Everybody knew there was a young family living there. You know, it was kind of news for a family to be living at a shipyard on a boat.

**RW:** Did you ever get a write-up in a newspaper?

**GS:** If they did, I don't know about it. I don't think we did. We had to walk through the shipyard each time we came and went. My mother said for us girls to be sure and not look at those arc-welding torches. She made it real clear that we were never to look there because she said it would ruin your eyesight. We played on the beach. There was a natural beach there before they started building things everywhere. It was kind of sandy. There were caves where my mother said the bones lived. It was scary.

**RW:** I am not sure, but did I ask you where the shipyard was, or is?

**GS:** Not yet. I know it was at the bottom of Sampson Street. We could go right through the shipyard, down the pier and right onto the boat.

**RW:** Do you think it is still there?

**GS:** Yes, definitely, but with a different name. I think some of the old buildings are still there. I'd like to get out on the pier to just see it again.

**RW:** What did you do for entertainment on board? Seifert - 8

**GS:** Everybody we ever knew, all our relatives, everybody from the First Methodist Church eventually came on that boat to visit.

**RW:** Where was this Methodist Church? Is that the one that was downtown?

**GS:** The big stone one. We all belonged to the Sunday School. I don't remember where it was, but I know it was torn down. I still have my cradle roll paper and so does my sister, Ruthie. At night, if you were going on the boat, as you looked down into the water off the pier, you could see all those little shiny fish. I am not sure if they were sardines, but they were silvery; there were hordes of them. I still like the creosote smell because it makes me sit up a little bit and think of those days. My dad even put in a trapeze for us. When people came on board they usually came to eat with us. They had been with us for birthday parties. It seemed to me like when I was working on my mother's diary which she kept in the year 1934 that she was always talking about the people who came. She has got all of their names. A lot of the people were a little bit afraid of it. They would make comments like, "Can you make this thing quit rocking? You know it is just constantly doing this." I'd go to sleep at night and sometimes I could hear this 'slap, slap, slap.' Sometimes it was kind of scary.

**RW:** When I lived on the Star of India for seven and a half years I would go to work at General Dynamics during the day and stay on the ship at night. I was an electronic technician and I had an eight-foot bench to work on. When I would go to work in the morning the whole bench was weaving.

**GS:** I know the feeling.

**RW:** I'll bet you felt that way when you went to school.

**GS:** I really don't remember that. I had problems at school because I couldn't see; I was cross-eyed. And that was a great deflection.

**RW:** Were you operated on?

**GS:** Never. My folks never believed in surgery. I've had to wear glasses all my life. I never had anything done for Seifert - 9 it. I learned not to focus a certain way. When I was going to school the kids would say, "Your eye is turned in again."

**RW:** So you had control of your eyeball?

**GS:** Yes. I did some exercises. I could hear the bells from the Navy ship that was nearby. I don't know how nearby it would have had to be.

**RW:** It doesn't have to be close because sound crosses water very easily.

**GS:** I didn't understand that the bells meant time-wise but I could also hear the radio and when they would speak on the speaker. I could hear that talking on the Navy ships. I also could see from the boat some pilings that were in the bay close to the boat. They had little houses on the top where the Japanese fishermen lived. They had their boats tied up there and they went out every day and came back. Whatever they were tied to, I don't know, but they lived right there. I don't remember seeing anything like that after the war.

**RW:** Well, during World War II the Japanese were taken away. But you were off your boat by then, weren't you?

**GS:** We were off before that, but I do remember that.

**RW:** Did you have electricity on board?

**GS:** Yes. There must have been some kind of a system of some sort. When we wanted to run our washing machine to wash clothes, they put on the machine that makes things run. What do you call it?

**RW:** Generated power. When you were tied to the dock did you have a freshwater hose?

**GS:** Evidently. We used the sink in the kitchen.

**RW:** What about hot water?

**GS:** I think she had to do that with a tea kettle. I'll have to ask her about that if she can remember. I've tried to ask her some things that she just simply cannot remember, and other things she will remember very clearly. She has Seifert - 10 some of her notes in shorthand. She can't even read them anymore. She says she hasn't used it for such a long time. She was a secretary most of her life. After we got older she went back to work.

**RW:** It was nice to have two incomes. Your dad always had a job; he wasn't ever without a job.

**GS:** He didn't quit the shipyards until he was 75 years old.

**RW:** I assume he is gone. When did he die?

**GS:** He died about four or five years ago. He had time to play golf for awhile. He took us down to the shipyards when we were little kids. During the war he would take us on a Saturday or Sunday and let us climb around. He would let us go on the tuna boats all by ourselves and sit up in the crow's nest. It was a wonderful place for us to play. That was when it was National Steel and Shipbuilding. One day there was a boat tied up to our boat. These were fishermen so it was a small boat of some kind. They had somehow gotten permission from mother for us to go and have breakfast with them. I went and there were the working tables and the benches. They liked to tease me, but they were nice and jolly. They wanted to give me coffee and I said, "Kids don't drink coffee," and they just laughed and laughed because I took it so seriously. I wasn't able to joke with grownups. My mother



said, "They were just spoofing you." People would try to tease us little girls and tell us such outlandish things that we knew weren't true. I remember we loved being on that boat. We had pancakes and syrup. It was a great opportunity for us. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night thinking about certain things that happened that I wanted to get on these cards and it would keep me awake for hours just trying to figure out how I would say it. That is the reason why I made the cards.

**RW:** You are more organized than most people I have interviewed.

**GS:** After you have taught school for awhile you write so many notes and keep so many notebooks. I keep a diary, too, just so I can remember when did we go here, when did we go there. This was the event that I want to tell you about that made us move off the boat finally. It was in 1934. I had Seifert - 11 already been going to school. The boat needed to go into dry dock in Long Beach and it was towed by the Cuyamaca tug. Tape 1, Side B: The trip and the work time in the dry dock was about three days. We just kept living on the boat and using all the facilities and sleeping there. It was foggy going north when we went out at night. This is what I got out of the diary because I wasn't sure of the details.

**RW:** This was the beginning of March of 1934?

**GS:** Yeah. When we came back to San Diego it was clear and my mom wrote that she enjoyed watching the shore lights as we returned to San Diego. I can remember the boat's heavy rolling when we went by a Navy ship. The boat rolled so and the waves were so big that you couldn't even see the other boat. That was scary to me. I don't remember being scared very much on the boat because we just took it for granted. But that really was interesting. At one point we pulled up to the tug so we could visit with the crew. They knew there was a family living there and they wanted to see who this family was that they dragged all the way up to Long Beach and back.

**RW:** So you lived on the boat for another year? **GS.:** We lived there until sometime in the spring of 1935. At that time my mother was pregnant with a third girl. She wasn't a part of our adventure.

**RW:** What was her name?

**GS:** Her name is Helen. She was a friend of your wife's. She is Helen Slusher now and they get together sometimes. We both talk with your wife. In 1935 my mother, Ruth and I were using the bridge to board the boat. It was a swinging gangplank is what I always called it because it wasn't a stable object. Mom has some packages and I understand she was reading a letter. I went across first and I got on the boat. She was pregnant and was trying to get my sister across here. My sister tripped and fell into the bay. She could have drowned. Now this was a baby, a little kid. My mother tried to grab her but it was hard. She called to a nearby Seifert - 12 worker, is what she told me when I asked her the other day. The man jumped in and saved my sister. And I don't remember anything that happened after that. I used to tell this story every year at the beginning of school - you know, that time when you got up to share what you did last summer. I would always tell them I lived on a boat. Finally the teacher said, "You know, we've heard all of those stories." When we moved off it was about May. My sister was born in June. So we stayed on quite awhile. We moved to East San Diego near La Mesa, 72nd Street. That is when I went to the John Muir School. When I got there those people knew I needed glasses. I could not read; I could not separate any letters; I was just absolutely useless.

**RW:** Do you have any idea what happened to the Point Loma fishing yacht?

**GS:** No, I don't and I wish I did because I've always been curious about it. Vaguely, I remember somebody told me (and I don't know if it was my dad or not) that when it got very old they just took the superstructure off and used it as a plain old barge. Barges just all stuck around everywhere.

**RW:** It had a wooden hull. Ed Reese doesn't know; did you ask him?

**GS:** I never did get into that conversation with him, but I've talked with him once or twice.

**RW:** Ed Reese is a writer who has written a lot about these fishing barges off the California coast. But he is not well now.

**GS:** He was glad to get some of the things I sent him. He said if he could he would use them somehow in what he was writing.

**RW:** We did cover the fact that your dad died about four years ago at the age of 90, and your mother is still alive.

**GS:** He died a little bit earlier than that. I don't think he made [it] to 90. She still lives in her same home. She has somebody with her to cook and take her around, but she does not want to leave her home.

**RW:** Thank you very much for this interview. I will see that a copy goes into the Maritime Museum and the San Diego Historical Society. Any photographs that you want to have copies made of to donate, let me know, or mail them down Seifert - 13 to the Maritime Museum. However, you said they are already at the Historical Society. This interview didn't run very long, but it is very interesting and will be of a lot of value to researchers.

**GS:** Perhaps somebody else could add to it or get an idea of something that would be an offshoot that I didn't cover, because I wasn't very old. I had a long way to go after that. I enjoyed doing this.

***END OF INTERVIEW***

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