

Charlotte McLeod
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Interviewed by Susan Stryker

Transcribed: Loren Basham

Kim Klausner: Interview with Charlotte McLeod by Susan Stryker on August 22, 2002.

Susan Stryker: A USO thank you letter here from February 8, 1955, thanking Ms. McLeod for their appreciation for appearing at the Street Servicemen's Club on 1 East Street, New York.

Some publicity stills here. Some publicity stills here. And you said you are a member of the American Guild of Variety Artists?

Charlotte McLeod: Oh, well, I couldn't go on the stage when I was.... There was some sort of delay. Anyway, I finally received it.

SS: Let's see if it has a date on it.

CM: Well it had to be about 1953.

SS: 1954. There it is. So, did the union ever do much for you, or was it just that you had to pay your dues to be...?

CM: I had to pay my dues. And they would check to be sure I had my card. Miles Ingles was my agent.

SS: Miles Ingles?

CM: Ingles. Oh he had Polly Bergen, ah, it slipped my mind. There was Polly Bergen. One of the real famous; he also had Cyd Cherise.

SS: Cyd Cherise, yeah.

CM: Cyd Cherise, and the young couple.... Can you turn that thing off for me?

[Interruption in tape]

CM: Steve and Edie.

SS: Yeah, Steve Lawrence and Edie Gorme.

CM: Yes. It was so fun because there was a little dinky, over New, “New Jorsey”, they used to say. And there was this little club that they would send new people to try out their gigs over there. But I remember I went, the first thing that Steve and Edie, I wonder if they remember that. Our first trial was over in that little dinky club in New Jersey.

SS: Now is this a publicity photo? Of you, this looks like you’re....

CM: Well it was done in New Orleans.

SS: You said, you told me that you were, in this photograph here, that you were modeling whose necklace?

CM: Empress Josephine’s necklace and I have forgotten whether it was in the Winston Collection. There was a guard that had to be within touching distance of me everywhere I went.

SS: Where was that? That in New York?

CM: In New York.

SS: And you were modeling and that was just one of the shoots?

CM: Freelance, yes.

SS: And this photograph here?

CM: Oh, that series of photographs that they sent to different clubs.

SS: So just your publicity stills?

CM: Yes, publicity. I told Susan she ought to remember Big Mike Mizurke (sp?) ‘cause he always played the great big tough guys and as far as I know he is still living. He’d be awfully old.

SS: She was thinking this is Victor Mature? Does that look like Victor Mature?

KK: _(?)_ It could be.

SS: It really could be. Some movie.

CM: He used to make the rounds in all the clubs, the Coco Cabaña, the Latin Quarter. And all of the main clubs. It was not a great honor to dance with a movie star. Just so you were there, everybody did.

SS: This is shortly after her wedding to her first husband, Ralph Heidal I've seen that picture in the newspaper before. It's nice to see the original. Much better quality, of course.

CM: Yes, we slipped off to Miami, but not knowing that Dorothy Kilgallen had her spies down there. So we didn't have such a secret, as much as we had hoped for.

KK: How did you meet him?

CM: I met Ralph when I was living in Copenhagen. I went with a bunch of young Baptist people to Bergen, Norway, for a weekend. And we went out of the hotel, there was this big plateau around one side, it was the children's side to learn to ski. I had never had a pair of skis on in my life and I was standing there, I thought safely, from the edge, looking down into the clouds. Ralph came up and took me by the elbow and asked me if I would like to ski, or something in Norwegian. And I made the improper reply. And, zoom, down the steep slope I went. The only thing I could think to do after going terribly far and terribly fast was try and fall down. I ended up in the hospital with every bone I had bent, nothing was broken. But that was the way I met my husband.

SS: So, was he Norwegian?

CM: Yes, he was Norwegian, but he was raised in Brooklyn, of all places. People used to listen to us in restaurants. Maybe my mouthful of cotton southern accent and him with his Brooklyn accent.

SS: So, let's see what else we've got here. The New Orleans Blue Book.

CM: It used to be quite a thing to be on the front page.

SS: Well there you are. "Charlotte McLeod opens at Show Bar." And there's that picture of Mike Mizurke, again. And here is the ad for you appearing at the Casino Royale. (sp?) Various other newspapers and pictures.

CM: Washington.

SS: Now did you work for awhile as a telephone operator?

CM: I was a receptionist in a real swank beauty salon.

[Interruption in tape]

CM: I mean a salon that I used to go to, I thought it was so swanky. Because it stayed open all night. And I met the loveliest ladies, I thought, oh, you can just be so friendly. I really enjoyed the company. But they turned out to be ladies of the evening. But I had fun having my hair done anyway.

SS: And these pictures are of the cast at Casino Royale.

CM: Casino Royale.

SS: You don't remember any of the names of the people who were on stage with you here?

CM: Well, I know I went in between Gypsy Rose Lee and Mae West. How in the world they figured a little nobody like me in between those stars, they must have thought I was somebody at the time. Oh, mercy, can you imagine getting up in the largest nightclub in Washington with all sorts of officials, high officials.

SS: You said this picture here is a picture of you with two governors from someplace?

CM: The two governors asked me if I would pose for a picture. I have no idea who the governors were.

KK: So the Casino Royale was in DC, Washington, D. C.?

CM: Yes. And also ___(?)___, Montreal.

SS: Various other pictures in Washington. A newspaper. Here's one from the Stork Club. Who did you say these people were at the table with you? This little guy....

CM: They were entertainers. And this guy was, I don't know what his name was, Royal Shell Oil, I think it was Shell.

SS: He gave you a mink coat?

CM: He gave me a mink coat. But I gave it back.

SS: It came with too high a price tag?

CM: Yes. Extremely high. I was awfully innocent in those days. It didn't take me long, it didn't take me long to catch on though.

SS: These, I think, are really nice contact sheets from modeling sessions. This is a....

CM: I have those by the hundreds. But when you're free lancing, there was just different companies would pick out what they wanted. Most of them lingerie and hosiery.

SS: This is the Armstrong Floor Covering sets. That's Charlotte looking rather bookish.

CM: Oh, I did some modeling for Kung Fu Nail Polish. I had forgotten that. It was the strangest thing. We had to wear gold bands and coverings of our nails and I know people

would see mine on the subway and be so interested that they didn't realize that it was a protective thing. They just thought that it was something very ornamental. And so many people would want them.

SS: Here are some older family photos that, who is this here?

CM: I don't have the vaguest idea who that gent is, that's me.

SS: That's Charlotte as a baby.

CM: I was cute at one time.

KK: You were cute.

SS: She made the newspaper right after moving back to Dyersburg, pronounced the "Beauty Spot of the Month" by the newspapers.

CM: I regret that. I had to work myself to death. They left it, I think, for two weeks. I called them and said, "Please take that sign out of my yard."

SS: That's a baby picture. And here is a picture, Charlotte was telling me, that this is her grandparent's house?

CM: My great-grandparent's house.

SS: Great-grandparent's house. The house burned down.

CM: They lived in a double log cabin. Before the Civil War while that house was being built.

SS: Stately Manor.

CM: During the war. During the Second World War the Army confiscated this great field next to the house and the Blues and the Reds were out there doing maneuvers. I remember my two great-aunts had a big old Hupmobile, and there was a stream and they couldn't drive across the bridge, the bridge was officially damaged, and this big old Hupmobile had to go down and ford the creek.

SS: And here is a picture of the copper state you said your husband....

CM: It is stated on there.

SS: I don't understand what that is exactly.

CM: Well, when you're a seaman, if you get on a ship and just stay there, they call it homesteading. Otherwise....

SS: Was this Ralph?

CM: Heidal.

SS: Heidal.

CM: Otherwise you take a trip and get off.

SS: Other baby pictures. Now here, I think these are quite, quite nice. Charlotte with her mother in 1925.

KK: __(?)__

SS: It is.

CM: Funny, that I should remember that, but in the big old houses they took the carpets up in the summer time and had these great straw mats that they put down. It was supposedly so much cooler.

SS: So, you were born in 1925? Is that right?

CM: Yes.

SS: And did you grow up in Dyersburg or did you grow up elsewhere?

CM: I was born in Nashville, and then my parents came here to live with my grandparents. In this house.

SS: What kind of work did your family do? When you were born, what was your father's business?

CM: He was a salesman with the Ford Motor Company. And my grandfather that owned this house was a landowner, I suppose you could say.

SS: Did you have any brothers or sisters, or were you an only child?

CM: I was an only child until I was twenty. My parents divorced when I was sixteen. My mother had a son when I was twenty. He is dead.

SS: That said, then, did you grow up most of the time in Dyersburg or what made you move here?

CM: Well, I always lived here. Until grandmother died in 1948 and then I hit the road.

SS: Yes. I've seen that picture of you as a teenager and that you looked quite, quite delicate. What was that like growing up for you, looking ah ...?

CM: It was very tragic, because everyone mistook me for a girl in boys clothes which made growing up sort of awkward.

SS: Like in school, did you go to public schools, or ...

CM: Yes.

SS: Private school?

CM: Well, both. I ended up at George Peabody in Nashville. It was awkward being in school because, well, I went to school right across there. I could come home, I didn't know which rest room to go to. Which was a hard situation for a teenager.

SS: So, I mean, did you, did you always think of yourself as a girl or did you think of yourself as a feminine boy, or how did you...?

CM: As a girl.

SS: How did you make sense of yourself?

CM: That old cliché. And that was fifty years ago. Feeling like a girl trapped in a male body.

SS: And that just always how you felt about yourself?

CM: Sometimes. My earliest memories, yes.

SS: So, did your family sort of, like did they give you a hard time about that or...?

CM: My father did. He wanted me to be a football player. The funny part about it was one of my closest friends was the captain of the football team. And my father coerced him to take me down and try to tumble me about. The whole football team said that they were not going to pile on top of me, it would kill me.

SS: But your mother was supportive of you?

CM: She was understanding.

SS: Understanding of you.

CM: She didn't know what she was trying to understand. But she did the best that she could at that time and age.

SS: Mothers can be good that way.

CM: Yes.

SS: And so, you were telling me earlier that you joined the Army for awhile? But you were quite young. That you bought your way in. What was...?

CM: I was turned down as 4-F. And then my conscience bothered me. And I hate to say it, but I did bribe my way in.

SS: Was this during World War II?

CM: World War II, the Korean War.

SS: So the Korean War...?

CM: Yes. I didn't have the strength to do what was required of me. I was put in as company clerk, but the time came that I had to get out on the rifle range and I didn't have the strength in my hands to get the shells out of the rifle, so that ended me there. Should have had more sense than to try it in the first place.

SS: Now....

CM: And the captain took me aside. I remember that little talk he gave me. He said it wouldn't be fair for me to go overseas and some boy might get himself killed trying to help me. Well that was a sobering thought.

SS: You were telling me another story, a little while ago, about soldiers living, walking down the street looking for girls. Tell me that story again? Kim didn't hear it.

CM: It was during the second war. And I got my job out at the air base. They hired, I think they would have hired my dog if she'd gone out and applied. There was such a shortage of manpower. I went out, and much to my surprise, I was hired. And, oh, the favorite pastime on Saturday nights was to park down around the square and watch the soldiers go by. Well I got more than my share of soldiers wanting to date me. Not realizing they had made a slight mistake. And finally, all my friends had so much fun at dances, I thought, "dad gum, I'm going to go out there and have myself some fun. See if I can get by with it." Well, there's no trouble in getting by, just had to buy a skirt, comb my hair down instead of back. And I, my only problem was I had to dance with real tall men, 'cause I was looking right over their shoulder into the eyes of girls I had gone to school with all of my life. I got away with it. There was never anything but fun.

SS: So did the people that you went to school with know that you dressed in girl's clothes sometimes? Or did, that never....

CM: Well they, no one knew exactly whether I was a boy or a girl then. I started maturing in my teenage years. Instead of going masculine, I went soft. I didn't have any masculine qualities and certainly didn't have any masculine thoughts.

SS: Did your parents ever take you to a doctor about it; did they think something was wrong?

CM: My parents were divorced when I was sixteen. Grandmother was very liberal about letting me go all over the country. And I was told that all over the country that I would have to be completely brainwashed, which would perhaps ruin my mind, and it would be easier to make a few alterations on my body than it would to tackle my brain. Remember, this was early on.

SS: Yes, tell me a little more about that. You said that your parents divorced and that your grandmother let you go all over the country and that you went out the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota, this was when you were a teenager?

CM: In Minnesota.

SS: And that they were telling you at the time, this would have been when?

CM: In the 1950s, no not that, in 1948.

SS: So it would have been....

CM: It was during the war.

SS: During the war, so it had to be in the early 1940s. And that, who did you see at the Mayo Clinic?

CM: Oh goodness, I can't remember that.

SS: But you went to the Mayo Clinic and....

CM: To see if anything could be done for anyone in my obvious....

SS: Condition.

CM: Messed up condition, really.

SS: And....

CM: I said I looked like a girl dressed up in boy's clothes.

SS: And then, you said you went to the West Coast, who did you see out there?

CM: I went to Los Angeles. I had cousins who lived in Manhattan Beach. And I went out there knowing nothing. I went there just, actually went from the telephone book trying to find specialists. But there were not too many specialists in that day and time. Nothing as far as my needs went. When I came back here, I went to Memphis to a doctor that I had known all of my life. And I think that was right after Christine had made such publicity. And he says, there's your answer. There is nothing to be done for you that I know of, except to have the same procedure done.

SS: So, did you think of yourself at the time as maybe having a hormone condition or,....

CM: I didn't know that much about it. I just knew that there was never the first male though that ever went through my mind.

SS: And so, you had never heard of people making changes in their bodies or,....

CM: It was too early on. There was nobody.

SS: Nobody?

CM: Until Christine came along.

SS: You hadn't seen anything in the newspapers?

CM: Never.

SS: Did you ever think of yourself as homosexual? Or....

CM: No. Not really.

SS: Or did people call you that?

CM: Yes. That's when I decided I was getting out of there. I'm taking out of there, if I can. I didn't care for it.

SS: Were there people in Dyersburg that wanted to treat you as a homosexual, or would approach you, or did...?

CM: They might have but my family was old and prominent so that helped me a lot.

SS: Now, I have heard too that you went down to New Orleans for awhile. When did that happen?

CM: Right after my grandmother died in 1948. And I lived there in the French Quarter.

SS: So why did you decide to go to New Orleans?

CM: I don't know. The city of New Orleans train. I could just go down to the bottom of the street and catch the train. Sit in the observation car and the next morning there I was in New Orleans. And I knew it had a big gay colony. I don't know how I knew that. But I was right there in the center of it and I suppose, I don't know why it just didn't, it wasn't my thing. I had nothing against it and I was so pleased people have an out that way. It wasn't anything critical; it's just that it wasn't for me.

SS: So what was New Orleans like in 1948? What did you, did you meet people, like Tennessee Williams or Truman Capote or anybody of Southern famous gay people?

CM: Well, I was a nobody. Then. When I went back the next time, of course I met everybody that there was, and then some. But I was just a very shy little mixed up kid when I went the first time.

SS: How did you support yourself? Did you have a job or did you have family money?

CM: I worked as a bookkeeper. I remember I made \$75.00 a week. Can you imagine? And that was doing well 'cause most people made \$50.00 a week.

SS: So did you just work? Did you have friends, did you go to the clubs, or what did you do for entertainment? Did you stay home and read at night, what was your life like in New Orleans in 1948?

CM: You know, that's hard to say. When you live in the Quarter, you can't keep from going to bars and clubs. They, well practically right under me was the Napoleon Club, which was rather classic, really. They played classical music and there was a nice group of people there. I can't think of it as being particularly gay. But everyone went there. I spent a lot of time there.

SS: Did you have any relationships with people? Any boy friends or girl friends?

CM: Well it couldn't be girl friends because I had no interest whatsoever in girls. A few boy friends, but that wasn't, it really wasn't what I was looking for.

SS: How did they think of you, did they think that they were with a boy who was effeminate or did they treat you like a lady? What were they like? Were they gay men? Or were they...?

CM: I didn't care for [attracted to] gay men, really. No, they were men that I think really didn't know who I was. Because I was a very, very effeminate boy, I guess was the way they looked at me. A very pretty effeminate boy. Which sounds like that would make me gay, but I beg to differ. It didn't. I was the one who was there, I should know.

SS: Although, I think I have heard that story many times, that....

CM: Well, thank goodness. Because I have had that argument over the years. Very few people have ever discussed it with. That would say that any man that went with me had to be gay. Well, they were not. 'Cause I wouldn't have been attracted to them. Then, as I said, I should know, I was the one that was there.

SS: Now I think a lot of people today don't understand

CM: They'll never understand my....

SS:Understand the fact that....

CM: That's one thing they will never understand.

SS: But as historians, you know, I've seen that that is much more common earlier in the century than it is now. It's still that way in a lot of other countries. A lot of non, not United States and Europe, like in Mexico and Africa and places that sense of, two people who seem to have male bodies being with each other. But one of them is very effeminate and the other is considered a "straight man." And that they date.

CM: Well, you are going too far back, into the Roman Empire __(?).__.

SS: Not even, when you....

CM: I would love to, I can't make any comment because I wasn't there.

SS: What you are describing I have heard described by people before and that it seemed to be more the way things were earlier, even earlier than the twentieth century, than it was later. So how long were you in New Orleans, for a few years?

CM: '48 and '49. That's when I made a fatal jump to Boston. And then I disliked that so much I came back to New Orleans. And I must have been there maybe a year and a half or so before Christine's story broke. And I took off.

SS: So you took off again from New Orleans? You went from New Orleans to Boston, back to New Orleans and then you heard Christine's story. So that was in December of '52 that Christine's story broke. So four years, roughly, back and forth between New Orleans and Boston.

CM: And Boston.

SS: Well, I want to hear more about Christine, but tell me quickly about Boston. What did you do there? Why did you move?

CM: Well I went there because I thought New Orleans was the hottest place on the face of the earth, and jumped from the frying pan into the fire. Boston in the summer is the hottest place on earth. So I suffered through that and a winter that I thoroughly enjoyed

in Boston. But I met so many wonderful elderly people in Boston. I remember, well I shouldn't call her name but she's so long dead now it makes no difference. I met Angie Crane. Lived up on Beacon Hill overlooking the park. That owned Crane Plumbing. And we became such good friends that I could sit there with Angie overlooking the park and the snow and we just had more fun. And she knew a lot of, I don't know I fit into elderly people's groups. They seemed to like me and I liked them.

[Interruption in tape]

SS: So once again, you went up to the Mayo Clinic and that they told you....

CM: Just a shot in the dark. I just went having no idea what I was going to ask. Knowing that if anyone could help repair me, they could. I didn't know what to ask for, I just bumped in.

SS: But they told you that they couldn't really help you?

CM: Surgically. Obviously what was needed, they couldn't do. Because it was illegal.

SS: Now, were you asking them to, what were you looking for, did you know?

CM: I really didn't know until Christine came along. I had no idea.

SS: Did you think that maybe you'd be happier if you lived as a man or did you want help to become more of a woman. You didn't just feel that you were...?

CM: I didn't want anything to do with living as a man. 'Cause I had no feelings as a man. My mind didn't go that way. When I was five years old I had enough sense to know that.

SS: And they, at the Mayo Clinic you were looking for help to become more of the woman that you considered yourself to be, and they said...?

CM: They were not allowed to do what they thought needed to be done.

SS: Did they suggest going to Europe? Or not.

CM: No. Nothing was known about that as far as I know of until Christine made her debut.

SS: And so you went to the Mayo Clinic, you went out to the West Coast, did you go anywhere else? To look for medical help?

CM: You know, it's all a blur in my mind. In those days everywhere I went I was looking, but nothing used to be offered.

SS: And so, to jump back to the story that you were telling me earlier, and you lived in New Orleans, moved to Boston, moved back to New Orleans and that's when you heard about Christine?

CM: Yes.

SS: And so tell me what that was like. How did you find out? Did you read the newspaper?

CM: I picked up a newspaper. And I think I hit the floor running. I started packing before I finished the newspaper. I thought, well, even though I owe my father nothing, before I do such a thing I want to swing by Dyersburg and explain to him what I was doing and why. And he seemed to accept it all very well. Until I got to got halfway through surgery and found out that my family had decided to reject the whole thing and they didn't believe in it. Didn't think that it was anything; that I was doing the wrong thing. After I had gone past the point of no return.

SS: OK, so let's back up to when you found out. You went to Dyersburg and saw your family, told them you were going to Copenhagen

CM: And why.

SS: And why. And then did you take a boat to Copenhagen?

CM: I went to New York and booked the first passage on the Maasdam

SS: The Maasdam?

CM: Yes.

SS: I think that was actually the same boat that Christine took.

CM: I wonder.

SS: I will have to look and see.

CM: It wasn't a, everybody on that boat was going to Queen Elizabeth's coronation. I never met as many wonderful British people that invited me to stop and go to the coronation. I wasn't in the slightest interested. If she had invited me herself, I wouldn't have stopped.

SS: So you went, you must have, I mean really as soon as you heard about Christine, you took off.

CM: Oh, honey, as I said before, I dropped the newspaper, I was packing. I was out of there.

SS: So you were in Copenhagen within a matter of weeks after Christine's news broke.

CM: Just as soon as I could get there.

SS: And so, did you meet her? Did you meet Christine?

CM: No, she'd already come home.

SS: She came back in I guess March, maybe.

CM: The Danes were not at all pleased. With all of that publicity. In fact they had the channels closed. But since I was already there, they were kind enough to let me continue. But oh, there is so much in between there ___(?)__.

SS: So, how did, so, when you got to Copenhagen what did you do? Did you, how did you try and find people to help you?

CM: I checked into the Don Lateaire (sp?) Hotel.

SS: Which hotel?

CM: Don Lateaire. It's one of the nicest around, this park that the pier goes down. It's supposed to have such a bad reputation, but goodness it's too well patrolled to the end of it. But anyway, anyone that knows anything about the Danish people, everyone sits out on park benches. Any time it's not raining everyone hits park benches. And I just leave it to by looking and made it, something wasn't just exactly right. And people would strike up conversations with me and this one young man that was a student seemed to take a liking to me and edged out of me what my problem was. And he introduced me to two young television actors, a man and his wife that knew someone that could help me. But by then they had discontinued treatment. It had become illegal. But they sent me to this Dr. Petersen. And he gave me lodging and was going to do the first steps of surgery.

SS: Was he somebody who was connected to the Syrum Institute (sp?) or the...?

CM: No this one was connected to nothing. He was cruel, (??) but he did go on and do the surgery in his apartment.

SS: So this is just somebody that you got connected up with.

CM: With this young television couple and it got them in trouble because this man [Petersen] stole my passport.

SS: The doctor?

CM: The surgeon, yes. And I had to go to the police and they demanded to know who my connections were that had helped me. Well, I couldn't tell them. Mercy, I'll never forget being in this Danish, I guess it was the Parliament. I never saw such a huge room in my life. With all of the judges, there must have been ten or twelve in their red robes and white wigs, interrogating me; putting me through the inquisition. I was a little bit a stray child. Down in the middle of this enormous room with all of those judges and though I was careful to answer them, "yes, your honor" and "no your honor," I wanted to say why the heck don't you speak English. I know you speak English better than I certainly would understand in Danish. But the end of the thing was, with them reminding me that I could be jailed by not answering their questions. And with me pleading with them to understand why I couldn't get anyone that had done me such a favor in trouble. I was asked to leave the country. Given a period of time to do so. But they said I couldn't, I couldn't, what would it be, to refuse to answer their questions.

SS: Contempt of court?

CM: Contempt. It was contempt of court and that even if they wanted to, they couldn't let me get by with that. That I would have to answer the questions or I would have to leave the country within a certain length of time. But I am confused, because so much that went on. From that time until the time that I did leave, and may it just seems that way.

SS: So, I am still curious about this Dr. Petersen. Do you feel like he is just somebody took advantage of you, or did he do something that you wanted...?

CM: There was something concerning the war. I think he was, I think, I'm just saying this. I think he was a war criminal. Because people would come in all night in his apartment, I know he furnished people with drugs. But that wasn't a big deal in Copenhagen at that time. To be a drug dealer.

SS: Do you think he is somebody who collaborated with the Nazis during World War Two? Is that what you meant by war criminal?

CM: I had that feeling. But I don't know why I had it, but the time that I lived there, there was something illegal about that man. And then in stealing my passport, he had plans. He wanted to get in it when he found out what I was there for. He wanted a piece of the action.

SS: And what made him, do you remember, why he thought he could help you? What his specialty was? Or why he could...?

CM: He could just take what money I had to do the surgery. The removal of the, what male organs was there.

SS: So the first surgery was just the removal of the testicles and penis?

CM: Yes.

SS: Just the testicles, or?

CM: And then I had go into the __(?)__ Hospital. It was the most impressive place I have ever seen. You know I don't like all of this being recorded.

[Interruption in tape]

SS: So it did seem like a lot of people, I mean even into the '70s and '80s would have to go through something a little shady to get themselves accepted at a reputable surgical program.

CM: Well, with me, that had to be done because no one would do it in the '50s. So we were forced to do illegal things.

SS: And it's very interesting to me that in that, forced to do illegal things because the reputable people won't help you. That....

CM: They couldn't. They couldn't help.

SS: Except this doctor that you hooked up with that you thought was a war criminal. Because I have seen other information about especially Danish doctors and scientists collaborating with the Nazi'.

CM: Well they were right there. People don't realize, right there on the border. Like they were. There were great, very expensive paintings in the apartment. They were very secretive and they would move at night. They would be gone.

SS: So you think this guy was also dealing in stolen art?

CM: I believe so.

SS: Did he, did he ever say anything to you about how he became knowledgeable about doing...?

CM: Very, very secretive about everything.

SS: Did he tell you that he had done castration operations before?

CM: He didn't. No. He said he was quite capable and he was a capable surgeon. And I was desperate, but there was no one else to turn to.

SS: Christian Hamburger wouldn't see you or...?

CM: I hadn't met him at that stage.

SS: So you pretty much just got off the boat and found somebody...?

CM: One that flew off the turnip truck. And ended up, the Good Lord must have been with me all of the way. Because I certainly delved into some strange avenues. And survived it.

SS: So, were there other strange avenues besides this doctor that you delved into?

CM: Not really. That was my five and a roof over my head. Oh, the police took me to a chateau out in the suburbs with the strangest little farm cover. Rented out, and some room and board type place.

SS: Do you remember Dr. Petersen's first name, at this point?

CM: I would be scared to mention it even if....

SS: Even if you did? Was it Petersen P-E-T-E-R-S-O-N?

CM: I have forgotten whether it was O-N or E-N.

SS: But it wasn't P-E-D?

CM: No, it was Petersen.

SS: Petersen. OK. And so, you just had the castration and then your passport was stolen. And then you had to leave the country. When did you have the next piece of your surgery? Was that in Copenhagen as well? Or was it out of the country?

CM: No, that was when I went to ___(?)___ Hospital of medicine and such. It looked like an enormous castle. The size of the structure. The main thing that I remember about it, looking out of the window and I said what is that enormous chimney with that billowing smoke night and day. "The crematory." They don't bury anyone in Denmark. So that put unhappy thoughts in my mind. Thinking of the doctors. This man that I had gotten under, but the police got me out from under him. When they found out what was going on. But they did allow me to stay long enough to get that done.

SS: The next stage. Who did that surgery? Was that when you met Christian Hamburger in that period...?

CM: No, in that period I did not.

SS: So after you had gone to Copenhagen in your naiveté hooked up with a very criminal sort of shady doctor, had your passport stolen, there was a police investigation. Because you didn't want to incriminate anyone, they told you that you were in contempt and would have to leave the country after a certain period of time. But after that,....

CM: If I would tell them, I was scot free. But I couldn't bring myself to do that.

SS: And then, because of all of the, your contacts with the officials then that you were able to get in touch with Christian Hamburger and you got to a reputable hospital for the next stage of your surgery?

CM: Yes.

SS: OK. Tell me about Christian Hamburger.

CM: Oh, he was the most careful, kind little gentleman. He reminded me of doctor, who?

SS: Benjamin?

CM: He reminded me of Dr. Benjamin. Hormones were the raging thing back in that day and time.

SS: Was that when you first learned about hormones?

CM: Yes.

SS: Hormones.

CM: Thinking back to Dr. Petersen, he mixed up his own batch. And put it all on my arms, thought it would remove hair. It didn't.

SS: No.

CM: Did you know? Speaking of that, it all fell out and went away. Somewhere along the line.

SS: So did Christian Hamburger give you hormones?

CM: Yes. And as I said I declare, I think every representative of hormone manufacturers in every capital in Europe has seemed to have had going over me and examining me and been very interested in my case. Incidentally, there was someone, some thirty years or twenty years, way before anybody's time, in Danish history that was supposed to have been the very first person that anyone knew anything about.

SS: Lily Helve. (sp?)

CM: You are very well versed, did you know that?

SS: It's my job.

CM: Merciful Zion. I haven't thought of that name in half a century. When you said it, it came back to me. The pictures reminded me. The soul of Dracula.

SS: When I was in Copenhagen a couple of years ago I saw some paintings by Lily Ulman's wife, Gerta Veganer, and she did this very beautiful art nouveau painting in Long Beach and several of them were of the late __(?).__.

CM: So we were not the first.

SS: Well, some of the techniques that were used were actually pioneered in the 1920s and 1930s. But it was Christine that was the first really famous person.

CM: Well, famous or not, Lily was the first one that actually did it.

SS: And there was one even, there was a couple even before Lily out of the Hirschfeld Institute in Berlin. This woman named Dora Richter had surgery in 1930. There's rumors of people even a little bit earlier than that. But before the Nazis took over in Germany in 1933, just....

CM: Oh, they would've stopped all of us.

SS: Yeah, and just before that, there were the first sort of experiments with doing it in the early 1930s and then Lily, someone wrote a book about Lily Elva in '32. But it didn't get the same kind of attention that Christine did right after the war.

CM: I think because Christine was American.

SS: I was going to say....

CM: Had a lot to do with it.

SS: ...The fact that she was an American made it really, for other people I mean it brought a different kind of publicity to it. What do you think about her being an American made a difference?

CM: She had some....

[End of tape, side 1]

[Tape, side 2, Charlotte McLeod]

SS: ...And just ask you why you thought it was significant that Christine was a friend?

CM: Well, that's to say she was at the women's clubs. And the backup that she had behind her was so enormous.

SS: I don't know anything about that part of it. That she would be invited to women's clubs and that they would, what, tell me.

CM: I can't help you there, I just remember the fact that she was.

SS: That women's clubs were very supportive of her?

CM: Yes.

SS: And that, hum, interesting.

CM: Until she started doing so much show biz. And then it became obvious that it had been thought that she had tipped the press off and other people.

SS: Did you ever meet her?

CM: I met Christine in New Orleans once. We were both booked in New Orleans at the same time. She is a very charming, very sweet.

SS: But you never had a friendship with her?

CM: No. I would like to have had, but she didn't seem, might have been that interested. I thought we would have been great friends. I didn't want to be pushy.

SS: So you would never have heard from her that she tipped off the press? She wouldn't have told you that?

CM: She wouldn't have told me, but I had heard it. And I can't say where I had heard it. That was just a general consensus in Denmark. That everybody had gone to so much trouble that they were a little resentful that the press had been tipped off.

SS: Because they had gone to so much trouble to keep it private and then she...?

CM: And of course I walked into the big trap that was just waiting with all the activity going on. And here no one bothered a Tennessee child. A country bumpkin. Although I made every mistake that there was in the book. They want to have, I wish I knew what that was, that body of judges, I have seen something that looked like that on television. But I never thought that I would be the object of their attention.

SS: So. You had the next stage of surgery, and you said that was just the penectomy, that you didn't have the vaginoplasty done, at that time? So that you were....

CM: And didn't for, oh, several years. I was living at Laguna Beach. And a little Japanese doctor did it. And there was some instrument that he had to have, I think. He was under the impression that he could use the same instrument on me that he could on a

normal woman that needed that surgery done. Well he did and perforated my colon. And I had to go to Stanford to have the colostomy to repair his work and while I was there I stumbled on Dr. Donald Laub [head of the Sexual Identity Unit]. Oh, me. What a to-do that was.

SS: Well, let's get there.

CM: He finished. I can't sit still too long, I get tired.

[Interruption in tape]

SS: Now you, ah....

CM: Drat.

SS: I'm not going to let you out of there yet.

[Interruption in tape]

SS: When in there did you start living as Charlotte?

CM: After, after all the surgery was done, I had the most beautiful wardrobe of boy's clothing and I had to hustle up a seamstress that could make skirts out of all these beautiful wool slacks and suits that I had. So after the hospital episode passed....

SS: That's when you started dressing in public?

CM: I switched over completely. And I, my passport was issued as, they never did give me, it's still an amended passport.

SS: I didn't have any trouble.

CM: Well, it didn't make any difference, I don't go anywhere anyway. If I was going abroad I'd have it repaired. 'Cause it was useable like it was. It was just amended. But I had to have the proper attire to get along with that one.

SS: So, before the surgery it would have been illegal for you to dress as a woman and then after the surgery you had to?

CM: I don't know how to answer that. I don't know whether they would have stopped me one way or the other.

SS: But you just....

CM: Except I don't think people would go traipsing around, in that day and time, in drag without questions being asked or somebody would object. But I don't know.

SS: But, I mean, before the surgery, would you have considered it “drag?” To wear skirts in public.

CM: I don’t even know that I even knew that term back that far. I don’t know, I don’t know how to answer that.

SS: But, well did you? I mean did you just wear boy’s clothes until the surgery and then girls clothes...?

CM: I wore boy’s clothes, everybody thought I was a.... You know, look at Marlene Dietrich, she wore men’s slacks and men’s blouses. There was a stage there that so many, I imagine, so many lesbian ladies dressed in that fashion. Well, nothing was thought about that. They could dress as masculine as they wanted to. But some poor little gay creep, it would be illegal.

SS: So people thought maybe you were a lesbian? A mannish woman?

CM: I don’t know because no women ever paid any attention to me in that, men were attracted to me. That women were, I didn’t know, I wasn’t aware of it.

SS: And so, then, it was right after your second surgery that you started using the name Charlotte and had a new, had an amended passport and you started dressing differently in public?

CM: Yes.

SS: Now, also earlier you said that you were out on a Danish island?

CM: No.

SS: Was that about the same time? Or is that a little later?

CM: No, I have forgotten where that came from. But I was called out there, the first Mig that ever crashed where the allies could examine it, was on the island Bonholm, which was closer to Russia and I was visiting a girl that, well, lives in this place. Her parents were survivors. And the ferry and that ferry service. And she invited me over for the weekend. But that darned Mig came down. Well, honey, we were invaded. I never saw so many Russian troops. Microscopic was their examination of all of our papers and when it was found that my passport didn’t match, I think they thought that they had found the master spy.

SS: You said that the Russians came onto the island?

CM: The Russians, yes. To protect that blasted Mig. Our troops were there. The British. But mainly the Russians tried to keep anyone from examining the thing.

SS: So you said that they thought that you were a spy? Who, the Russians thought you were a spy?

CM: The Russians. I had a terrible time explaining to them why I was there in my attire. And my passport was that of a man.

SS: So this was before you were required to leave Denmark, and before your surgery?

CM: I have forgotten where that came in.

SS: But you still had a male passport with the name Charles on it?

CM: And I didn't match the passport. And with the language barrier it was terrible to convince them.

SS: What did you finally tell them?

CM: They finally believed me. Someone had enough sense. I think they were ready to ship me off to the Kremlin. And someone decided that my story was true and they let me go back to Copenhagen. I thought, well, I'll never leave that place again.

SS: All right. So you came back to the United States from Copenhagen? When was that '53 or '54?

CM: I don't know. The only way that I can be so sure about my dates was Queen Elizabeth's coronation. I think I was there for two years, going on two years. I'm over in Denmark, Yvonne DeCarlo, she came....

SS: Yvonne DeCarlo?

CM: Yes. She had all the press lined up for this big landing that she was going to make when she came in from Europe. And they found that I was in next car coach and everybody that was supposed to interview her came gang banging on me.

SS: Oh my goodness. So you were in Copenhagen for about two years and then came back to the United States and how did the press find out about you coming back?

CM: I don't know. They knew all about me due to Christine. So I suppose my passport or, I don't know how they got onto me, but they definitely did. But I was certainly met en-mass. It was the most unpleasant thing I ever went through.

SS: Did you have any contact with the press when you were still in Copenhagen?

CM: No.

SS: I mean, did people call you up, or...

CM: No, no, no.

SS: Nothing at all? Were you expecting any publicity, or?

CM: Heavens no, that was the last thing I wanted.

SS: And so....

CM: The last thing I wanted, I guess the best thing that happened to me because I had nowhere to go. No money. No one to turn to.

SS: So when you got off the plane, in New York, what were you thinking that you were going to do when you came back from Copenhagen? You were just going back to the states and were going to see what was going to happen?

CM: I was going back to the states to take it from there. It's all I could do.

SS: And so you got off the plane and they...?

CM: And was descended upon.

SS: And that was a complete surprise to you?

CM: Wouldn't it be, an old country girl from Tennessee. Getting off of the plane having all of this flock of reporters descend on you, they would burn my face flashing those pop bulbs so close into my face.

SS: And that's where you got into this scuffle with the photographer?

CM: Yes, I....

SS: Was it right there at the airport?

CM: I had my cape pulled over my face, trying to hide my face. A photographer grabbed it. It nearly made me fall down, he yanked it so hard. Well as I went down, I gave him a swat with my parasol.

SS: And then that became the story?

CM: Oh, yes. We were all taken to jail for assault on each other.

SS: And were the charges dismissed, or?

CM: It was all a scam.

SS: That was quite a welcome home.

CM: Gracious.

SS: But you said something good came out of it? That you met someone who....

CM: People were making offers to me all over the place. Mainly night club appearances. And this one man that worked for the National Press Club did religious articles. Funny they'd pick on me. But he offered, he wanted to do a book on me. And offered to put me up in a Washington hotel until we finished the book. I borrowed my great-grandmother's name.

SS: Your great-grandmother's name was Charlotte?

CM: No, it was Frances, but I knew I couldn't check in as Charlotte McLeod. Something funny happened to me. I was riding the train from, I guess New York to Washington, and this man was sitting next to me and the back of his paper was this great big picture of me with same little hat and my same old clothes. And he struck up a conversation, or tried to. He said do you think anybody could put this over on me. He said I'd see through this in a minute. I wanted to hope you don't turn that paper over.

SS: So, you said you came back to the states, you had your row with the press and someone put you up in a hotel while working on a story about you, working on a book? What became of that? That book never ...?

CM: Oh, he kept on piddling around and not getting anything done. With his own job he really didn't have the time. And then he was running out of money to keep me up and I had been coming in and.... When did this happen, when I was getting kind of desperate wondering what in the world I was going to do financially. And I'd saved a bunch of cards that nightclub people had given to me. So I sifted through what I hoped would be one of the nicer ones. And called New Orleans and they were delighted to have me.

SS: So which nightclub did you work at in New Orleans?

CM: I can't tell you because I can't remember. I got there and found out that I had signed up for one of the hard core strip joints. And right across the street was a very, well the nicest club on the street. No hard bumps and grinds and strips and all that kind of thing. And to get me out of the verbal contract the owner paid for me going to court. And the next thing I am sitting up in front of the judge. I never will forget, I had a great big felt cart wheel hat on. Couldn't sit on the seat because the cart wheel hat hit the back and I had to take my hat off. I don't know why I should remember that. In that day and time ladies wore their hats. And he released me from the contract and I went across to the Show Bar, which was the nicest club on the street.

SS: Did you ever hear of a club called the My-O-My?

CM: Yes, of course that was strictly transvestites. And they took a great interest in me. In fact, one guy that lived there in the Quarter didn't, I was never there. But he offered to make me costumes for me. Did a good job, too.

SS: When you were living in New Orleans before, did you ever think about working at the My-O-My?

CM: Never thought about even going there. Or working there. I couldn't, only transvestites worked there.

SS: So how long did you work in New Orleans? This must be the third time now that you would be there. You were at the Show Bar?

CM: Well I worked there I guess for a month until my contract ran out. And I had a gorgeous apartment above the Napoleon Club on the same street.

SS: You said, you told me before that you felt like you didn't have any talent. But you had an act, but is your act, what did you do?

CM: There was a dancer and comedian, her name was Cupcake. And she wrote the material for me. Which was quite a trick. Because I refused, I would do risqué, but nothing vulgar. I just wouldn't do anything vulgar. And she wrote this ditty:

My name is Charlotte and I just got into town and thought I would look it over,
just sort of look around.

I've been to many places, environments strange, and then I went to Denmark, just
for a little change.

And then it went on from there. It was a cute thing.

SS: Do you remember more of it?

CM: No.

SS: Do you have ___(?)__ thing?

CM: Oh, I had the whole score and the whole band. When ___(?)__ to go to the Casino Royale, we had a band, a singer and a host. All of it came out of my pay. I was naive in those days. They gave me an act to take on the road.

SS: So, is that was you did for awhile? You toured with a nightclub act.

CM: I did gigs up and down the eastern seaboard, yes. Until, goodness, that was a rough life. Especially being on my own, because I didn't have any, there were plenty of men, but nobody to look after me.

SS: Mmhuh.

CM: Fought for my interests. I guess I did that for, oh, several months.

SS: But not for years and years?

CM: No, I was doing it as a means to the end to get out of it. Instead of building up such fame, it was of no pleasure to me whatsoever. I had stage fright. And really, I had no talent. I depended on the talent of the people that I was with, and they latched on to me because they needed my name. And I allowed that because I needed their talent. There, that's putting it bluntly.

SS: And so, what did you do after you were through with your nightclub career, your brief stint on the boards?

CM: I signed up with Miles Ingles, a modeling agent, and show business, whatever he could book me as.

SS: I have seen some of your contact sheets from you modeling. Was that a period that I was, it was in this period in the mid-'50s?

CM: Yes.

SS: So did you work as a model?

CM: Off and on. Well, quite a bit of modeling and then I got tired of Dorothy Kilgallen chasing me around and writing things about me that I have never thought of doing. And I went to her house one day and knocked on her door and the butler recognized me, it was strange, he said, "aren't you Miss Charlotte?" And I said, yes. And he said, don't go away. I said, well I have no intention, that's why I'm here. So I met Dorothy. And I said, well Dorothy, I'm tired of this, this business and I need a job. If you'll help me get a job, I'll tell you anything you want to know. Her husband is Dick Colmar a Broadway producer, and he owned the Left Bank Club. He owned a little French restaurant and bar right across the street from Madison Square Garden. And in that day and time, the hat check and cigarette concession could make you a decent living. So they were most pleased to get me to be the hostess and hat check girl. The main thing that's fun, I met everybody that ever was in show business.

SS: Mmhuh.

CM: Because they all came flocking there, especially when Liz Taylor and, oh my gosh, which one was it, that had the wedding in Madison Square Garden.

SS: Who had the wedding there?

CM: It wasn't Fisher, it wasn't Todd. Which one was it?

SS: Richard Burton?

CM: I don't even think it was, isn't that strange. I got, well I didn't go to it, I just walked to the door. I saw Elizabeth Taylor riding on top of an elephant. I thought, well that's a strange thing to do. It wasn't so weird in that town. And I remember one night that was so funny. Dick Colmar had one drink too many and I always admired Sophie Tucker, and he got up and made this great speech about how honored he was to "present Miss. Sofa Tuckee"

SS: So, when in there did you meet your husband, your first husband?

CM: Oh, after, well why Bergen, there was a little place called Maxie's, a little bar, that was....

SS: Max's?

CM: Maxie, M-A-X-I-E, that was right in front of the, I lived in the Washington-Jefferson Hotel, which was a place for retired show people who lived there. And right across the street was Maxie's, which was a bar that was very protective of its lady clientele. No one was allowed, allowed to annoy you at all. And there came my husband, well to be my husband, to be around. And naturally, he recognized me. We had kept contact a little bit by mail.

SS: You had met him previously in Copenhagen, is that, when you were skiing?

CM: In Bergen. Where he pushed me off the top of a mountain, on the steep side.

SS: So that was during the two years that you were living in Copenhagen, you had met him there and that he was, you said, Norwegian, but raised in Brooklyn.

CM: And lived in New York.

SS: And lived in New York. And that he was a sailor?

CM: Merchant Marine.

SS: Merchant Marine.

CM: So it was just by chance that we bumped into each other again.

SS: And then, but did you stay in touch over the years?

CM: I think just one Christmas card.

SS: And then you just happened to meet again?

CM: We happened to meet and kept the meeting permanent.

SS: So, when you met him the first time, in Bergen, you didn't have any sense that you were going to wind up with him, you were just thought he was an interesting man, or?

CM: I thought he was some fool trying to kill me. When he pushed me over the precipice, bless his heart, his intentions were good.

SS: But you weren't attracted at the time? Or he was just somebody that you happened to meet?

CM: Well I guess I was because being as tall as I am, I never even noticed anybody unless they were about 6' 4". And he was that and more.

SS: So how long was it that you stayed in touch, just, say, with a Christmas card, or whatever, a couple of years, or?

CM: I think it must have been a couple of years. While I was doing all of that modeling and business.

SS: And then you just happened to run into him in a bar in New York and he remembered you?

CM: Yes.

SS: What was that meeting like?

CM: Very affectionate.

SS: Had he heard anything about your career in show business? I mean did he follow...?

CM: He, he knew what I was doing. Yes. And all that he said, I want to get you out of there. I don't want you to.... I thought, well, he had some good points.

SS: When he met you at Bergen, did he know that you were transsexual? Did he discover that over the years? Or did you tell him? When did you, if he knew about your stage career, he knew something about that and it didn't make any difference to him?

CM: No.

SS: Tell me a little bit about how he, how he thought about the fact that he was in love with somebody or attracted to somebody who was transsexual.

CM: It didn't seem to bother him in the slightest. In fact it didn't bother him in the slightest.

SS: But was there something...?

CM: There are men, they're very, I have almost come to the conclusion, as long as everything is going just fine and alright, but let the least little something go wrong and you might be reminded of it. You know what I mean?

SS: Mmhuh.

CM: Unfortunately. Could we turn off just a little

[Interruption in tape]

CM: I didn't enjoy the lack of privacy in that business.... There was no privacy. Everybody knew everything about, I wasn't quite taken with that.

SS: So then, Ralph Heidal said, "let me take you away from all that."

CM: Yes, the rat.

SS: Why was he a rat?

CM: Well, 'cause, he didn't want, he wanted without getting married, put out getting married and I said, "look here, I am going on towards thirty years old, and when I hit thirty, I am leaving New York because I know as long as I live here I will never date anyone but you. And I am living in Miami. If you want move to Miami and get married, fine, if you don't, you find you someone, I'll surely find me someone." I wasn't about to be too long, but here comes old Ralph.

KK: When you were in New York did he introduce you to his family?

CM: He had no family. So we had that in common. And bless his heart, he couldn't do a darn thing but drive a steamship around the world. Never did teach that rascal to drive a motor car. In fact, that's why we broke up. I had visions of a little cottage on the side of Mt. Tamalpais. And oh how we did love it. But Ralph didn't find a job. Everything he knew was diesel, whatever made steamboats run. I took him to every plant in Northern California trying to find a job for him. And finally, I got the proverbial Dear John letter. He said it was how it is every year we had to write but unless I was willing to go back to New York, where he was perfectly happy. And we would have to part company and I wouldn't go back to New York. I am scared of New York. New York's fine if you've got money, but if you don't you live in a poor neighborhood. And you saw

the strike and looting. It was dangerous. I got driven through the subways at twelve o'clock at night by myself. And oh me. I've had some narrow escapes.

SS: So you moved to Florida and that's where you got married? And then you moved to California? How long were you and Ralph together?

CM: Seven years.

SS: Now this is a very personal question, I will turn the microphone off if you want. But when was it that you had your vaginoplasty surgery, was it afterwards or during...?

CM: I knew that was coming. Is the microphone off?

SS: It's on.

CM: Turn it off.

[Interruption in tape]

CM: I wonder why that's getting too personal.

SS: So, I mean, would you mind saying that again on tape? It think that's a very eloquent way of talking about it.

CM: It's rather basic.

SS: It is rather basic. Yes.

CM: I would rather not answer that.

SS: Alright.

CM: Well I'd rather pass by it.

SS: I think that the way you phrased that the way you phrased that, though, it revealed something of your wit and character.

CM: That wasn't what broke us up, you see. Perhaps it good about the job.

SS: You didn't want to go to New York. You did want to stay in California.

CM: So we did it.

SS: He was happy in the marital relations with you?

CM: As far as I know. He never said he wasn't. He certainly went into it with his eyes wide open. I was always, with both my husbands, very, very careful to let them know exactly under all circumstances, I didn't want anyone to ever throw it in my face and say, "you didn't tell me that." They both went into marrying me with their eyes completely wide open.

SS: Now, did you have any trouble with the marriage certificate? I know some people have had, some transsexual people have had trouble getting marriage licenses. Did you have any problems with that?

CM: No. It was in Florida. We just got one. And when Phillip and I were married in Las Vegas, I think they would have married two donkeys in those stupid little marriage chapels. My heavens. That's a degrading experience. We married in one of those little things. With a little bell hanging with a bad tape and then this pastor would come out and say "would you want to buy this tape? You can buy the tape of your marriage." All for seven bucks. I didn't care for it.

SS: So, let's move back up a little bit.

CM: How do you ever remember where you are? You get me confused in my own life.

SS: Well, I wanted to talk about your move out to California. Was it, when you moved out to California, that you met Harry Benjamin? Or had you met him in New York?

CM: No, I met Dr. Benjamin when I worked at the Left Bank. Dorothy Kilgallen's husband's restaurant.

SS: So Harry came in there?

CM: Yes.

SS: And did...?

CM: I don't know how I'd forgotten that. The circumstances were that he knew I was there when he came into see me.

SS: How did he introduce himself to you? Did he say, "hello, I'm Harry Benjamin, you must be Charlotte McLeod."

CM: I don't remember, but we took to each other. I just fell for Harry the first time I saw him. Oh this brilliant, proper, well dressed little German gentleman. That had a sense of humor. You could tell intelligence just sprouted out of him. In all directions.

SS: Did you know his wife?

CM: I met her once. It was Street.

SS: And so, did you see Harry Benjamin as your physician or did you just know each other socially?

CM: My physician. But he sent me on to other doctors for medical reasons. A combination of the two. He enjoyed taking me out because there was not the slightest doubt that anyone ever had about my authenticity. And I think he loved to pick out men that he knew that had been very doubtful about such a subject. And he would enjoy taking me out. For instance, Herb Caen and William Buckley.

SS: Walter Mitchell?

CM: No. Buckley.

SS: William Buckley.

CM: Oh that man. He still looks great. He just....

KK: Is he still alive?

CM: Yes he's still alive, shrunk up in that.... Looks like a turtle peeking out of the top of his shirt.

SS: He is the one that came out as gay, right?

CM: No.

SS: No. Who is that?

KK: __(?)__

SS: Right.

CM: His father was a very famous....

SS: And there was one of them __(?)__ conservative, it was Martin Leadback, (sp?) who wrote, he founded the *New Republic*. *New Republic* Magazine. And he....

CM: I was watching the news and all of this business about, they were attacking the editor of the *New York Times* about gays and homosexuals, their marriages have been put in the paper, and he was, the manager of the *Times* was very supportive and resentful that this jerk was attacking him so. His name was Tucker. Tucker something. I never will like that new man.

SS: So, you met Harry Benjamin in New York at the Left Bank and socialized with him. From time to time he would take you to lunch. Did he introduce you to other transsexual people.

CM: No, I don't think there was anybody to introduce me to.

SS: In New York.

CM: Back in that day and time. He introduced me to a lot of famous movie people. We would go out to lunch with Douglas Fairbanks. Who was Za Za's husband who killed himself? Sanders? He was so nice. Oh I met the most wonderful people. About everyone in show business.

SS: And what did people in show business think about you? Were they curious? Or just treated you like one of the crowd?

CM: Some of them were very resentful that I had attained such a level with no talent. They felt like I had been given a lot of advantages just because of who I was. Not that it made any problem, but I was aware of it. And that subject kind of came up. I didn't go there again.

SS: So did you renew your acquaintance with Harry in San Francisco?

CM: Oh yes. __(?).__.

SS: And what years was it that you were married to Ralph?

CM: '60 to, I remember John Kennedy was killed that year.

KK: __(?).__.

SS: Robert. '63.

CM: The president was killed.

SS: '63.

CM: We were still together in '63. It was '67.

SS: '60 to '67. And so in those years were you living down in Los Angeles? When did you move to Los Angeles?

CM: Ralph and I married in Miami in '60 and we moved to the West Coast just a few months later. First we moved up to University Avenue and Grove. Near the University.

SS: In Oakland, Berkeley?

CM: In Berkeley. When all the hippie business was in full swing. And the neighborhood got kind rough and we moved over to Oakland. That's burned down now.

SS: Where did you live in Oakland?

CM: I can't remember.

SS: Up in the hills?

CM: Right on the top of the hill. I remember the Maxwell House Coffee people, they're old run down family home was right across the street. It was a lovely old neighborhood.

SS: And it was the part of the hills that burned in the fire in '91.

CM: And we were there until, I loved Marin County. I got a little uneasy in Oakland. That's all I've got to say. Marin County. We moved over to, first to San Anselmo then to the little town of Fairfax.

SS: Let me ask you a question about Berkeley. You said you were there when all the hippie stuff was going on. What did you think about the whole sexual liberation movement, did you see yourself as a pioneer of that? Or did you see it as being something you didn't have anything to do with?

CM: Oh, I didn't have anything to do with that. Well that's just ___(?). Haight Ashbury and all of that. They looked so dirty, unkempt. I didn't want to have anything to do with that.

SS: Do you remember people talking about a new, a new sexual morality, that it's OK to have sex or to be more sexually free or about feminism or gay rights or anything...?

CM: Yes.

SS: Did you feel that that was usually like, "yeah, that's kind of like me. I was doing that in the '50s." You know, "Me," being transsexual was kind of a forerunner about anything that had to do with you?

CM: No, it wasn't. It wasn't, I made no connections with that. Once I did my little bit, I wasn't interested in anything else. I had accomplished what I wanted to do. And all of those fads that came in and out. I just had no interest in them.

SS: You didn't see...?

CM: I'd like to go look at them and visit. But I didn't want to join in.

SS: You didn't think about the struggles you went through to do what you wanted to do with your body, to be the person that you wanted to be? You didn't see that as part of a political struggle? I was just something that you needed to do for yourself.

CM: Now, we connected that ___(?)__.

SS: I'm just curious, you know that....

CM: No.

SS: No?

CM: That hadn't come into being, such as you, you're connected to that. You know all about that. I know nothing. I might as well have been living on the moon as far as all of that goes. I had never had any connection with ___(?)__ about it. So you're in virgin territory.

SS: I was just curious, in the later 1960's I started to hear some transsexual people say that "Oh, I'm a member of a minority, transsexual people, we have our rights, we're being denied out rights to do, to live in society the way that we want, we're being oppressed...."

CM: But I never was.

SS: And that's what I'm asking you, you didn't have any connection with...?

CM: I've never had any reason to give that any thought. Because I've just trotted along my own little way. After I came here in 1977, of course people that have known my family forever kind of gave me a strange look, but it didn't take me long to disprove that. I got a job, I had to have a job, went to work in a nursing home as a nurse's aide. And everybody seemed to love me and I loved them. The next thing I knew, I was a social worker. And that, I didn't like so much because it was not the human contact. Sitting there pushing a pen.

SS: So, that...?

CM: I gave no one anything to criticize.

SS: So, 1960 to '67, you were married and went from Miami to Berkeley to Oakland to Marin, and...?

CM: After I was divorced.

SS: And then you were divorced.

CM: That's when I moved to Laguna beach. Then I got a job as a receptionist in a beauty salon, handling people, the largest, most, Leisure World. And the business.... And I just had a beautiful ocean view apartment.

KK: Why did you choose Laguna Beach? Did you have friends?

CM: I had friends around here that had politely not mentioned to me that Laguna Beach was the biggest homosexual colony on the West Coast and I had just been divorced and frankly I was looking for a boy friend and I was beginning to think I was a vampire or something. I walked down the street, these good looking men would just look right past me as if I didn't exist on the face of the earth. It really gave me a complex there for awhile. Someone explained to me that they were all gay. I thought, yeah now that I've pitched my tent. Right in their back yard.

SS: Now you tell me.

CM: Now you tell me. But anyway, at work, one of the beautiticians said "I've got just the man for you. My brother in law just lost his wife." And ya, ya, ya, he was a good catch and so forth. And this one I might mention, I married. I'm sure he loved me. He was a control freak. I mean a complete control freak. We did wonderful things all the year that we dated. I don't suppose there was a nice restaurant up and down the, from San Diego to Laguna. After we got married his idea of a night out on the town was Taco Bell. His wife had committed suicide. And he had two children that were eleven and twelve. When I was dating him one of the children would come down and spend the weekend with me. Each week. And I found myself running a household in Laguna Beach and running a household in Los Angeles. And then all of a sudden, the children started calling me "Mom." And I thought well, some things just went from better to worse, and when my husband asked me to marry him, I thought "good lands, those kids need me so badly. And it can't be any harder to do than what I am doing now," 'cause I was running up and down that freeway like a demented being. So we got married. And stayed married for seven years. So as I said, I don't want to mention his name because he has high military clearance abroad for heavy maintenance kind of stuff. And it might cause some problems.

SS: But you continued to parent the children? You say they were eleven and twelve at the time so you stayed through them getting out of high school?

[End of tape, side 2]

[Tape, side 3, Charlotte McLeod]

SS: You were saying that you married the second time, and that was in what year, '60...?

CM: I'd say '70.

SS: '70 to '77. And then you raised those two children. Do you still consider yourself their mother? Are you still in touch with either of the children?

CM: My son died.

SS: Sorry to hear that.

CM: But I am a grandmother. I wasn't called "step-mom," I was just "mom." I was so very careful to hide the past. If it came out it would be a great shock to her. I wouldn't say I had a lurid past, I hadn't done a darned thing that I am ashamed of. I did what I had to do. But it might be beyond teen age understanding.

SS: When did you tell your daughter, about your past?

CM: You know, it wasn't until about two years ago. I was extremely sick. And I knew she'd find it out. If I died. So I wrote to tell her on my own terms. And she accepted it that way. She understood.

SS: So she just knew you as a person, that...?

CM: Well, she never had any, she'd never had any reason. I'd never done anything, my life style had been such that she would have questioned anything. For any reason.

SS: Your son never knew?

CM: No.

SS: So your daughter has two children, you said, and they're in high school or going to college?

CM: In college.

SS: They're in college? In Southern California?

CM: Yes. One of them wants to be a surgeon. I've always loved antiques. I never will forget my son saying once, right after we were married I had all my antiques in Los Angeles. He said, Mom, when I get a job you won't have to have any of this old second hand furniture. I'm going to buy everything new for you.

Tape turned off.

CM: After I married I was over at Cathy's at one of the canyons and the other canyon across the way, you could see the people, you couldn't hear anything, but you could see the people on the deck. We were out there the night that that horrid Manson massacre took place. So that date I can easily remember. I don't remember the date but I remember the horrible things that happened.

SS: That was the day you met Cathy? The day that you met Cathy was the day of the Manson murders?

CM: No, I was over at her house.

SS: After. You had met her before that?

CM: I had met her before that.

SS: Through Harry Benjamin somehow.

CM: She was one of his patients.

SS: But you hadn't known her until you moved to Los Angeles?

CM: Cathy was very feminine.

SS: Tell me a little bit about her. Was she the, did you know any other transsexual people besides yourself until you met her? So, she also had been in New Orleans for a while. Did....

CM: How did you learn that?

SS: Well, ___(?)___ told me that she and you and Cathy were all Southerners, that was one of the things that, besides being part of a special little sorority that you were all also Southerners.

CM: I don't remember New Orleans, though, I don't believe ___(?)___, the three of us knowing each other before California days.

SS: I don't think that, ___(?)___ didn't say that you knew each other before California but just that one of the things that helped make the friendship....

CM: That we were Southerners, yes.

SS: Besides having sexuality in common was the southern....

CM: I don't think being southern had anything to do with that, actually.

SS: I'll tell ___(?)___ that she was wrong, then, OK?

CM: Well, I don't know that she is. I just don't know that our southern background had anything whatsoever to do with out being transsexual.

KK: No, being friends.

SS: Being

CM: Oh, of course, being friends, naturally.

SS: That the three of you met and that not only did you have a transsexual history in common, but that you were all southerners ...

CM: Oh, yes.

SS: ...and that was part of what made it all a very special group of friends.

CM: Because they used to tease me about being the last of the Southern Belles. I have been teased about that in a great many places.

SS: Did you guys socialize with each other, get together with your boyfriends or husbands and have dinner or did you...?

CM: I didn't care too much because my husband ____ didn't really know any such thing. In fact, it was Cathy who went to him and explained to him the situation because we had debated. He hadn't the vaguest idea. And I knew, if he hadn't already asked me to marry him, Cathy said, let me see if I can help. And she went and talked to him. And Cathy's husband did not take it so well. In fact, he was very belligerent when he did find out.

SS: Did you ever meet a Dr. Elmer Bell in Los Angeles?

CM: Mercy yes.

SS: Well, Elmer Bell was ____ (?) ____'s surgeon and then he was a very good friend of Harry Benjamin and Elmer Bell organized meetings between various of his patients and some of Harry Benjamin's patients.

CM: Well I didn't get a, well I guess I moved.

SS: I think it was earlier but then the early '60s.

CM: Oh, if it was when I was married, I wouldn't have known of that anyway.

SS: So were ____ (?) ____ and Cathy the only other transsexuals that you knew? Or did you meet more before or later?

CM: Cathy told me that there was one that I did ____ (?) _____. But I can't remember meeting her. And really I have never met anyone in this long, long period of years. That I knew of.

SS: Did you ever, did you ever meet anybody back in the early '50s named Camera Beese (sp?)?

CM: That's a hard one. She came along after I did. But I would have said she wasn't attractive, at all. And the press played it up, just a little bit. A very little bit, it wasn't much.

SS: So you met her, or didn't? Saw her publicity and Did you ever meet Dixie McClain?

CM: I never heard of her. There was somebody, a member of the royalty in Briton that was written up a lot, but I never met her either.

SS: Don __(?)__ Simmons? Louise Lawrence of San Francisco. Were you ever introduced to her?

CM: No

SS: OK.

CM: With that little red Thunderbird. My goodness. But she never went anything beyond being a transvestite did she?

SS: Right, but she just seemed to know everybody.

CM: But did she identify, my goodness.

SS: So what did you, I am very interested in her. How did you meet her, what are your memories of her?

CM: I can't remember anything except that she was very, very flamboyant. I never met her privately. I think I've just seen, I don't believe really that I ever met her. She was pointed out to me.

SS: By, by who?

CM: I don't remember. Probably someone in one of the beauty salons where I was working. I worked with Mr. Lee on Sutter Street, it was right down the street from Elizabeth Arden. And all the big movie stars had appointments there, because Elizabeth Arden was there.

KK: __(?)___.that you wouldn't have been interested in meeting other transsexual people then, but it was only after your divorce when you were single that, or did I get that wrong?

CM: Well, you said it right, but I don't remember, remember saying it or thinking it particular. I just, I don't know where they all were. But we just didn't cross in any way. Since Dr. Benjamin died, goodness, I have lived in such a vacuum for so many years along that line.

KK: When you were with Ralph, did you ever want to have a kid, I mean of your own?

CM: No, with him being a seaman. I never thought of children until I had two. At an advanced age.

KK: When you met ___(?)___ and Cathy, was it a moment of, "oh my gosh, here is somebody else just like me." Or was it...?

CM: I don't think it was, really. We just blended in like anybody else.

SS: But was it, did it feel special to you somehow to know other people who shared this relieving (??) experience with you? Or did they...?

CM: Oh, it had to. I didn't think much at the time when it happened. [coughing, "excuse me"]

[Interruption in tape]

CM: It happened the year that we were dating. Every week one of them came down to the spend the weekend with me at Laguna Beach.

SS: So you gradually moved into the "Mom" role with them, ...?

CM: Well I loved them at first sight. I knew what they had been through. And they loved me at first sight. We just struck it out. Marrying their father was all incidental. If I knew what was good for me I would have left it the way it was. But I couldn't run two households and work too.

SS: Let me ask you another surgery question. Did you do a breast surgery? When did you do that?

CM: The first time, when I went up to have ___(?)___, when I went up to have the colostomy ___(?)___, and then he was going work in vaginal business when he closed the colostomy cervix there. And that was a rather painful ordeal, they had both of those going at the same time. And then years and years went by and then tightened ___(?)___ and irritating, so I had to have the something, heh, can I tell you something funny? When I was arranging having me cremated, one of the questions the crematorium ask you now, anybody, is if you have had breast surgery. And I said why would breast surgery. He said they explode and mess up the oven, the inside of the crematorium. So you have to be punctured before you're cremated.

KK: I remember you telling me that.

CM: Isn't that ghastly.

KK: That's pretty amazing.

CM: That they would ask a grandma, eighty year old grandma if she has had breast surgery. I thought, well, I don't want to explode, mess up anything.

SS: So you had breast, let me just look at the picture here. Did you have breast surgery early? Or was that...?

CM: That was early on. There was a Dr. Elsie Monroe who was that was a very famous plastic surgeon that was trying to make a so called __(?).__ business. And she did __(?).__ Of course, I've had three. Because that was some sort of sponge business and it wouldn't heal. It kept draining __(?).__ blood. __(?).__ And then when I was at Stanford, they decided they would do a remodeling job on me from stem to stern. Mostly stem to stern, mercy.

SS: One later.

CM: And then there was __(?).__.

SS: Tell me about Donald Laub from Stanford. I was always curious why you'd seen him. Did you enjoy meeting him, or his manner, why, what was your feeling?

CM: Oh, he was so nice and considerate. Everything was so secretive. As I said, I think I am not mistaken, we had code numbers, our names were not even used. And that really ruined my marriage with my second husband. We were going up and stopped by for a chat with him. And we went in and Donald had started, he was so very selective, very selective. He had a Gorgeous George sitting in there with tattoos all over him. And if my husband __(?).__.

SS: __(?).__ Go ahead.

CM: I live in a very selfish way, meaning me. I felt I could lose all of that __(?).__ It could have ruined my marriage.

SS: When you stopped at Stanford for post-surgical

CM: Checkup.

SS: Checkup and when your husband saw other people....

CM: __(?).__

SS: ...that because of how some of the other patients looked, that it gave him a very

CM: I could never answer them. As I said, we were in enough trouble about a few things for us. With those people that looked like a wrestler with tattoos, to do a sex change job on him, I thought, I just thought unnatural, I thought it was very bad.

SS: So you think that if somebody can't pass as a non-contextual person that it just makes their life too hard?

CM: I would think it was. He might have been jumping from the frying pan into the fire. Which is not kind way of serving people, but that is just the way that I felt. I never thought of it in years, but that's the way I felt at the time. Had you thought about your situation, much, much, much worse. I didn't think the doctors should do it. I was surprised that Dr. Laub did it.

SS: It's interesting to hear you say that because so many of the other people that I've talked to that ___(?)__ said, oh, he just had impossibly high standards and made you jump through all of these hoops and he would only take the people who were really pretty and

CM: He did tell me about ___(?)__.

SS: That's good to hear another side of that story.

CM: He did ruin my marriage. My husband saw me in a different view from what he had in mind.

SS: Can you think of some more things that you are curious about? Well tell me something about deciding to move here in 1977. That you had just, why did it seem like a good idea?

CM: Didn't we talk about that?

SS: I'm not sure we had it on tape.

CM: We didn't? My mother died. And she knew she didn't know anyone in California. I wanted to bring her back, she had old friends here. And this house was entailed to me for the rest of my life, left to me by my aunt. I had to come back to do something about this house. And that was it. Plainly why I wanted to come back. ___(?)__.

KK: And how often did you come back to live here ___(?)__?

CM: Oh, once or twice, since I had gone to the cemetery ___(?)__. I thought was '60 – '70 ___(?)__. I had to come back to prove ___(?)__. So I suppose I did, this is where I am.

SS: In a beauty spot.

CM: Yes. God's beauty spot.

KK: __(?)__

CM: Very, very much. My main consideration and worry was to get Momma out of this life in as much comfort and happiness as I could. And then I felt __(?).__

KK: __(?)__

CM: I guess I did. Nothing was written that I had to. Gosh, here I'm older than she was when she died. My other grandmother died right over in that spot. And I hope I can too.

[End of tape, side 3]