

Kathy Jones Interview (10/14/75)

I met Bert in the later 1960's. Certainly it was after 1961. Because my crusading effort to "save" the dunes was almost began with the establishment of the Sierra Club Unit in S.L.O. County. That unit was called the Santa Lucia Group of another Sierra Club chapter. Since that time it has become a full-fledged Sierra Club Chapter. That was formed on Nov. 9, 1961. Very soon after our formation it came to our attention that PG&E was trying to buy a parcel of a little over 1100 acres in the dunes about 4 or 5 miles south of where Bert lived. In the course of this conservation crusade -- at that time I lived in Paso Robles and I was married to Duncan Jackson, (and we were bringing up our children) a rancher there -- but I was very taken with, interested in the dunes. I fell in love with the dunes -- and that's a story in itself. One of my daughters took me there as a birthday present. . . and it rang a bell. I remembered in my childhood when my father in Santa Barbara had got us camping. Having come to love the dunes I wanted to explore them and I kept exploring them -- did a great deal of hiking alone -- for years. And hiked with others and led outings.

One day I ran into Bert. Actually, the way it happened was a photographer from southern California with his wife, old Sierra Club friends of mine, visited me and wanted to go out into the dunes in the wintertime. When the shadows were long earlier in the afternoon. We went out and up into the high dunes near Bert's place, but didn't know that it was there. From where we stood on the highest dunes at the time when the shadows were long we could hear the birds -- lots of birds -- their evensong -- and we realized it was not coming from Arroya Grande Creek which was on our right. We were facing the ocean, but that it was in a place where we could see a glitter of water, straight ahead, so I said, "Why, there is a little pond hidden in the dunes which I've never seen before. Let's go down." So we ran down the dunes and made our way to a little pond -- which is not too unusual because there are unnamed ponds in the dunes. Sure enough. The birds were filled with song. Their evening talk. So we circled around this marshy little pond and I said, "Let's cut through these willows -- you can never get lost in the

dunes." So we circled ~~the pond~~ around and I rather lost my sense of direction, but parting the willows, I found myself on the edge of a clearing and there was a little shack.

It was so late afternoon it was really dusk. There was a faint light coming out of the little shack. I said to the photographer, "Fred, you go and see who's there." He said, "No, you, because you're connected with the dunes." I said, "Helen, how would you like to do it?" Anyway, we argued.

It resulted in my making the move and calling out and saying "Hellooo, Hello there. Hello," and nothing happened and suddenly the door of the shack ~~was~~ flung back against the -- was flung open -- a great figure came out and put his arms on both sides of the little posts that held up the porch ~~and~~ shelter and I was reminded of Samson holding up the portals of the temple. I can see the picture in our Bible Story Book and I can also see ~~the~~ him there TOWERING because he was over six feet. And he said, "Well, hello there. Come in. It's dark. You must be cold. Come in and have some coffee." Just like that (chuckle). That this was my introduction to Bert.

So the three of us went in and he made some coffee for us with what became hot water and talked awhile, so it was the beginning of/a long, very pleasant, but quite casual friendship. Surely not an intimate friendship, although we had MANY good talks. Particularly on philosophical subjects. I had philosophy in college and I was impressed with the fact that he had read all the philosophers whose names I knew. He was also interested in contemporary philosophy -- William James, and so forth. He said that he had given up philosophy and had turned his attention to astrology. (Did he talk to you much about Buddhism?) I wouldn't say he talked MUCH about it. No. His hospitality on that first occasion was typical of his friendliness on ALL occasions. Now, I have led somany trips into the dunes of ^{small groups of} special people -- botanists, geologists, and the public that I have lost track. Now I could go back to my dairies and find out exactly how many, but it would amount to several thousand people over the past ten to twelve years. One of the things that I enjoyed doing was sometimes to lead a group out into the state park-owned dunes where vehicles are forbidden, for the purpose of giving people the

privilege of meeting someone who wanted to live alone.

Bert and I had a good understanding about this. He said,

"Don't bring everybody in at once, but if ^{you can bring} ~~I-can-meet~~ them

in small groups I don't mind meeting them." And he said,

"If I suddenly have had enough, then I'll just say don't

bring anymore in and you'll understand I don't feel like

meeting anymore people that particular day." I followed

this implicitly and usually, practically always when I

went I took some little offering when I went. Fresh fruit,

in particular. Because I knew he LIKED it and because I

imagined he lived on a limited income. He once told me

that his income was \$40 a month and that he earned that

from taking care of a cottage in the Oceano beach community

area. And that he was able to live completely on that.

(Do you met him in his own habitat, so to speak, his own

territory.) Yes. And i NEVER found him out of sorts.

(It seems to me you once told him you loved wildflowers and

delighted in learning their botanical names : . :)

It was _____, my great Sierra Club friend, that said

that actually. I've repeated that many times when I've been

out with people on wildflower walks, and Bert agreed with that. I know nothing about his childhood, his family. I would like to have heard about that. I know he was ~~an~~ative of the Freisan Islands. I don't know about his educational or religious background. I have never heard him IMPLY he might have had a child. It is the kind of thing we might have joked about. He spoke of a woman cousin from the north. Does that mean Oregon? (I think it means Canada). He sent her money so that she could come down and visit him and she came and he was SO disappointed because she stayed such a short time. (She didn't know how he came to Oceano) I have a theory because of his dislike for airplanes overhead, I had a theory that maybe he had been shocked during world war II because of course it was right after WW II that he came to the dunes. In my imagination I just tied it in with a possible war experience. He told me, "I tried the mountains, and, no, it wasn't my country, but the dunes were." (What do you know abt his life in the dunes?) Only that he knew the last of the dunites. He knew Frenchie, of the FACE OF THE CLAM. He had a happy-to-lucky relationship with most of them. I think he had certain criticisms to make of the

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personality rather than the character of some of them whom he knew. I don't think he ever mentioned unpleasant experiences with anyone being dishonest with him down there. I don't know. When it came to friendships, when the dunites were gone, he said, "Well, I have the little rabbits and I have the birds. He said the rabbits will compete for my food, and eventually, you know, he gave up growing vegetables because he said the rabbits need them more than I do.

(Can you offer insight into his basic philosophy of life, then?) His basic philosophy of life is so simple that it's a universal attitude of many good people. To live and to let live, and to enjoy his own thoughts and pursuing his own problems in astrology. (Can you account for his interest in politics?) His interest in politics? I don't remember that he was significantly interested in politics. (That's something you didn't touch on with him, then?) No.

(Can you offer any insight into his temperament?) Always pleasant and ready to joke and twinkle. This picture of him is the way I knew him. We had no occasion to probe and to delve and to discover his deeper self, or mine.

There was no stress under which we met. He was very pleased that my avocation was conservation and preserving the dunes which encompassed his way of life. He had nothing but commendation for the kind of thing I was doing. And he was helpful in that he made it interesting to some of the visitors.

(Do you know he came to be interested in astrology when his interest in philosophy waned?) No. He never told me about the transition. (What do you feel he valued most in life?)

His good fortune at finding solitude and having security in an income that made it possible for him to live a solitary life. (Do you feel that his friends were important to him?)

Yes, I feel his friends were more important to him than we acknowledged. He used to say, "I don't need people; I'm

better off without being among people," but I noticed that he was very friendly and responded in a welcoming way to

the strangers whom I brought to him. I'll tell you one thing

I have of his. He did an astrological chart for me that

extended through several months and after experiencing a

few days of it, I decided to fold it up and never look at it

again. This isn't a good day, be careful. Well, my goodness,

if I had to drive to Atascadero to see my mother, every car on the freeway was a threat. No. This astrology ahead was something to be very careful about dabbling in. (Did he leave his shack and go off to visit friends often?) I wouldn't say he did it often, but he would do it. He went to see Kim Robertson -- now age, middle seventies -- nearly died of a sudden bursting of the aorta. Kim lived in a cottage in Dr. Gerber's garden. Dr. Gerber took Kim to the emergency ward at Sierra Vista and there, to everyone's utter astonishment, Kim recovered. Kim is now living in Patio Home Care, at 222 So. Elm. Kim's real name is Florence Robertson. Kim was named after Florence Nightengale in Dresden, Germany. She is one of those human beings who is half female and half male and has always had very strong male leanings. It's definitely not a lesbian, but she gets along well with men. But being born a female and the male parts not turning up until later. After puberty or during. . . Kim went through life as a female and was a surgical nurse. Kim is a very friendly person -- easy to talk to - but now is bothered by signs of senility and is very forgetful. You could go one

But she will remember all kinds of things that happened a long way back. Kim has a good accurate memory and doesn't make up fairytales. (It's hard to talk to her on the phone) Say that I sent you. We went on many walks and I even introduced Kim, at the age of 70, to backpacking. Kim has led a life of struggle for being much misunderstood. A lot of halfway male, female characters have tried to latch onto her. All she wanted to do was live a simple, straightforward life. Act male when she felt like it; she never felt like acting female. She's an exceptionally honest person. (Do you know anything about Bert's favorite pastimes?) He went to South Convalescent Center to see Kim. I've forgotten who took him. Maybe Harold. No, I think Mrs. Montgomery did. She saw him week in and week out when he came in -- once a week -- for groceries. To read and to lie in the sun and to think. I do not know what he read.

I know that one time when Gaylord and I were there we got on the subject of poetry and Bert went back to his library and picked out an old volume of Robert Burns. Gaylord flipped through it to a poem he felt was fun that had a

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twinkle in it and read it aloud and we all had a good laugh about it. He was making fun of making love to girls that would take a tumble with him in the hay. (Do you know his

favorite music?) No. I have no idea. (His favorite foods?

Did he eat simply?) Yes, he did. He was a vegetarian, though

not altogether. (Did he tell you he was a vegetarian?) No,

he never told me that. No. I think I assumed it. (What

things bothered him most?) Let's see what I've ever heard

him rant and rave about. . . I just can't remember anything

to which he strongly objected. (Do you feel he was lonely?)

I'm sure he was lonesome and deeply lonely some of the time.

His very warmth and welcome to people would indicate that

he was lonesome even if he said he could get along without

them. He did joke about the few women that wanted to marry

him. (Do you think that was a tongue-in-cheek kind of thing

or that there were really women who wanted to?) Oh, I'm

sure that there were women -- there are all sorts of women

who would be intrigued or -- I think it was REAL that women

would make it clear to him that they would find him acceptable.

(Did he ever express regret to you at the lifestyle he had

chosen?) No. (Did he seem interested in material things to

you?) (Almost with indignation. . .) Well, certainly not.

(The business world? Stock market?) No, because we never got on that subject. (Do you know anything about his health history?) I don't. (Did you see any significant changes in

him during the time you knew him?) No, except a certain slowing down and his remark, "I'm growing older, Kathleen,

I'm growing older." As you and I are talking, we're looking right down on his willow thickets. If I got out my binoculars,

I could pick it out exactly. (How many people would you say you've taken to visit Bert?) Oh, probably as many as five

hundred. In groups of 5, 6, 8. Not more than probably 8.

We would stay only a short time and I would REALLY brief them ahead of time. Be friendly, be rather quiet, don't ask any personal questions. Just be interested. If you have anything to contribute, fine; if you feel like starting a conversation, fine. We never had anything unpleasant, unhappy.

(Did you know of his stowaway episode?) No, (In what ways did you feel he valued nature highly?) His gentleness toward the little creatures, his interest in observing the rabbits, the wolves, the foxes; I never heard him speak of coyotes.

There are coyotes and deer in the dunes. I don't think any are in that area. (Did you ever know him to hunt or fish for subsistence?) No. The racoon, His interest in watching birds, although he wasn't a serious birdwatcher. He was not an intellectual nature lover, he was -- he had a friendly

emotional relationship. Really, my husband looks like Father Time, don't you think so? giggling. He is such a gifted man; oh, he is so gifted. He's an artist who never really completely realized himself. He was an architect who came out of college during the depression and what was an architect during the depression? So he made his living carving beautiful copies of antiques. Doing things for very wealthy families who didn't lose all their money. He carved panels and interiors. . .

To go on with Bert: he was gentle, he felt for the animals, he had a sort of St. Francis feeling about them. Although he wasn't religious in the way a priest is religious at all. He had too much twinkle in him. He had a sense of humor. One thing I might say in passing is I feel that Bert had a high and fine and refined moral code of ethics. There was every reason in the world, in view of the times I visited him,

night and day, if I was exploring and I came back at nightfall I'd drop by and say "Hi, I was just stopping by on my way,"

when he could have made advances , he could have made insinuations and he was not a man who went after women. He probably never did. He was almost passive. He accepted overtures from a few women in his life, but he was not a seeker.

I don't know what kind of a sex life he may have had.

But I would feel that he somehow -- to some extent that he put his sexual drive to slumber. Of course, this could be a matter of all kinds of things; maybe body chemistry. Another thing that is interesting about Bert, unlike some hermits, he was not bitter about anything. I NEVER heard him express himself bitterly. He may have been, but I never heard it.

He wasn't frightened; he wasn't suspicious. Now, these are hermit characteristics. (I found him to be very frightened and suspicious.) of certain kinds of people, situations.)

(He was afraid of vandals.) Oh, well, he suffered from vandalism. I would say this was a righteous concern.

But not a timidity. He wasn't a timid person. He was fearful of people coming and taking his things.

Robbery, just outright robbery, concerned him. And he suffered from robbery. He had a radio taken one time. I don't know what else. (Do you know anything abt his life before he came to Oceano?) Only those remarks about trying the mountains. I don't know where. (Any personal anecdotes abt him you wld like to share?) No. I have no anecdotes -- scattery impressions. (Did you feel he was a performer when you took people into the dunes?) Welllll, he enjoyed slightly being the center of attention.briefly, but he did not enjoy being the center of attention and he was not a born actor. He didn't seek attention, I'm sure. He just thought, I don't know if he ever SAID, I'm a curiosity. . .I think he probably did. I had the feeling that I didn't want to make a curiosity out of him, that I didn't want to take advantage of him, show him off as the weird man of the dunes. Just here was a person that lives alone and how interesting that he chooses to live alone. in these dunes. The Hermit of the Dunes. You know, my own personal experience of him was, observing him,; was that he was a clean person. Clean of body. I never smelled stale body odor.being around him. Of course, I wasn't very

close to him. But, one of the things I NEVER asked him was where is your latrine? How do you handle your toilet problems?

And I never smelled a latrine when I was there. Not ever.

Not once. And I thought, My goodness, you're clever; what have you done? And I have no idea what his health or sanitary facilities were. (He would joke with some of the people he talked to and say Saints have no need of such things. . .)

THAT is typical of him. That sounds like Bert. Yes, I wish I could remember more of the ways that he referred to himself in such exalted terms because he had fun doing that.

Knows of no other names and addresses of people knowing

Bert. (If you were to describe Bert, how would you do it?)

Oh, I think I've done that for an hour now. That he was tall and well built and friendly. (What did you value most about

him?) Well, you see, we were FRIENDLY, we were not close

friends. We knew each other in such an on-again, off-again

way many weeks would go by and I would never see him. I had

no feeling of obligation. I did tell him that he ever had

need and could get word to me by any means, that I would be

very glad to go way out of my way to help him take him to a

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a doctor. To bring him anything. I was single most of the
time that I knew him. Because I was divorced in 1966 and
moved to Oceano in Aug. of 1966. I knew Bert before that.
But I wasn't in the position to say, come stay in my cottage.
I didn't -- I know that plenty of women would -- and I know
that I would now more than even 10 years ago. Because the
whole attitude toward male-female relationships has shifted.
I think that I have a sense of self-preservation to the extent
that I wouldn't want to be burdened by someone I thought
might become a burden. He was a VERY open person.
(Did he have any affect on your life?) No. There was a time
in my life when I would have like to have lived in the dunes.
But not with him or near him. I would like to have lived
somewhere near Harold Guiton's sandplant. just to feel the
dunes about me. It is my own wish for a poetical, emotional
experience. I slept out in the dunes a number of times,
not, many, many times. I'm leading another overnight for a
group of campfire girls. in Nov. (You've never found that a
personally threatening position to be in?) There's a man
here in A.C. a lot of people don't like men personally

because they say I took away the economic bonanza of this part of the county by thwarting PG&E's plans to build a power plant down there. I read today in my PG&E paper that they are building a nuclear plant near Modesto and I wish they could have build these plants only inland because the coast is such a rare piece of geography. In the world the one recreation demand that is higher than any other is water. People gravitate toward water. Streams in the Sierra, lakes wherever they can get them, and the coasts of the world. And to think that the coasts of the world are in short supply; there is much more inland in existence than there is coast. And to think that coasts of the world should be used up for power plants and houses right down to the tideline; this is a sad and baffling problem. (Is there anything else you would like to add abt Bert?) In a way,

I made use of Bert. He was one more interesting facet of the dunes. (Obviously you did it with his consent) I don't think I abused our acquaintance. When I went to see him in the hospital, he was alittle bit concerned about going upstairs, as he said. Because inspite of all his

reading and all his thinking, ^{just} /wasn't sure what the next room was like. No more than the wisest had ever been sure of.

That was the nearest that I ever saw him express a fearing concern of something. The way he held my hand tightly and said, "I'm going upstairs, Kathy, I'm going upstairs. He clung to those of us who saw him more at the end there;

I went every day to the hospital. (He told me that soon it will all be over; all that will be left is for Christ and Buddha to fight over my soul.) How cute. In a way

I felt sorry that I never had him up here. Look at the sea and how the dunes become dark as you look out. There is a serenity up here that gives you an overview of the dunes.

And it gives me perspective on this long struggle to save some of it. Of course, when I think of the movement of continents, and the millenias coming and going, and the coasts rising and falling, then I think, for goodness sakes, when the continents are moving around and joining and breaking apart, why is it important to me to save 18

miles of one little coastline? And it's curious how these drives come about. Therefore, at this point, after the 13½

years that I've worked at it, I once in awhile look out at the sea and get this perspective over the dunes to the end of space. It brings a serenity to the soul. Bert may have

gone out of his clearing and up on the dunes and looked afar ~~and~~ sometimes. I don't know how often he did. Of course, with imagination you can look afar, too. So he had his own pathway to serenity. He apparently grasped at your being in a deeper way than he did at mine. (Well, he felt

that our astrological signs were and that it was an eternal

-- I have a tape recording where he's talking w/ a girl

who's very knowledgeable about astrology -- I am not -- and he referred to our signs as an eternal thing. We just always seemed to be on the same wavelength. I think he

fascinated me because of his freedom, his serenity, his isolation without being isolated, because he was very know-

ledgeable about what was going on in the world; he was a

very perceptive social critic, and very perceptive, a very

perceptive man when it came to incisively cutting through

to human motives and foibles. I was constantly amazed at his

ability to do that.) Hmmmmmm. (Upon first meeting a person

I found him to be a very unique and special human being.

I think that he's enriched my life a great, great deal.

Perhaps I was drawn to him because I haven't a father;

my father's been dead for a long, long time. But I think

it was much more significant than that because not often

do we meet people that seem to hear us with their soul.

And I felt like that about Bert.) This is very important,

that you should have met someone ~~who~~ with which you had

this relationship and this feeling (And that's why it seems

very important to me to attempt to do this thing that I

promised him I would and to do it honestly and to -- you

know, I don't want to idealize him in any way; on the other

hand, I would like it to make people feel like I do when I

put down the book, ON THE LOOSE. When I put that down, I

feel full, I feel -- after putting that book aside after

having read it and looking at the pictures -- I feel

nourished.) That's beautiful. (And that is what I hope

to achieve -- and it will be difficult, because Bert was

indeed a difficult person, but I'm finding that this man in

Massachusetts. . . You know, I didn't want to distort Bert

Bert through the lens of my perspective of him. And I find that so many people are giving me reinforcement of certain areas and new knowledge in other areas. All this is important now. Bert, I knew, had many, many visitors to the dunes. He told me that Jerry Pearce's wife had come out there to get an astrological chart done to see if he was going to win the election, when he was running for sheriff.) Giggle. (And things like that. And I knew people gravitated to him and came back, but I didn't know that in any sense there was an organized kind of thing. such as you led.) Organized, but casual. Sometimes I wrote him a note ahead of time and said I'm going to bring a group. If it isn't all right when we get there, I know you'll let me know, ~~or~~ something like that. So he did meet several hundred people, but those were pretty casual; those were just brushes. There was a picture of him in the Santa Maria Times which was one that a man took on one of my trips that I led Doris Olsen use it. Have you studied any Chinese philosophy yourself? (I have done a considerable amount of reading on Zen several years ago.) Yes, Zen. Because I think that Bert and Zen. . . I would have

enjoyed talking with him more about Zen. (Had I read the Buddhist Bible while he was alive, there's no sense regretting what's past, but I . . . it's very close in line w/Bert's mode of living. And w/his morality. And code of ethics and all that. I can imagine him being a man so in control of his own feelings that even though he might be drawn to someone -- supposing he were drawn to someone like yourself -- that he would be so beautifully, reservedly affectionate and that it would be a very real part of him that I knew nothing about. I know what my sensitivities are and I can feel this and imagine it that there is a whole, finely sensitive affectionate side in him. It might have been a very fine experience. It would have no intrusion at all upon an experience with a husband. Because there is a difference. I have been married before and I know, and I have cared for a third person deeply in my lifetime and I know that there is SUCH a difference in the relationship between yourself and a or b or c: they are different worlds. They do not intrude upon each other. And since you are married, your problem would be to make it clear to

your husband that always there was no trespass here.