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Interview with Jane Magee Stauss

Date of Interview: August 3, 1996

Interviewers: Susan Gutierrez and Marje Howard-Jones (Int:)

Transcriber: Dee Morning

Tape opens with Stauss standing in Magee House front room and in the middle of a sentence:

Stauss: Lena had a mobile home park by Cleveland. She was a wonderful lady and she was with my Uncle Hugh when he died and her mother was the midwife when he was born. They were all kind of practical nurses you know, took care of everyone.

Int: What did he die of?

Stauss: He had lockjaw, tetanus. I don't know whether it affected his heart or what. But he was a very dear person and he spent most of his time feeding cats.

Int: How did they (Florence & Hugh) live?

Stauss: Well, they were very naughty –

The threesome sit down and Stauss continues:

Stauss: for this reason. They sold part of the ranch to a gentleman and his family. His name was Coleman M. Gray. Whether they had been friends in the past or not, I don't know. Coleman was very handsome and a bachelor. They (Grays) lived in Del Mar up on a hill. The problem was that they sold part of the ranch but they didn't tell the rest of the family. Hugh was the administrator but it never occurred to anybody that they could do this. I had an uncle in Los Angeles that was very successful in motion pictures, the business part, not the pictures. He sent someone down to look around the old house and he discovered that he (Hugh) had done this.

Int: This was while Hugh was still alive?

Stauss: Yes. Then the lawsuits started. But he was a nice man, he never did anything wrong in his life you know. It was his wife, it was her, she made him do it!

Int: They continued to live there (at the ranch)?

Stauss: Yes, but in another house completely separate. When I was little they used to come to our house in San Juan Capistrano in a big car, I think it was called a Chandler. It had cut glass vases, we had one too but those days were over and gone when the lawsuits started over the ranch. They cost so much money and then the problems with the roads started. My Aunt Jane said Mr. Gray cannot drive over my property to get to his (property) so they locked the gate so that they (Grays) had to drive over our yard, past the barns and down the hills.

Int: Your family had property up there (Condor's Nest) too?

Stauss: Well it was the family property. My father, Aunt Jane and Uncle Hugh all (owned it). My grandfather and grandmother were long gone by then. I have some pictures. Here's a woodcut of Condor's Nest.

All look at Stauss's picture album. They decide Hugh was handsome.

Int: Tell me Jane, why Shipleys had a problem with Florence marrying Hugh. Was it because he was half Indian?

Stauss: No, no, (it was) because he was Catholic, that was the problem. No, my Auntie Weeze (Luisa/Louisa Magee) was half Indian. My grandparents adopted her. She was my grandfather's brother's child. He had his own store in Temecula. His name was John Magee. They all came from New York, the Magees. Here's a picture of the younger Magee children, Uncle Victor, my dad William, Uncle Louie, Aunt Bea. Their parents were dead by then (when picture was taken). Aunt Jane raised the younger children.

Here's a picture of Auntie Weeze. She is in the will to share equally with the other children. Here's my mother and my dad. My mother was quite interesting. She had a magnificent voice, was on the stage, taught music, was a concert pianist, sang at the Met, did Aida as an understudy. My mother was married previously to a man who made his money in the wood business in Alaska during the Gold Rush. He died and a friend of hers introduced them (my mother and my father). My dad was living with the Forster Family in San Juan Capistrano on Ortega Highway. Here's a picture of my great grand father Miguel de Pedorena, one of the first signers of the California Constitution in Monterey. He was from Spain. And my great grandmother, she was an Estudillo. This is a picture of my brother Bill; he just killed a mountain lion that killed three of his sheep. These are pictures of Condor's Nest. (Shows pictures of where Florence & Hugh lived at one time).

Int: What did Florence & Hugh do at Condor's Nest?

Stauss: I don't think they did anything. Raised cats.

Int: I mean in order to eat, what did they do?

Stauss: Well, there were fish, oranges, cows, deer; we ate venison all the time when I moved there in '39.

Int: How many people lived at Condor's Nest?

Stauss: Florence and Hugh never had any children

Into: By choice?

Stauss: Who knows? You didn't ask questions like that in those days. Someone sent me copies of some postcards that Florence had sent Hugh before they were married and I

didn't like that. I felt as though I was spying, you know like reading someone's diary.

And she (Florence) would not have liked that, not at all.

Stauss: And this is Nigger Nate, who lived on Palomar Mountain. He was an ex-slave.

When my dad and Uncle Louie were little, he was their friend. They would go (to visit him) and it was a long way to go. He told them he would give them a yellow pup. That's how he got them to come up and do chores for him. I was adopted into the Luisano Tribe when I was 12 years old as a courtesy to my grandmother. She helped them (a lot).

Here's my grandfather (Henry Magee) and my grandmother (Victoria de Pedorena). Her parents were dead and she was raised by her grandmother.

Int: How did they meet?

Stauss. He came here in (18)47. He was stationed at the Presidio to protect the Americans in San Diego and she was (living) there.

Int: Isn't she the one who ran away with an American doctor?

Stauss: No! That's not true. I have the whole story written by the judge. There's a lot of myth and a lot of truth. I have it right here. Her grandmother gave her permission. Mrs. Sutherland (who was) like someone who took care of her talked her into this. The doctor's name was Hammond. Here it is as you can see it was taken from the judge's files.

Int: Oh, it's the marriage ceremony.

Stauss: They were married in the judge's quarters. The family was incensed and her grandmother obviously approved it. And she was just a little girl. Anyway the doctor said he would not consummate the marriage if he could send her away to a boarding school until she was a certain age and then they would go back East. The people in Old

Town and her family and friends of the family were incensed. The judge looked out of the window on the Plaza and saw all the people out there on horseback and they (the people) just took her away. (Others) told the drivers who came after her that they went the other way. They took her to a distant relative in Mexico. Cave Cout's wife knew about it.

Int: So the doctor didn't get her:

Stauss: No, they (hid) her, they couldn't find her.

Int: The papers we have say that your grandfather Magee provided the horses for them to take her into Mexico.

Stauss: That's true. They probably were government horses because he was a lieutenant in the army.

Int: Is that how they met?

Stauss: Well much later I think as he was about 30 and she was 18 when they married.

(Anyway) they had the (first) marriage annulled and there was great trouble about that.

Marje, the reason you can't have copies of these stories is because these are for my kids.

I wouldn't give them to Betty (Keller, a cousin) either. I've given her enough.

Shares more pictures of her dad and uncles.

Int: When Florence moved back here (to Carlsbad) were you living here at the time?

Stauss: No, she moved here long before I came to Carlsbad which was after the war sometime.

Into: Did you visit her?

Stauss: She really didn't like company. I really saw more of her when I lived on the ranch in 39, 40 and 41. After Uncle Hugh died she would bring hay and cat food up to

the ranch. She had a couple of Indian boys. One of them had been with our family for a long time and the other had worked for my dad and my brother. One was named Placentia. Anyway, they'd run out of food up there. They didn't have cars, they had horses and Placentia would get drunk every Friday night and go up to Pechanga or someplace. Her car was always breaking down and then she'd get so tired I'd find her asleep in the car along the road. One time I was hauling calves and the road just gave out and I was stuck and she came along. We jacked up the car and put rocks under it.

Anyway, we'd help each other that way. But she was never warm, she was never the kind to run up (to) and put your arm around. She was very direct, and very important and very cranky. One time when my little girl Sandra was born, we didn't have cows, only range, so I went and asked her if I could have a quart of milk a day. She had beautiful cows.

You know what she said? "I only have enough for myself, if you want milk why don't you buy a cow?" I was crazy about this lady, let me tell you (spoken sarcastically).

Int: What was her mother like?

Stauss: Kinda cute and small, cotton stockings, prissy black shoes, a little bitty thing.

Another thing about what my Aunt Florence was like, when Uncle Hugh died he was buried in San Diego. I don't remember what cemetery, probably Greenwood. We had this procession from Oceanside at 35 miles per hour. I rode with Aunt Florence and another cousin. And on the way home she (other cousin) said, "Well Florence, one nice thing, when you get home your mother will be waiting for you". Florence said, "Unfortunately you're right". She was just a miserable lady.

Int: But she has such a sweet face in the pictures.

Stauss rolls her eyes, smiles, say's nothing. Shows more pictures of her family. Says her father was a real mover and shaker. Explains he didn't really farm but was an overseer.

Int: Were there any Indians around?

Stauss: Oh, he grew up with them. Rincon was only about 10 miles away. They were still living out doors, in huts.

Stauss continues to tell family stories and about Indians getting in trouble. She turns her head away from the camera and drops her voice so low that most of the words are indistinguishable.

Int: Could we ask a few important questions here?

Stauss: Sure, what do you want to know?

Int: Well first I'd like to know how Magee House looked when Florence and her mother lived here?

Stauss: It was piled up high with papers. They never threw anything away and they subscribed to every magazine you could think of. There was a beautiful china closet here, probably against that wall. It had a piece of amber on top of it (gestures with hands that it was the size of a football) and my dad wanted that sooo bad. He was a mineralogist and a gemologist. He wanted it not for its value but because of what it was.

Int: Which room was Florence's?

Stauss: I don't know – I do know that when they were married there was an apartment of some sort added on for them, probably a bedroom and a closet, to come and stay here.

Int: But we thought that she never saw her father again after her marriage.

Stauss: I don't know, maybe it was added on after he (father) died.

The story was that Mr. Shipley was kind of a carpetbagger. I know that he had been an ambassador to ^{New Zealand} Australia. I know they lived on the Isle of Man at one time or another.

She (Florence) had beautiful things. I don't know if they were hers or her mother's. I know at Condor's Nest she had a beautiful set of china dishes. They were pale green with Mount Fuji on them. There were baskets of eggs over here that were rotten, and over there he (Hugh) had rocks piled up. It wasn't like just being in an untidy house, it was weird things. And she wouldn't give you anything. She had silver, crystal and the garage was piled up with mattresses that the rats (had reduced) to the coils.

Into: did she get a dowry?

Strauss: Oh I'm sure they gave her a lot of money. I know she left some man \$10,000 and he'd been dead for years.

Int: We have a copy of the will here; she left quite a bit of money to the humane society.

Strauss: Yes, I know that. I have the picture of the man receiving it that was in the paper. She had cats. Her house was never very pleasant because the cats would jump out of the cupboards and on the tables. I hated it.

Int: she had all these exquisite things, how was she personally, was she well groomed?

Strauss: On the ranch she always had on men's bib overalls and rubber boots. She always had on this bracelet. As she got older her hair got gray. You know when you get older you disintegrate and start to fall apart. She got smaller.

Int: Was she a tall woman?

Strauss: Oh I don't know, well she couldn't have been because my Uncle Hugh was not a tall man. She was willowy, always was thin. She was always brown as she had been in the yard a lot. She used to come to our family parties, holidays, at Las Flores. You

know, I never saw her dressed up. She was always very polite, always very stern. She did really mean things – she could have given one of my cousins, who was interested in history, a lot of papers that would mean nothing to anyone outside of the family. She promised him and she didn't do it. Oh, he was sick. He taught history in San Diego, was a Major in the army and a prisoner of war.

Int: She gave all that land to the Episcopal Church.

Strauss: Well I have several relatives who wanted to go to heaven. I have one who gave the Pope a million dollars.

Int: You think that's why she did it?

Strauss: I don't know, what do you think?

Int: She doesn't seem like that sort.

Strauss: People get older, don't have any children, and think maybe I haven't been all that I should have been. She had a really nice life; she could come and go as she wished. They went to an osteopath and a chiropractor in Oceanside. And she liked Pancake House. The only really nice thing that that woman did – well, there was a fellow that worked for her (the rest of the story is unintelligible until she says) now, that was a nice thing to do.

Int: Well, I think her father was that way too.

Strauss: I never heard anything nice about that man. What did he do?

Int: He underwrote some civic improvements.

Int: How was her mother?

Strauss: I think she probably was a very nice little lady. I never saw her mother at the ranch. (My friend) Barbara had one of the first antique shops in Fallbrook. She called

me and said she'd like to buy that red barn (from Florence). I said why don't you just let her alone; she probably won't be nice to you anyway.

Discussion follows between MH-J and Strauss about merits of Mr. Shipley's personality and character; most of the conversation is unintelligible.

Int: From pictures I have seen in the library, the house used to look different on the outside.

Strauss: Didn't it have a lot of gingerbread? (Strauss is unable to verify the colors).

Inside it seems to me it had that awful wallpaper, everyone had that awful wallpaper.

The three ladies discuss wallpapers. Strauss tells a long story about her mother's sister's husband.

Int: Anything else you can tell us about Florence.

Strauss: What can I say? I know she was an extremely intelligent lady. Who knows what she felt inside because she didn't confide in anyone. People were nice to her.

(Something about three different cousins being interviewed separately and asked who is your favorite in the family? All three responded that there isn't a favorite family member, all are wonderful). And that's the way we were raised and all of my dad's people were nice to Florence. But she never really reciprocated back. Then they had that horrible lawsuit.

Int: What was the outcome of the lawsuit?

Strauss The outcome was that Mr. Coleman Gray had to build a road over the top of the mountain. And that was terrible; I mean, think of the expense. They had already caused the damage (by selling part of the ranch) but my Aunt Jane wouldn't let it go. She and Uncle Hugh were the administrators of their mother's estate. They owned a lot of

property; see they owned from El Cajon to the Precidio. She wrote in her will that they all had to live in harmony and nothing could be done until the little ones were of age.

That didn't mean they had money, but they were all educated, every one of them.

Int: Do you think that Hugh & Florence's marriage was a happy one?

Strauss. I think they were very much in love. I think my Uncle Hugh was a very timid, quiet man. A cousin told me a story about Uncle Hugh. He had a beautiful set of matched black horses and when he'd go down to see Florence, he would stop ahead and wipe those horses down so they'd just sparkle.

Discussion follows concerning where they met. Strauss says she doesn't have the foggiest idea, and then proposes several possible scenarios, which all three discuss. Conversation turns to how fleas breed in adobe and different methods of controlling. Tape ends abruptly.